

In Sadness

It is with profound sadness that we mark the passing of Rajpattie Persaud, wife of Paul Billette. Those of us who had the pleasure of her acquaintance were privileged to be awed by her energy, intelligence, compassion, and proactive sense of justice. Raj was a true friend and a helpful ally with a great sense of humour, who brooked no silliness: a marvellous combination.

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question August 4th, 2011

Date of next meeting

Thursday, October 6th, at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library (Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

**“A Study in Scarlet (Part 2: The
Country of the Saints)”**
prepared by Carol Abramson

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 4th, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Florence Belfer, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Nitika Dosaj, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, Tom Holmes, Raf Jans, Rina Kampias (guest), Rebecca Katz (guest), Lars Lovkvist, Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, Arlene Scher, Heather Wileman-Brown

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Wilfrid de Freitas

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:40 by Acting Sovereign David Dowse, with a gentle, "Okay, everybody, calm down."

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating George and Gracie, Rinty and Lassie, Ollie and Stan)

1. Another Reason to Visit the Big Apple

There is a bookstore recently discovered by one of our own in Greenwich Village of New York City. It is Partners & Crime, located at 44 Greenwich Avenue (corner of Charles), tel. (212) 243-0440.

2. Don't Mind If I Do

Chris Herten-Greaven once again did the honours with smoked mackerel, pâté, cheese, and crackers. Even the crackers were delicious. Thank you, Chris.

3. The Gentleman in the Doorway

To see the tall, elegant, silver-haired gentleman together with his short, intense and beautiful wife was a study in contrasts. And liveliness. And entertainment. A whisper from Paul would unleash a stream of comment from Raj. On several occasions, Your Lowly Scribe and his wife had the pleasure of their company, and this was always a treat. With Raj's passing three days before our August 4th meeting, it was assumed that Paul would absent himself at least this one time. Not so. When your Lowly Scribe saw Paul in the doorway of the reading room, entering to participate in our meeting, he was temporarily at a loss for words. A rare thing, indeed. We rushed to him, offering our condolences, and more. Paul spoke of Raj, her brief and strange illness, the promise of a rally, and then the final day or two when what had appeared hopeful, turned its sad tide. Your Lowly Scribe, not without a few screws loose, felt Raj in the room that night, through Paul. As much as we tried to comfort our dear friend, we also thank him for the gift he brought to us.

4. A Brief Moment in Time

It is never our intention to bring tears, or to dampen a moment of our conviviality, which is the general tone of our Sherlockian meetings. But – and this is a big BUT – events in the recent past have taken away those dear to us. Their absence represents more than an empty space around the table. It is the sadness of weight upon the heart, light gone from a room, the impression made on the cushion on the seat of a chair. Too often recently we have seen friends of ours disappear from the long table. In consideration of these losses, this night's chairperson, David Dowse, called for "a brief moment of contemplation and thought" not just for the passing of members, but also of family and close friends of our members. David himself has lost his father recently. Maureen and Jack Anderson were on their way west to dispose of the ashes of Maureen's father. Raj was gone, not three days before. Patrick Campbell read her obituary notice to us. David Kellett left us weeks earlier, and Stanley Baker months before that. Who among us, in our striving for joy, are untouched by the exit tax on life? Hank Williams, as un-Sherlockian as you can get, sang, "You never get out of this wor-r-r-uld alive." We are humbled, and are reminded that the ultimate price of joy is yet another contrast on the canvas of life. Whatever our beliefs, regardless of our travails, we come as friends around the long table, support each other, and make Sherlock matter too. Thank you all for being. And please try to stick around.

5. Remembering David Kellett

David Dowse asked that if we have memories of David Kellett, to kindly send or bring them to us. He suggested that we name an award or something else after him. We discussed a billiards night in his memory, at Unison Billiards and Bar on Cote Vertu. The plan grew. We would go to a restaurant first. Patrick Campbell would explain how to play billiards. We discussed doing this on the third Thursday of September.

As of this writing (September 12) nothing further has been heard about it by Your Lowly Scribe save an e-mail: one of those newfangled things of which the original Master would have disapproved because (a) he was particularly sensitive to microwaves in the air, and (b) for other reasons which our experts will suggest, or at least, debate.

Patrick Campbell mentioned that Maureen Anderson did a lot by way of supporting David during his debilitating illness. He reminded us that David had not wanted anyone at his funeral. Maureen will set up a visit to his grave for those of us wishing to attend. Chris Herten-Greaven suggested that we might want to plant something in his honour, but that we should do it soon, before the ground freezes

6. Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Our first-time guest, Rachel Katz, brought in by Rachel Alkallay, announced that she would be moving to Ottawa at the end of August. With perfect hindsight, we wish Rachel a flawless move and great success with her career in Ottawa.

7. Not Billy the Kid

Paul Billette asked: What canonical character first appears outside the canon, and was then later used in the canon by Doyle?

Answer: Billy the Page appears in the play *Sherlock Holmes* written by and starring William Gillette, which debuted in 1899. The first mention of Billy the Page in the Canon was in *The Valley of Fear*, published in 1914.

8. First Toast – To the Master

by Maureen Anderson

Through the miracle of e-mail (of which, naturally, SH would have disapproved), Maureen sent the toast to Your Lowly Scribe who dutifully forgot to bring it to the meeting. It is presented here in its entirety:

The Touch Of The Master's Hand

by Myra Brooks Welch

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three..." But no,
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
"The touch of the Master's hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game -- and he travels on.
He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

9. Pretty in Pink

Heather Wileman-Brown showed us a pink floral satin handbag.

10. Debbie Reynolds as "The Woman"

Why not?

Roger Burrows told us that movie memorabilia from the collection of actress Debbie Reynolds was being auctioned. Included were such items as one of Charlie Chaplin's bowlers; Judy Garland's ruby slippers from *The Wizard of Oz*, and two of Basil Rathbone's costumes from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

11. A Study in Doyle

Paul Billette spoke about Doyle's visit to Salt Lake City in May 1923 where he was well-received by the Mormons despite his depiction of them in *A Study in Scarlet*. Doyle lectured them on spiritualism and all 5000 seats were sold out, according to contemporary newspaper reports.

12. The Smoking Glass Theory of Viewing Sherlock Holmes

What if time were a pane of glass through which we view the passage of smoke?

What if that smoke followed trails and pathways in the air and defied our imagination in the way it traced designs beyond our understanding? We could watch it, but do nothing about it. Then, as the smoke passed and the air cleared, we would be left with nothing but a memory, an elation, a wistfulness, perhaps a lesson. An experience.

Great and near-great literature is like that glass. We can see past it into a bygone world, one that lives only in our imagination. Even in the case of the most contemporary fiction, it becomes history the instant it outputs from the author's Canon i560 printer. It is a document of a time. It chronicles something that is no more.

Similarly, the world of Sherlock Holmes remains as smoke through the pane of glass. We read the words, visualize the setting and action, and cognitively discuss what we believe is there, and quiz each other on these things. We enlarge on the experience which becomes a thing apart from the smoke and the glass.

At our meeting, the weighty issue of understanding the relevance of Sherlock's world and stories was raised. Are we truly able to understand a fictional life in a fictional world of over one hundred years ago, and an ocean away? Is anything lost in the translation through time and space? Is it fair to expect such literature to be changed, in order to conform with current standards and contexts?

According to David Dowse, no. Literature reflects the times.

This raises other questions too.

For instance, could *The Odyssey* take place today in New York City? Did anyone see the movie starring Peter Fonda, *Ullie's Gold*? It's main character is Ullie, short for Ulysses. The "gold" is taken from the golden fleece.

What goes around, comes around. When characters are larger than life, they keep reappearing behind that glass, passing by in other forms, altered states. They are emblems, symbols of lasting impression. But they do not pass this way again. It is never necessary to change literature. It is as impossible as recalling smoke that has passed. But we can set new fires in keeping with the appetites of our spirits, and in this way, nurture anew our acknowledgement of the gift of Prometheus.

13. Not Scrap

Erica Penner showed us a commercially available SH scrapbook. These are delightful. They provide alternate avenues of comprehension for people such as Your Lowly Scribe.

14. Back in the Closet

Patrick Campbell informed us of a play by SACD, *Angels of Darkness* which features Watson, but not Holmes, and has a plot similar to *A Study in Scarlet*. The manuscript is in the Toronto Reference Library Sherlock Holmes collection. It was not printed during Doyle's lifetime, but is currently available through the Baker Street Journal.

15. Rubbing Shoulders with the Gods

Once upon a time, Patrick Campbell worked on the Canadian Frigate Program. His participation required him to go to England. On one such trip, he went on a tour of Granada Studios where he visited the semi-permanent installations of sets for *Coronation Street* and the *Sherlock Holmes* series.

16. The Stamp of Approval

Patrick Campbell showed us a newsletter of *The American Philatelist* which featured a collection of stamps dedicated to Sherlock Holmes. One of the stamps showed a view of Reichenbach Falls where our society installed a commemorative plaque of the tumble that shook the world.

17. Bargoons

Carol Abramson announced that she recently bought the twin Baring-Gould edition for only \$10, a steal at half the price.

18. Breaking Away to Bloomington

Marie Burrows informed us of a Sherlockian conference at Indiana University, Bloomington, November 11-13. Sponsored by Wessex Press, and entitled *From Gillette to Brett III*, this is the third in a series of conferences dealing with Sherlock Holmes in theatre, film, and on television. For further details, go to <http://wessexpress.com/html/g2b3.html>.

While you're at it, check out the movie *Breaking Away*, filmed there, which won the 1979 Oscar for best original script for its writer Steve Tesich, a Yugoslavian immigrant.

19. Shakespeare in the Park

The plan was to meet Saturday, August 20th at 4:00 p.m. at the southwest corner of Westmount Park, near the toilets. We were to have brought food, chairs, umbrellas, and insect repellent. Apart from that, Mrs. Lincoln ...

20. Clueless in Snowdon

In going through her autobiography, *Unfathomable Mysteries of Life*, Rachel Alkallay said she needed help from the great Sherlockian minds of our society, with one of the great unsolved conundrums of her "past." Here it is: "For ten-and-a-half years I used to live in a basement apartment. It could only be accessed by stairs inside the building. Gradually, I became aware of things moving around inside my home. Articles appeared and disappeared. After not being where I had left it, a lavender sweater showed up in a drawer. Why lavender? Why the drawer? Why, indeed? To top it off, there were two thefts, one quite serious – a computer, of all things. After five years, I installed a Medico lock and the mysterious peregrinations and disappearances of my possessions ceased. I have always owned cats, sometimes in the plural, and I am confident that they would have indicated to me, somehow, if someone had entered in my absence. The cats, however, continued calmly licking themselves, looked poofy or sleek, disdainful or needy, and weren't talking. They were no help whatsoever."

Roger asked if Rachel had a tendency to walk in her sleep.

David Dowse suggested she should have put powder on the floor, to see if it turned up footprints other than those of a cat.

21. What's a Compendium?

Nitika Dosaj said she is the proud owner of *A Sherlock Compendium* by Peter Haining.

22. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Patrick Campbell

A dictionary defines the word “adjective” by noting that the word is derived from the Latin, *adjectivion* or *adjectives*, meaning “added,” and from *ad* meaning “to” and *jacio*, “I throw. It goes on to define it as a word added to a noun, to express a quality of the thing named or to describe the thing as distinct from something else.

Now the good doctor appears in a great number of the tales, and if, as we are assured, he was the author or the biographer, then we can be assured that the wording is correct. Here are just a few of the descriptors (adjectives and nouns) used in the Canon to cite Dr. Watson as distinct from others ...

adventurer, agent, astonished, bewildered, bitter, bohemian, busybody, chauffeur, conductor, defender, discrete, dutiful, friend, historian, honourable, invaluable, long-suffering, master, messenger, monomaniac, modest, moral, neat, observer, partner, pawky, poetic, practical ...

... and I'm still only halfway through the alphabet, but I have surely made my point.

So I ask you to raise your glasses to the multi-adjectival but admirable ...

Dr. Watson!

23. David's Game

David Dowse can be relied on for many things. One of them is to come up with games gleaned from all over the world, often with a twist, always challenging and rewarding. We don't know what the most recent game is called, but it kept us hopping. Here it was:

Each participant folds an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper horizontally, so that there are seven creases and eight strips, each measuring approximately 8½" wide x just under 1½" high. Each person writes a short sentence in the first strip, then trades the paper at random to someone else. In the second strip, the next person draws what s/he believes to be a graphic representation of the sentence. S/he folds back the paper so that only the illustration is visible, and trades the paper, again at random, with someone else. Person #3, seeing only the picture, now writes a sentence representing what s/he believes the picture to be. The sheet continues being traded at random, with the panels being folded back so that only the most recent sentence or picture is visible. Remember that each person has initiated his or her own puzzle page, so that there are many sheets of paper circulating around the table. When we get to the last panel, the picture in that strip should (theoretically) illustrate the sentence in the top strip. The game tests this supposition because each person is supposed to choose, from a pile of all the sheets, his or her original sheet containing the hidden sentence at the top, *based only on the picture at the bottom!*

Great game, David! Nobody came close to recognizing their sheet, but it was loads of fun.

Your Lowly Scribe believes we have a ways to go in establishing inner harmony, cosmic *ommm*, and letting our artistic hair down if we are to communicate messages effectively and be receptive to messages from others.

David's observation: “This game illustrates that it's not the destination that's important; it's the journey.”

24. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Rachel Alkallay

(impromptu)

Sherlock Holmes always admired The Woman because she was the only one who bested him. Let this be a lesson in life. When you are honest, you achieve more than when you are not honest.

To the Woman!

25. Well-chosen Words

Patrick Campbell observed that in the Canon, The Woman speaks only five words, and Mrs. Hudson, thirty-eight.

26. Quiz – Results

Story: *The Resident Patient*, prepared by Roger Burrows

Possible total: 71 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	
1.	Carol Abramson	65	book
2.	Raf Jans	59	book
3.	Patrick Campbell	52	book

The next quiz, based on *A Study in Scarlet (Part 2)*, will be prepared by Carol Abramson.

27. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Walt Colby

Walt was a guest of our meeting in the Spring. A few of us had the opportunity to get together with him throughout his month-long vacation in our city. He graciously offered to send in a toast to Mrs. Hudson, which follows.

Coriander, cumin, mustard, fenugreek, pepper, chilies, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, and other spices contribute to the dishes we know as curries. Curries were included in British recipe books as early as 1747, with the appearance of Hannah Glasse's "The Art of Cookery".

In 1811 retirees of the East India Company returning to London were greeted by the opening of the Hindostanee Coffee Shop, near Portman Square, not far from 221B Baker Street.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace provoked a surge of interest in things Indian, even resulting in Victoria and Albert decorating a wing of Osborne House, their home on the Isle of Wight, in a resplendent Indian style. There they entertained guests, serving them curries.

And thus it came to pass that Holmes, Watson, and Percy Phelps, recently beset by brain fever, were served curried chicken in July 1889 at the breakfast wherein the missing Naval Treaty was returned.

Holmes says of Mrs. Hudson, "Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotswoman." We may credit her more than he does for her fashionable cuisine and the panache of serving a traditionally dinner dish for breakfast.

Let us honor the woman who skillfully keeps Holmes nourished, frequently against his will,
...to Mrs. Hudson.

28. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Erica Penner

As usual, when I am to do a toast I turn to the Internet for ideas since I have no imagination. I began my research by reading several definitions of "society" from several dictionaries from *Oxford* to *Wikipedia* and learned that they all essentially copy from each other.

Even so, this is what I learned about "society." A society can be based on geography or social class or shared interests or activities. It is distinct and has its own rules and customs and is "more or less ordered." It has a particular purpose. Always it involves being in the company of other people for some mutual purpose.

Initially I wanted to apply this paradigm to The Bimetallic Question in a humorous way, but given the losses of the last months, I decided instead to pay tribute to three captivating persons who I would not have met without The Bimetallic Question.

I always got a kick out of Stanley Baker's quick wit – he was never at a loss for words. In a way he is responsible for my being here since he recruited Arlene Scher who recruited me. I was extremely fond of Stanley and tried to sit next to him whenever possible. I loved his quiz "answers" and it did not hurt that he was generous with the half-points when grading mine.

David Kellett may have been our most passionate and engaged member. I was impressed at how he was always super prepared and how often he won the quizzes. Not only won, but aced! From costumes to paintings to show-and-tell, David was "the man."

Rajpattie Persaud, Paul Billette's wife, was my dining and conversational companion at my first Annual Dinner at the Vieux Port Restaurant. (This was before I joined the Snowbird society.) I have no idea any more what we talked about, but I remember how kind Rajpattie and Paul were and what an enjoyable evening I passed with them. Even though I was new to The Bimetallic Question they made me feel comfortable and included.

Back to my internet search. I will share one quote. It is by Francis Bacon:

Man seeketh in society comfort, use, and protection.

So let us comfort and support each other as we remember the remarkable individuals who no longer sit around the table with us, but will always be part of the Bimetallic Question society.

To the Society ...

29. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

To be announced. Please contact Ron Zilman if you would like to volunteer.

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favour upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, October 6th, 2011, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to:

<http://www.bimetallicquestion.org>