

**Minutes of the meeting of  
The Bimetallic Question  
October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Date of next meeting**

Thursday, December 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 Adventure of the Empty House”**  
prepared by Carol Abramson

**Minutes** of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, David Dowse, Tom Holmes, David Kellett, Lars Lovkvist, Elliott Newman, Mietek Padowicz, Naomi Padowicz, Denis Pothier, Arlene Scher, Ron Zilman

**Regrets:** Wilfrid de Freitas

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Acting Sovereign Marie Burrows called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30.

### **In Memoriam: Stanley Baker**

We are saddened to announce the passing on November 1<sup>st</sup> of Stanley Baker at the age of 87. He had suffered deteriorating health for several months. Stanley, who was born in London, England, was a Sherlockian and gentleman extraordinaire, and a Westmount personality who redefined "debonair." He attended most of our meetings, unless he was off on a cruise, charming the rest of the world. He performed yeoman service as our Recruiting Sergeant, a.k.a. "Gentleman Collector," ushering into our midst a good number of new members to the society. Stanley's keen wit, warm and friendly sense of humour, and abiding patience will be sorely missed.

#### **PREFATORY NOTE** (e-mailed by Wilfrid de Freitas Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 from "the coast")

Once again, the pressure of business forces me to be away for yet another meeting; this time a cross-Canada trip to Vancouver during the course of which we'll be exhibiting at four Canadian antiquarian book fairs in five weeks. Some members might be forgiven for thinking that I don't enjoy attending our bi-monthly get-togethers ... far from it. Even after thirty years every meeting delivers something useful and, more importantly, a reminder that for two-and-a-half hours every couple of months one can forget everything else and concentrate on the most important thing of all — pleasure! Apropos which, a reminder: as mentioned at the last meeting, Jack and Maureen will be bringing some hard and soft cover Sherlockian pastiches for sale at \$1 and .50¢ respectively, so get there early for the best choice!

Marie Burrows has kindly offered to chair the October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting (thanks, Marie!) and before Maureen hands out the toasting accessories David will take a few pictures for our website. This will replace the rather sterile present one of an empty room, so don't be concerned by the delay in receiving your wee dram!

Some of you will be aware that the Montefiore Club has closed its doors: the building has been bought by Concordia and I hear is to be converted to ... well, I'm not quite sure. I hear rumours of a conference centre/faculty club but, in any event, we will most likely have to find another venue for our annual dinner in January. A few alternatives have already been suggested and I've contacted Concordia to see if they're planning to re-install a dining room and whether or not they would be open to hosting outside events. No reply so far, but I'll keep you posted.

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

(Incorporating Look and See, Listen and Hear, Show and Tell)

##### **1. A Big Thank You**

Marie thanked Carol Abramson for hosting the Summer Victorian Tea Party at her home in Dollard-des-Ormeaux. Many attendees showed up in appropriate Victorian attire.

David Kellett passed around pictures that he had taken at the party.

It was noted that a picture of the tea party appeared in the *Westmount Examiner*.

## 2. **Happy Birthday, David Kellett**

This could be the title of a movie enigmatically presented by the Coen Brothers in collaboration with Harold Pinter. But it is nothing that dramatic. In honour of David Kellett's birthday on the day following our meeting, Naomi and Mietek Padowicz created – not simply baked – a chocolate beetroot cake. There are very few of these left on the planet (DK and chocolate beetroot cake), and they must be well guarded. Before mounting a guard, we did manage to belt out a resounding “Happy Birthday” to David and thank-yous to the clan Padowicz.

## 3. **First Toast – To the Master**

by Mietek Padowicz

*An original poem composed for the occasion. Mietek explained that due to the 180-second rule imposed on toasts, he had elected to present his toast in the form of a poem, due to what is universally acknowledged to be the compact nature of poetry. (Has anyone seen The Bible lately? Or Paradise Lost? How about Wordsworth's Prelude? They were all poetry, and not necessarily succinct. Beware of works starting with “In the beginning ...” You know you're in for a long ride. On the other hand, anything commencing with “The other day while ...” has its own cachet, the je ne sais quoi of mystery and possibility. Peruse on, Gentle Readers ...)*

The other day while in the street, I chanced across a beak-nosed man with eyes so keen.

He asked me in a thousand ways, if by chance I knew, if by chance had seen  
The tricky, nasty scheming scum that ran through London's very being.

I offered him a cup of tea, a ginger snap, some time to think, before again he disappeared

Again to hunt, to sniff, to prowl the seamy underbelly of time and Hell.

A land where more ingenious by the day, evil lives and plots and grows,  
Where we but pass from time to time, he lives it every day.

For every criminal dispatched, a dozen more take up the cause.  
Eternal fear, eternal thrill, eternal vigilance for him.

So should you see his furrowed brow and feel his deep eyes questioning,  
If he should stop you in mid-flight, to give inquiring greeting,

Please understand, he can't stay long, he's on a case, must soon away.  
Perhaps another day, he'll stop and play, but not today ...

TO THE MASTER

## 4. **Low Stationery Alert**

Marie informed us that the old stationery was finally running out and that a newer version, printed in the summer, would be replacing it. The artwork has been slightly modified from what we are used to on our existing letterhead. Marie passed around copies of the old and new versions.

## 5. **Colour Preferences**

Marie reminded us of the new British Sherlock Holmes series (three programs constitutes a series when it comes to The World's Most Famous Consulting Detective (TWMFCD). Since most of us had already seen *A Study in Pink* (the first of the series), we discussed our impressions of it. A particular point was made that the obsessiveness of Holmes in his drug addiction detracted from the canon in that too much was made of it. We need not have concerned ourselves about it. A team of pastiche authors, probably Mollie and Michael Hardwick in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, had Watson surreptitiously dilute the cocaine solution down from the commonly believed 7% to a point slightly above our national prime lending rate, no more than 2 or 3%. This having been the case, Holmes, in the throes of a sudden rush, would be as tractable as a kitten after a bowl of warm milk, with recovery powers to match. We observed that the modern Holmesian hero is faster and more communicative than our beloved icon, Jeremy Brett, who, by the way, at one point, had to be taken off the production set, suffering from a nervous breakdown. He was heard to babble that Sherlock Holmes was inside him and he couldn't get him out. We appreciate the sacrifice, and wouldn't have it any other way.

David Dowse commented that the new SH in the mini-series is rude, terse, and arrogant in a way that our hero (the actor Brett and the real-life Holmes) never was.

## 6. **This Guy is Back**

The new Guy Ritchie Holmes movie is due for release in December 2011, a year from now. Stephen Fry will play Mycroft. They're trying, folks. Should we encourage them?

## 7. **Second Toast – To Doctor Watson**

by Chris Herten-Greaven, read in his absence by Patrick Campbell

Ah, the avuncular\* Dr. Watson!

In so many of Sherlock Holmes's adventures the personification of a man of Physic, of sound reasoning, a good companion to the Master, who seldom embarked on a new adventure without him; one of Nature's gentlemen. Always ready with the considerate reply to the often overly sharp barbs with which Holmes would reward his deductions, or reasoning, when assessing the evidence at the start of a new case. One gets the impression that Holmes wants no one to forget who is the alpha male in their group. Perhaps a bit too much the Sancho Panza to Holmes's Don Quixote, always down-to-earth and pragmatic, even if somewhat short on the flamboyance.

We all need a Dr. Watson, on occasion; someone who will voice an opinion, probably well-founded, and with no hesitation because of the fear that someone will upstage him with a show of superior wit or knowledge or fortuitous\*\* serendipity\*\*\*.

So hang in there all you Dr. Watsons. The world needs you!

Please raise your glasses to the man without whom Sherlock Holmes's acumen\*\*\*\* would surely be somewhat diminished.

\*of, or relating to a maternal uncle; kindly, genial (Stephen King would make mince-meat of this, of course!)

\*\*occurring by chance

\*\*\*the faculty of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for

\*\*\*\*keenness and depth of perception, discernment, or discrimination, especially in practical matters

## 8. **The Sherlockian Repast**

Once again, we did not starve. Although not with us physically, Chris sent pâté, cheese, and crackers. Maureen and Jack brought Walker's ginger snaps in a stunning, authentic Walker's tin. Those biscuits go down smooth like their cousin Johnny, and you never, ever, throw out the tin.

## 9. **The Kellett Caravan**

The ever-generous David Kellett bestowed a number of possessions upon club members, as follows:

- A clock made in Scotland (there is no city named "Scotland" in China) to Paul Billette
- A pocket watch display case, also to Paul
- A book on *Coronation Street* to Mietek Padowicz
- Two books on China (we knew the name would come up) to Carol Abramson
- A *Jeopardy* book. David Dowse, Rachel Alkallay, and Maureen Anderson played for it. Rachel got it.
- A large, disguised package containing 17 volumes of *Look* and *Life* magazines from the 1960s to Rachel Alkallay

## 10. **The Pen Is Mightier Than Our Brains**

David Dowse posed the question: What kind of pen would Sherlock Holmes have used? He knew we wouldn't know the answer. It was a loaded question.

David then proceeded through a fascinating and revealing presentation of writing paraphernalia of the period with pieces from his own extensive pen collection. He showed us: nibs, an eyedropper (for filling ink into pens that require filling from the top of the barrel), metal pens and pencils. He explained when and where pens used to be used, as well as the availability of ink. Pens were available to the public in banks and train stations for writing in the business of the day. In Holmes's time, these were all dipping pens, usually steel nibs slotted into a lathe-turned wooden shaft. Inkwells were usually sunk into the top of the counter and held in place by specially-designed bottles, to avoid spilling. David pointed out that lever fillers did not appear until the 1920s.

If you are interested in pens as collectibles or as works of art, you might want to start your search by visiting these web sites:

<http://isellpens.com/>

<http://www.scotianpens.com/>

The latter is the web site of Darryl Eisner of Halifax. He is a virtuoso pen maker working out of his garage in a suburb of Halifax. He turns fountain, ballpoint, and roller ball pens, as well as mechanical pencils from a variety of local and exotic woods to which he matches hardware and fittings from diverse metals and suppliers. Your Lowly Scribe visited him in August 2010 and was enthralled by the accuracy and beauty of his wares. He showed me the ebony fountain pens he had been commissioned to create for the leading delegates to last summer's Toronto G-20 conference. The pens were waiting for their specially-made wooden presentation cases before being shipped out.

#### 11. **The Fave Rave**

We were invited to vote on our favourite Sherlock Holmes novel. In chronological order, they are:

*A Study in Scarlet* (first published by Ward Lock & Co. in the 1887 edition of *Beeton's Christmas Annual*)

*The Sign of the Four*, a.k.a. *The Sign of Four* (first published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* February 1890 as *The Sign of the Four*)

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (serialized in *Strand Magazine* August 1901-April 1902)

*The Valley of Fear* (serialized in *Strand Magazine* September 1914-May 1915)

We had quite a lively discussion about the narratives and then the results were announced: *The Hound* (9 votes), *The Sign of the Four* (5 votes), *A Study in Scarlet* (4 votes), *The Valley of Fear* (1 vote).

Once the counting was over, all the ballots were thrown into a cardboard "hat" for a draw, won by Carol Abramson. She claimed a bag of "Bimetallic Currency" (chocolate coins).

#### 12. **Third Toast – To the Woman**

By David Dowse

Why introduce us to a woman such as Irene Adler? The women of the canon are for the most part dependent, relying on someone else to give them sustenance, protection, employment, and meaning in life. They play their roles as partners to dominant men.

Two women stand out as breaking this mould – Irene Adler and Martha Hudson. They are women from opposite ends of the social strata, but nonetheless women who call their own shots and stand alone.

Irene is an actress, traveler, lover, and perhaps a spy. She has a mind of her own and goals that she wants to achieve. She is an independent woman of the world who has supreme confidence in her own ability to succeed. She stands head and shoulders above that little man, the King of Bohemia.

Martha Hudson, at the other extreme, was married to a Mr. Hudson at one time. He either died or left her and now she must make the best of the situation as the landlady of a boarding house. How many rooms has she to let? Can she survive with only one flat rented? Does this imply that one set of lodgers is sufficient for her to keep body and soul together, as well as maintain a fairly well-appointed building on Baker Street?

Let us examine the facts in this matter:

Holmes and Watson do not have a lot of money to spend. But Holmes insists on exclusivity in this central London location. He does not want to share it with a constantly revolving array of unknown lodgers. He strikes a bargain with Mrs. Hudson for a percentage of each of the rewards he receives from the solution to his cases. Her cut increases as Holmes's professional reputation ascends. She gets in on the ground floor of an institution: Sherlock Holmes, The World's First Consulting Detective. She is a visionary to spot the potential in Holmes.

Both Irene Adler and Martha Hudson have taken risks in life and have been enriched by their association with Sherlock Holmes.

I give you two extraordinary women: Irene Adler and Martha Hudson.

### 13. Quiz – Results

Story: "The Hound of the Baskervilles", prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 50 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Carol Abramson	45	<i>The Hound</i> graphic novel
2.	Ron Zilman	41	A recent copy of <i>Canadian Holmes</i>
3.	Patrick Campbell	38	The BBC Radio <i>Hound</i> on tape

The next quiz, based on "The Adventure of the Empty House", will be prepared by Carol Abramson.

### 14. What Goes Around, Comes Around

Patrick Campbell informed us that the Northumberland Hotel where Sir Henry stayed in *The Hound*, is now the Sherlock Holmes Pub.

### 15. And Now, for a Brief Commercial Message ...

"Since its founding in 1990, the Baker Street Breakfast Club of Shaftsbury, Vermont has developed its own traditions. Among them is the unrehearsed reading of a Sherlock Holmes Christmas play at its December meeting. The first was an adaptation of *The Blue Carbuncle* by Robert Sugarman, a member of the group. After a few years, two other members, Stephen Seitz and Rich Nethercott, adapted that into *The Blue Carbuncle – the Musical* in which new lyrics were written for a number of standard songs from Broadway and elsewhere. Beginning in 2007, Sugarman has been writing an original Sherlock Holmes Christmas pastiche play each year. This volume contains the two versions of *The Blue Carbuncle* and three original pastiches. The Baker Street Breakfast Club makes the scripts available, royalty free, to those who wish to use them. Even if you don't perform them, they are great fun to read."

Contents of the book:

- *The Blue Carbuncle* (play)
- *The Blue Carbuncle* (musical, with music)
- *A Christmas at Baker Street* (Holmes and Watson, joined by Irene Adler, help an adult not-so-Tiny Tim retrieve an inheritance.)
- *The Adventure of Father Christmas* (Holmes and Watson save Father Christmas himself from attack, and the management of Harrod's learns the true meaning of Christmas.)
- *Sherlock Holmes and the Retired Cavalry Captain* (Holmes solves the apparently supernatural difficulties faced by London's Christmas Circus.)

To order: Each copy \$9.95 (US) + \$3.00 S/H. Money orders payable to: Mountainside Press, P.O. Box 407, Shaftsbury, VT 05262 USA

## 16. **Fourth Toast - To Mrs. Hudson**

by Mac Belfer

Whenever Mrs. Hudson had some time to spare from her busy household, she would visit Mrs. Bucket (pronounced *boo – kay*), a friend and neighbour who lived a few blocks down the street. What made the visit memorable were the tea and crumpets and the delicious homemade jam Mrs. Bucket served on chinaware usually reserved for the vicar. What was even more delicious was the latest gossip Mrs. Hudson provided.

Tea served, Mrs. Bucket said, "Now tell me more about your illustrious Mr. Sherlock Holmes." With a sardonic glance at Mrs. Bucket, Mrs. Hudson began, "My dear friend, let me tell you. However famous a man he is, when you live with him day in and day out, you get disillusioned when you see similar flaws in his character to those of mere mortals. This comedown can be quite wearing, I can tell you. I have mentioned that infernal, malodorous pipe of his and his abominable habit of fiddle playing at all hours. But I have told you this before."

"You certainly have, Mrs. Hudson," replied Mrs. Bucket, "There is enough there to fill ten Beeton's Christmas Annuals, I'll warrant. But tell me. What of the personalities that are his clients? You must have a treasure-trove of information."

"Oh, most certainly. For instance, there was the King of Bohemia who needed his help, one time."

"A king! A real king," gushed Mrs. Bucket, paling at her proximity to such a distinguished client, however vicarious. She was so moved that she was tempted to call in her husband Richard who was outside hiding under the family buggy. But she thought the better of it.

"You simply must tell me about it," she encouraged, passing the plate of chocolate fudge ever closer to Mrs. Hudson.

"Well," Mrs. Hudson said in a confidential whisper, tilting her head toward Mrs. Bucket who in turn inclined hers in the direction of her guest, as if there were about to be a cataclysmic meeting of the minds, "Let me tell you ..." and Mrs. Hudson helped herself to the world's longest pause, along with a large wedge of fudge.



“Yes? ... Yes? ... Don’t leave me hanging off the edge of Dover with chalk marks on my dress!”

Mrs. Hudson pretended to sigh, and continued, “Of course, due to the sensitive nature of the case which I was privileged to have in my establishment, I can only tell you this much: Mr. Sherlock Holmes didn’t much respect the King. I rather like him for that.”

Mrs. Bucket formed her lips into a large O through which she pushed a piece of fudge and regarded her companion with newfound awe.

“The King,” she breathed.

Members of the Society, a toast to Mrs. Hudson!

**17. Killer Fiction**

David Dowse showed us a book entitled *Talking About Detective Fiction* by the master, P.D. James. A brief perusal turned up enough clues to confirm that this volume should be on everyone’s shelf, writer, amateur Sherlockian alike. David found the book discounted in the remainder section at Chapters, although not recently.

**18. A Sherlockian Dossier**

David Dowse showed us a dossier kit on “A Study in Scarlet.” This ingenious collection offers a substantial set of clues related to the case. Sifting through these is like a step back in time and adds several dimensions to the Sherlockian experience.

**19. “What Are You Doing Here?”  
“No. What Are You Doing Here?”**

Rachel Alkallay told us about a break-in artist who entered homes in New Jersey, but didn’t take anything. Your Lowly Scribe had a mouse like that. Still does.

**20. Fifth Toast – To the Society**

by Arlene Scher

Tonight I propose a toast not only to the society, but also to Carol Abramson and Jacob for hosting the summer tea a few weeks ago. So tonight’s toast is in honour of all the special and social times we spend together and to the people who make them special.

To the Society!

**21. Christmas Plans**

Tom Holmes suggested that we might go carolling around Christmas time. He pointed out that members of our society had done so in London 12 years ago. He suggests that we do this on a week-end afternoon in front of Ogilvy’s department store, in costume, with proceeds to the Welcome Hall Mission. We will discuss this further at our next meeting.

**22. Annual Dinner**

We had some discussion on venues for our annual dinner, probably to take place January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. Due to a dearth of information, we did not arrive at any consensus. We should have more information for you at our next meeting.

**23. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters**

To the Master	-	Paul Billette
To Dr. Watson	-	Naomi Padowicz
To the Woman	-	Elliott Newman
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Roger Burrows
To the Society	-	Maureen Anderson

**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, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010, 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>