

## Correction

For those of you who were at the Annual Dinner, we bring you a correction. Due to an error on the part of our official auditors, Moriarty & Moran, the name of the prize winner in the envelope handed to Patrick Campbell was incorrect: Carol Abramson is in fact the 2011 Quiz Trophy winner. Congratulations, Carol!

## Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

### **Date of next meeting**

Thursday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 6:30 p.m. at:  
The Westmount Public Library (Westmount Room)  
4574 Sherbrooke Street West  
Westmount, Quebec

### **The Quiz at the next meeting**

**“The Reigate Squires”**  
prepared by Raf Jans

**Minutes** of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Florence Belfer, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Wilfrid de Freitas, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, Tom Holmes, Raf Jans, Elliott Newman, Lawrence Reich, Carole Rocklin, Ron Zilman

**Regrets:** David Dowse, Marlene Mandiuk, Joan O'Malley, Arlene Scher

## **CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:30 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

## **ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION**

(Incorporating Kitchen Sinks and Miscellanea, Various and Sundry, Now and Yesteryear)

### **1. The Quintessential Post-it**

We have prepared a modest poster to announce our meetings for the year. This will be displayed on the bulletin board inside the library building, sandwiched between announcements ranging anywhere from threat of decapitation for overdue books, to bake sales in aid of ducks frozen to the Westmount Park pond. We had considered a talking advertisement for our meetings, activated by a photoelectric cell, giving a verbal reminder of our meetings, but this was considered inappropriate since the library is a place of silence and study, and the repetition of the same message, even if concluded with "Have a Nice Day," especially signalled day in and day out, might have a grating effect on those dozing over their Gazettes and Examiners, and result in acrimonious looks towards our innocent membership on the first Thursday of every second month. Anonymity might not link to fame, but it is a hedge in favour of longevity. Besides, have you ever met a writer named "Anon."?

### **2. Another Moment of Silence**

Maureen Anderson delivered the results of the silent auction she had organized regarding the distribution of some of David Kellett's book collection. The auction raised over \$120, with half of the money being used to send items from David's estate to relatives in California. The remainder was added to the coffers of the BmQ.

### **3. In the loop**

Wilfrid de Freitas announced that he had sent Dr. Joe Schwarz a note informing him of David Kellett's passing.

### **4. Planning the Annual Dinner**

Although the Annual Dinner will have come and gone by the time our members receive these minutes, it is worthy to note that our December 1<sup>st</sup> meeting marked a significant milestone in the annals of our club. Ron's call for volunteers to help organize the evening actually resulted in a lively and positive response, without any actual or implied violence. He announced that there will be a standing committee to plan the annual dinner evening. We have seen that to date, this has been the smoothest planning of an annual dinner within the memory of your Lowly Scribe, thanks to the initiatives undertaken by our Sovereign, aided by Wilfrid de Freitas, Paul Billette, and others, in scouting out the venue, nailing down the price, and establishing that the cost of drinking enough to communicate directly with The World's First Consulting Detective will be much less this year than last due to the lower prices of alcoholic beverages. With many hands making light the work, Marie Burrows created and sent out the invitations, with reservations and cheques to be forwarded to Wilfrid de Freitas.

We were informed that our guest speaker would be M. André Saumier, former president of the Montreal Stock Exchange, and a long-time acquaintance of Paul

Billette. According to Paul, M. Saumier is humorous, entertaining, and spellbinding. A former priest, he is now a consultant to Vietnam.

#### **5. Be a Part of It, Not Apart from It**

It's that time of year again, time to join and become a brain-stimulated, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, literary, questing, affable member of The Bimetallic Question. Renew your affiliation with The Society, and your faith in the great works of mankind. Individual memberships have been increased slightly to \$25, with spousal accompaniment to \$35, which is still cheap at half the price. The increase was necessitated because of the rising costs of everything. In our case, we are depressingly affected by the cost of mailing, and the price of paper, envelopes, printer toner, etc., etc. The tragic exigency of expunging verbosity has laid low your Lowly Scribe, all this in the interests of maintaining a slim profile of your bimonthly Minutes mailer, since the fatter the Minutes, the heftier the mailing bill. So, ante up, folks, and keep a writer starving in his garret. Please. Besides, it's a great deal, you'll enjoy the camaraderie, and you'll walk away from each meeting reeling with the sense that something epochal has just happened, although you're not certain what. Wot?

#### **6. In Praise of Gratitude**

The Westmount Library has been a generous supporter of The Bimetallic Question in several ways:

- a. It provides non-squeaky wheels on the lovely oak tables we rearrange into a row for our meetings
- b. There are always enough chairs
- c. It enables us not to have snacks during our meetings
- d. It has gently supported our ethical decision not to have booze on the premises
- e. It furnishes us with two sets of double doors to keep out the annoying noises of pages turning in the rotunda
- f. Best of all, it provides us with a complementary shushing service when we grow too ebullient.

As a society, we wish to donate a small token of our appreciation of having been able to loll and languish in that wonderful building over the past several years. Wilfrid de Freitas suggested a gift of \$300 for the use of the beautiful reading room and its quite lovely, Victorian atmosphere. Wilfrid said the library will let him know what we can donate.

#### **7. Downey to the Theatre in Droles**

Once again our Society was the happy recipient of 20 double passes to the preview screening of *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* at the ScotiaBank Theatre. The joyful event took place on December 14, with 40 members meeting well in advance of the curtain-raising, in order to ensure a seat. As with the first film, the theatre was packed. In the film, we were led through a more international sequence of locales than in the first instalment, culminating in a highly stylized, computer-assisted plunge at Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland. Our Society has the distinction of being among the most critical of audiences in the world; and at that, some of us liked the film for its entertainment value, pacing, acting, humour, and attempt to observe proper obeisance to the verity of Sherlockian fact and iconography. Your Lowly Scribe did a bit of a double-take when at the beginning of the film, Dr. Watson is typing up a memoir of the WGCD on what appears to be an Underwood 5 typewriter, which was

produced from 1900 to 1931 or early 1932. This was of special interest since it was this model which David Kellett had bestowed upon the most unworthy of all Scribes, and was, in fact identical to the model upon which he had grown up. If the story takes place before 1900, it would have been impossible to have used this model. This point will readily resolve itself under the commentary of knowledgeable Society members. Furthermore, one had always assumed that in chronicling the events of The Master, Watson would have used a pen. Indeed, why? Can any of our members enlighten the rest of us on this point?

## 8. Murder, etc.

Patrick Campbell showed us how great writers influence each other by providing (in other words) literary models, fragments, phonic models, thematic paradigms, rhythms, tempos, and other signposts of kinship, inspiration, and plagiarism. He proved that a page from T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* is highly reminiscent of our annual "Whose was it?" excerpt. He gleaned from other excerpts of famous writers who adapted passages from the canon:

- Dorothy L. Sayers was one such student of the canon. A master of the mystery genre in her own right, she founded the first Sherlockian society in England, which did not survive WWII.
- In addition to the Eliot play, Patrick referred to Stephen Leacock's *Nonsense Novels* (1911), Ms Sayers' *Unpopular Opinions* (essays, 1910), and A. A. Milne, *If I May* (essays, 1921)

Patrick also showed us a book, by W.E. Butler, containing illustrations of notable Sherlockian bookplates.

## 9. A New Pastiche

Paul Billette showed us a review from the previous week's *National Post* of *The House of Silk*, a Sherlockian novel by Anthony Horowitz. As if taking lessons from Patrick Campbell, the author pays homage to another great literary detective:

In chapter one there is some mention of C. Auguste Dupin, a character developed by author Edgar Allan Poe, and his ability to make astounding deductions based on visible emotions reflected through the physical medium. Holmes demonstrates this by uncovering Watson's anxiety and the source thereof. This mention of Dupin is in itself a reference to a reference made by Conan Doyle to the character in the first Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. (Wikipedia – The House of Silk)

## 10. Smoking Up

Not that we would disrespect, disparage, or ignore the regulations of the Westmount Library, BUT we could not avoid landing upon a certain lily pad of discussion in the pond of impossibility, to wit: WHAT IF Chris Herten-Greaven were to bring in a salver with gold and silver inlay, laden with game *pâté*, sharp old cheddar, and (hickory?) smoked sturgeon, cured eight feet above the fire of the gods? Would this not speed things along as with one ear we listened to the proceedings of The Society, while with all other senses actively engaged on the passage of food – hypothetically – as it made its way up the table, down the table, up the table, etc., like the gentle swell of a tropical sea, we continued to stuff ourselves? Would this not be a cause for celebration? Would we not express a sincere thank-you to Chris?

## 11. First Toast – To the Master

by Chris Herten-Greaven

For a change I will not start by saying, “What could be said that has not already been said?” Rather, I will try to relate what the Master’s life would have been like in our present day’s challenges, in the same milieu.

Having been involved myself with forensic sciences in the 1980s, I have seen first-hand how the interpretation of evidence from ballistics, questioned documents, toxicology, body fluids, arson, etc., had advanced from the Master’s day until the ‘80s, and then the quantum leap to nowadays. The Master would no doubt be fascinated by such things as DNA analysis, gas chromatography, on-site arson analysis, and so on. Yet his ability to arrive at scientific conclusions and deductions, using far more rudimentary techniques, plus an extensive, almost omniscient knowledge, and the ability to relate, to remember, and to recall, would, I am sure, not find him often out of his depth.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses and toast the ever-present, and probably forever up-to-date Master!

## 12. If You’ve Seen What Hyoscine, You Might Believe It Too

Rachel Alkallay shared with us the story of Hawley Harvey Crippen, an American homeopathic physician hanged for the murder of his wife in England, on November 23, 1910. He was imputed to have used the toxic drug hyoscine, although it had never before or since been known to have been used for murder. He is also the first criminal to have been apprehended by the use of wireless communication. There were many irregularities in the chain of evidence. The recent use of modern forensic verification largely revealed that the body disinterred on the bad doctor’s property, was probably not that of his wife. The many inconsistencies in his life led eventually to an iron-clad case of circumstantial evidence, and Dr. Crippen met Mr. Ellis for the last dance. Such were the convolutions and complications of events, characters, and sub-plots in this case, that it has given birth to many fictional and reportorial stories.

## 13. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by David Dowse

(In David’s absence an impromptu toast was given by Roger Burrows. David’s toast continues below.)

It is Watson, Doctor, Dr. Watson but on only three occasions in the Canon is the name John added and it is never spoken by Holmes. And we should really pare it down to two because his beloved wife Mary referred to him as James in *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. Has anyone an idea where to find John H. Watson in the Canon? For the answer to this conundrum, read on, and keep on reading until you come to it!

In appearance, Watson is “as thin as a lath (def. – narrow strip of wood nailed to rafters, joints or studding as a groundwork for slate, tiles, or plaster) and brown as a nut”, a “middle-sized, strongly built man – square jaw, thick neck, [and] moustache.”

Watson was well aware of both his limitations and his abilities as well as Holmes’s reliance on him. “He was a man of habits ... and I had become one of them ... a comrade ... upon whose nerve he could place some reliance ... a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. ... If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my

mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.”

Where Holmes was often secretive and devious, Watson was naturally open and straightforward. Holmes seems almost sarcastic as to these traits. As Holmes says in the recent film, “I can rely on you, Watson, to state the obvious.”

But there is no doubt that Holmes truly loves Watson. His expression of that sentiment is shown in that scene where Watson is shot and Holmes sternly looks at the villain and assures him that “If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive.”

Holmes would have been lost without his Boswell, his faithful friend and biographer.

I give you a toast to Watson!

#### **14. Complete, Unexpurgated, the Real Deal!**

Chris Herten-Greaven referred us to a book written by a descendant of the fourth officer on the *Titanic*, who reports the “true” version of what happened on that fateful voyage. The book is *Good as Gold*. According to the book, the collision with the iceberg stemmed from a rivalry between the White Star Line and the Cunard Line which escalated into a speed race across the Atlantic. An order to increase speed was misinterpreted, and the side of the *Titanic* swung into the iceberg, despite the fact that an officer had a critical warning telegram in his pocket. To compound the tragedy, there were not enough lifeboats or life preservers. These and other interesting tidbits were tossed out at a regularly scheduled Sunday morning book club meeting at the Sheraton Hotel, sponsored by the *Gazette* and Paragraph Book store.

#### **15. Three Little Maids**

Chris Herten-Greaven has done a counting. He has identified at least three Gilbert and Sullivan societies in Montreal, which for our purposes, may be identified by location: McGill, Montreal West, and Lakeshore. Chris has elevated G&S oeuvres, calling them “Sherlockian, with a Victorian drawing room comedy twist.” Plus music, of course. All three societies will meet to present a concert of G&S samplings.

#### **16. Time to Bow Down**

“Sometimes personalities carve for themselves a larger-than-life image. We should take these with a grain of salt,” said Chris Herten-Greaven.

Rachel Alkallay seconded the sentiment by referring to yet another case of fraud perpetrated on an international scale, as in the instance of *The Man Who Never Was*, subject of the non-fiction book concerning the floating of the body of a bogus spy in the North Atlantic during World War II. It was intended to convince the Germans that they had uncovered some vital secret information on the body, which could turn the war in their favour. Chris was surprised that the Germans did not suspect they were being misled, since the corpse in the ocean had to have bad teeth, and could not have come from the level of society expected of one who would be found floating in the Atlantic, and entrusted with important secret information. We can, in all honesty, imagine little James Bond’s mummy calling after him, as he goes off in his shorts to play with his chums, “Jamie, dearest, have you brushed with Crest today?” Well?

## 17. Fast Company

Wilfrid de Freitas told us that one of our own Patrick Campbell's books has been signed by SACD's daughter, Richard Lancelyn Green, and other notables.

## 18. The Uncaused Cause

Wilfrid de Freitas circulated a copy of *The Blue Book*, Volume I, Number ii, July 1912. He noted that the essay by Ronald Knox, printed in this issue, was one of the foundations of Sherlockian scholarship.

## 19. The Third Toast – To the Woman

by Raf Jans

One cannot propose a toast to "The Woman" without rereading "A Scandal in Bohemia." It is certainly one of the most fascinating adventures of Sherlock Holmes. The beginning lines of this adventure are absolutely captivating: "To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name."

This definitively is a most intriguing statement. It places Irene Adler on an entirely different level compared to all the other women in the canon.

It is worth keeping these lines in mind when reading further, and then these opening lines become even more intriguing. If I am not mistaken, Sherlock Holmes actually *never* refers to Irene Adler as *the* woman in the canon. Even more fascinating is the observation that Sherlock Holmes does mention her under many other names.

So here is a list of names that Sherlock Holmes uses to refer to Irene Adler:

Irene Adler (twice)  
Irene Adler, spinster  
Miss Adler  
Miss Irene, a Madame  
A lovely woman with a face a man might die for  
The daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet  
The lady (four times)  
This young person  
Mademoiselle  
The bride  
and finally, Our lady of to-day

And yet, no one will doubt the truthfulness of Dr. Watson's statement that "to Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman." Sherlock Holmes will without any doubt always have referred to Irene Adler using this honourable title *after* the conclusion of this remarkable adventure.

So here is a toast to *The Woman*!

## 20. Say, Vicah, Have Anothah Sticky Bun?

Once again Carol and Jacob Abramson are opening their home in the Victorian sector of Dollard des Ormeaux to an awftehnoon tea in the Victorian mannah. This is tentatively planned for May, with more news to follow.

## 21. Quiz – Results

Story: *The Three Garridebs*, prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 60 points

Winners were:

| Rank | Name           | Score |  |
|------|----------------|-------|--|
| 1.   | Raf Jans       | 58    | <i>Talking About Detective Fiction</i> by P.D. James |
| 2.   | Carol Abramson | 57½   | Magnetic bookmarks                                   |
| 3.   | Lawrence Reich | 51    | Moleskin notebook                                    |

The next quiz, based on *The Reigate Squires*, will be prepared by Raf Jans.

## 22. What's a Garrideb, anyway?

Our discussion on this meeting's story initially tried to grapple with the question of what a Garrideb is. It was mentioned *sotto voce* that some of them have three legs, while others, having been in the war, possess only two. Which are adequate for walking, but never for pole vaulting in the mud on Sunday mornings. *Sotto voce* conversation then shifted to speculation on ethnic manifestations of said Garridebs. Some said Sicilian, others Corsican, taking us into a horse-mule conflict similar to *Fiddler on the Roof*.

What was a little more down-to-earth was the observation that the plot was familiar, as were the plots of two other canonical tales: "The Red-Headed League," and "The Stockbroker's Clerk." It was noted that the plots of all three stories were rehashed for subsequent stories.

Which is not surprising when you consider that most characters do have two legs, although some have three, but you don't hear much about those.

On a more personal note, Patrick Campbell could not find any source or meaning of the name "Garrideb".

Paul Billette found the opening of the story to be brilliant.

Chris Herten-Greaven believed there are many people with weird names because they couldn't get their names understood by the border guards admitting them into the country and registering them.

Again, given our collective innate intelligence and firm command of communication, it is easy to see how McGillicuddy can be transmogrified into Cohen.



### 23. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Carol Abramson

In the canon, we are faced with many mysteries, yet Holmes and Watson manage to solve them all! The stories include various women of mystery. But why do Holmes and Watson **never** address the mystery sitting at their very doorstep – **Who is Mrs. Hudson?** In the course of researching her on our new encyclopaedia, the Internet, I came across a variety of Mrs. Hudsons, all claiming to be Sherlock Holmes's landlady.

First we must deal with her very name – Mrs. Hudson is listed in various sources as Mary, Martha, and Flora, as well as once being called Mrs. Turner. Who is she really – or are these all aliases to hide her true identity?

Next – her marital status. One source states she is a widow, another that she is merely separated from her husband, while a third claims he was a criminal, hanged for his crimes in Florida. Another feels her husband is alive, and lives with her, but was not mentioned in the Canon, while a final opinion is that she was never married, and that “Mrs.” would be the title used by someone of her status, even if unmarried. Some claim she is of Scottish origin, while others say she cannot possibly be. She is reputed to be both plump and thin. Her age is again indeterminate. While the stories of the Canon span a period of years, and Mrs. Hudson is generally thought of as a middle-aged woman, there is one internet source which gives her the age of nineteen when Holmes becomes her tenant.

We are told Mrs. Hudson has a Basset Hound named Zeke, and three cats, yet in *A Study in Scarlet* we know she had a terrier (the one Holmes put out of its misery). Her hobbies seem to include embroidery, knitting, and playing patience.

Mrs. Hudson's dealings with her infamous tenant are also portrayed in varying ways. She is mostly listed as long-suffering and patient in dealing with Sherlock's habits, yet one source lists her as feisty, bordering on rude in her comments to him. And another voice speaks of her affection for and acceptance of “her boys,” her tenants who “were clearly besotted with each other.” While her pride in and loyalty to Holmes is never questioned, she is seen by some as gossipy and avaricious, yet Watson refers to her as “our worthy landlady.”

Who is the real Mrs. Hudson? A secret indeed!

So I now ask you to raise your glasses to “the woman of mystery” who resides at 221B Baker Street.

To Mrs. Hudson!

### 24. On the Tube

Marie Burrows has advised us of the release of the next British *Sherlock* series, to be broadcast in the U.K. starting January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

## 25. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Roger Burrows

What should I say about our Society? I haven't been a member long enough to invoke the Good Old Days, and I don't have the oratorical abilities of a Patrick Campbell or David Dowse to bring to bear on the subject. So I did what I usually do: research. Which for me means books. In this case, books about the Canon.

I started with the *Canonical Compendium*. In that excellent reference, there is a section entitled 'Clubs and Societies,' which is further subdivided into 'Fraternal,' 'Social,' and 'Other'. This led me to wonder: if The Bimetallic Question (as a society) had been mentioned in the Canon, what kind of society might it have been?

Amongst the 'Other' we find the Avenging Angels, the Ku Klux Klan, the Mafia, the *Vehmgericht*, and so on. Not where I want to be (the Diogenes Club is also listed there, but since it's not Fraternal, and clearly not Social, that's not surprising).

"Fraternal" sounds more like it, but a closer examination of the list shows it mostly contains the not-so-brotherly Lodges and Order of Freeman mentioned in *The Valley of Fear*. It also contains the Royal College of Surgeons and the Swedish Pathological Society. Some people might say that our interest in Holmes might qualify us for the latter, but ...

So finally, "Social" it is. Not a card club like the Bagatelle or a sports club like the Skating club (5 bonus points for anyone who can tell me which story *that's* in). The men among us might feel comfortable in something like the Carlton, or Watson's (unnamed) club, but that would hardly do for the fair sex. Instead, I suggest that the Canonical Bimetallic Question would be a club where members of either sex could feel at home, and equal to everyone else.

My friends, I give you The Society.

## 26. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

|                |   |                  |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| To the Master  | - | Maureen Anderson |
| To Dr. Watson  | - | David Dowse      |
| To the Woman   | - | Elliott Newman   |
| To Mrs. Hudson | - | Paul Billette    |
| To the Society | - | Patrick Campbell |

**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, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, 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>**