

In Memoriam: David Kellett

It is with profound sadness and the deepest regret that I must advise you all of the recent passing of David Kellett. Although I did not know him as long as many of you, I valued his company, and appreciated the sincere enjoyment he took in the characters and stories associated with Sherlock Holmes. While his favourite story seemed to be *A Scandal in Bohemia*, he took great delight in most of the stories in the Canon. The portrayal of Holmes was a serious issue for him, as evidenced by his intense dislike of the latest movie version. I think he felt a closeness to all of us Sherlockians because we were kindred spirits, and a kind of family to him. He had a great love and respect for our organization, as he showed in his final, touching toast to The Society, at his last attendance, having attended 60 meetings in a row. We will miss him greatly. God speed David, to your final rest.

Ron Zilman

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question June 2nd, 2011

Date of next meeting

Thursday, August 4th, 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 Resident Patient”
prepared by Roger Burrows

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, June 2nd, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Maureen Anderson, Florence Belfer (new member), Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Walt Colby (guest), Louise Corda, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans (new member), Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, Ron Zilman

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Wilfrid de Freitas, Joan O'Malley, Lawrence Reich, Carole Rocklin, 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 Show and Tell, Pause and Reflection, Hope and Transcendence)

1. Bimetallic Outreach

We were delighted with the attendance of Walter Colby, visiting from his home town of Northampton, MA. Some of us had met Walt at the Bennington (VT) Symposium a year before. Walt, a retired IT guy, attends meetings of both the Baker Street Breakfast Club of Bennington, and the Sherlock Holmes Society of the Upper Valley, in Hanover, NH.

2. Bound up in Punch

Chris Herten-Greaven showed us three bound volumes of *Punch* magazine from 1911. He cited their “horribly class-conscious comments” which, we infer, was the way humorists handled satire back in the supposedly golden days before the dust and disaster of WW I.

The manner in which Chris acquired these volumes is worthy of comment, so bibliophiles: take note. As is wont to happen in the normal course of daily life, people die. Even in Westmount. Or they move. When owners of 1911 vintage *Punch* move on in a breathing mode, it is usually to an assisted living facility. Therefore they are often relocating to smaller quarters where the service does not include dusting of musty, century-old volumes and does include banning of such subversive literature if only because of the bronchial ailments that might arise from the rot of their pages or the half-life of their pernicious, desiccating glue. And if these individuals die, well, there you have it. Has anyone taken *Punch* to the grave that we know of? Which is to say, that apartment building rubbish heaps are great places to glean old books for which family members and friends have no use. If we could but conceal a cell phone camera in one of these volumes, we would no doubt have evidence of the callous disregard non-bibliophiles have of our most cherished keepsakes (“*What good are these? They smell. Did Aunt Edna ever read them, at least? Lord knows, I offered to buy her a Kindle® with 5,000 books in one thin personal electronic device. But did she accept? No. All of this embarrassment could have been avoided. Isn't there an antiquarian bookseller in Westmount? Oh, he's always travelling, you say? These things have to be worth a fortune.*”) Therefore, these incredible *Punches* became fair jetsam for Chris's quick eye, and have been saved from the city dump.

3. The Master's Methodology

Louise Corda gleaned this from the newspaper: “You know my methods. Use them.” And we will.

4. Waxing Pixtorial

A very old photograph of the members of our Society was passed around. Most of us had more hair. Some of us weren't born yet. It was nice.

5. Scriptum Impertinentum

Erica Penner shared Latin quotations which weren't. They had the flavour of something between Latin, English, and a bone in the throat. We need more.

6. Burrows on Burrows

Marie Burrows told us about a gang in St. Petersburg (not Florida) who used the plot of "The Red-Headed League" to rob a jewellery store. They induced a woman to leave her flat so they could burrow through the wall to rob the store next door.

7. An Idiot's Guide to Practically Anything

Haven't you wondered about those reality television programs that show how the police finally apprehended lawbreakers according to a certain body of evidence that they have accumulated? When presented in this light, we, of course, laud our constabulary, wish them well, and give them the pension they so richly deserve.

On the other side of this prism, are viewers taking notes? Chris Herten-Greaven is concerned that this ilk of program provides a "How to" compendium for lawbreakers to learn from the mistakes of their colleagues, and raise the bar to a new generation of more efficient and more effective criminals. He cited the case of a bank robber who learned how to hide his tools in a safety deposit vault so he could get to work without raising suspicion.

Ron Zilman pointed to a robbery in England where thieves placed an "Out of Order" sign on a night deposit slot at a bank, and set up an official-looking box next to the tampered one. There were more morons on the street that night than we would have expected. People actually put their deposits into the free-standing box which the thieves managed to empty in short order.

With so much media exposure being given to these malfeasances, there are apt to be slews of copycat crimes.

Your Lowly Scribe will be delighted to transfer to you the many lucrative opportunities that fill his Junk Mail account daily. In return for a pittance, we can all be millionaires! There is abundance in the universe! *Namaste! Ommmmm!* If any of this works out for you, don't forget who gave you the steer.

8. First Toast – To the Master

by Nitika Dosaj

Nitika was slated to have offered the first toast of the evening. However, the exigencies of year-end at her school precluded her from attending. Instead, Maureen Anderson offered up a hasty and heartfelt "To the Master."

The next day Your Lowly Scribe was e-mailed Nitika's toast which had been sent to another address within our society. So it is with great pleasure that we include it here:

In such convivial company the question of why we choose to honour the Master need not be answered — but for those lost souls for whom Sherlock Holmes is only a character in a story, I would like to offer a few clues as to why he is so much more.

From the stories we can deduce that Holmes has the ability to fixate on a singular problem for hours, nay days (as long as there is a good amount of shag tobacco in the slipper!) and yet remain broadminded enough to picture any problem in its entirety. As such he is the rare man who can see the forest AND the trees.

We can deduce that Holmes is dedicated to his work as the world's only unofficial consulting detective and yet finds a way to balance his excessive ambition with languid hours spent on the violin, taking in a concert with the good doctor or indulging in the much disapproved-of 7% solution. As such he is the rare man who can work hard and play hard, doing neither in half measure. He is the Yin and the Yang, the active and the passive, the

cold, clear reason, and the passionate, generous soul; a man whose flaws are as glaringly obvious as his accomplishments. He is large; his gifts are seemingly boundless. He is the rare man who embodies all contradictions without hypocrisy.

He cannot be accused, as so many of us can, of living half a life. He benefits from his natural intelligence and physical abilities but he does not allow these gifts to go to waste, using every ounce of himself until the day when the bees must find a new keeper.

He is the Master. Not because he has mastered the art of deduction and observation; not because he has mastered the majority of the mysteries put before him; nor because he has mastered countless criminals and cretins who threaten our civility and civilization. It is because he has mastered the most important thing of all. He has mastered himself. And for this we raise our glass to Sherlock Holmes.

L'chaim!

**9. Holmes for Sale.
Holmes in the Yard.
When you're selling Holmes
You need a bard.**

Ah, Rachel, Rachel. There are a couple of really good ideas here!

1. Let's have a garage or lawn or barn sale of our surplus Sherlockian memorabilia at someone's home. By invitation, for members only! Will we finally get to meet your cats? Rachel? Rachel?
2. Everyone has a mystery in his life, some inexplicable puzzle that has cropped up out of the woodwork, the family album, an old recipe book with hand-written notes a few of which look suspiciously like a formula for a nuclear bomb. Rachel suggests that we bring in one of these old conundrums and share it with our members. Perhaps collectively, we can work towards a feasible explanation to why Aunt Harriet suddenly ran off with the drummer from *The Who*.

**10. Sherlockian Mystery Self-explained
(An exploration into the ego-logical impertinences of the human brain.)**

Maureen Anderson revealed the solution of a personal mystery which took place one night at her home which, not uncoincidentally, is also home to a varying number of cats that conflate and diminish like an overworked accordion. Not that we want to lead you into accusing cats who might be innocent, or mixing our metaphors by introducing more red herrings than necessary, but ... but ... well, you be the judge.

The police showed up, citing a 9-1-1 call from Maureen's telephone number. Not only did they show up, but they insisted on searching the house because of the 9-1-1 call. The details of this are reported in section 13 of the December 2009 minutes (available on the BmQ website), but briefly the call had originated from the fax machine. The frustrated police announced that they would have to impose a hefty financial charge against the owner of that fax machine if this bogus call were to happen again. The Andersons and their cats were moving dangerously close to the Forbidden Plateau of serial criminality. Motivated thusly to avoid a fine, Maureen, Jack and the cats applied all of their lives collectively to the solving of this puzzle. Memory, which serves at the oddest of times, revealed that there had been a power failure before the first felonious (felineous?) event. Under such circumstances, it was realized that there was a technical service default in the machine, which caused it to dial 9-1-1 when the power was interrupted. Why? Perhaps to override the possibility of the failure of a potential burglar alarm which might not operate during a

power failure. Better be safe than sorry: call in the cavalry in the event that basement, main-floor, and second-story men *might* be on the prowl. When this default was discovered, the machine was reset, the cats were exonerated, and the Andersons were relieved. Although they are all now known to the police.

11. Dramatic Repercussions in the Park

Paul Billette informed us that Repercussion Theatre will be presenting *Macbeth* this year as part of its city-wide program of *Shakespeare in the Park*.

There will be a **Saturday, August 20** performance at Westmount Park which we plan to attend as a group.

We will enjoy a picnic atmosphere. We should bring pâté, picnic foods, wine (unofficially), and chairs both for the picnic and the performance, since public seating is of the grassy and earthy variety. Also, you may wish to bring warm clothing and insect repellent.

We will convene at 4pm at the southwest corner of the park near the pond and rest room hut. The performance begins at 8pm.

12. The London Language Psychiatrist

According to David Dowse, this game is popular on the pages of a leading London newspaper. If it doesn't make you crazy, it means you are good with words.

David set up the game at the back of the room on a flat surface by spreading out some 30+ items.

He provided one set of explanations that go something like this:

A standard quotation is provided to each participant who needs to exercise some creativity (psychosis) by twisting around words defining the objects on the flat surface. By combining the descriptors of (usually) two items, the players should be able to arrive at the objects representing the phrase they were given. They would then be able to announce which objects represented the daffy definition of the objects in the group.

Taking this in reverse is another way of understanding the rationale for the game:

For example, if you saw a small picture of the Matterhorn (the Swiss mountain), and an Adidas sneaker, you would gain everyone's admiration by concluding: "Shoe Horn."

Similarly, a small card printed with "SUM" and a tasteful photo of a young miss in her bikini, freezing on an ice floe would translate into: "amber." Why? In Latin, "sum" is the first person conjugation of "to be," meaning "I am" from which we would derive "am" for this game to work. What about the largely unclad young lady who is freezing? Well, it couldn't be simpler, could it? She's freezing. She would say "Br-r-r-r-r," wouldn't she, which we would spell "ber." No one has denied us the right to poetic license. By combining "am" and "ber," we have "amber." If we understand this, we all need help.

13. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Paul Billette

The more I look at the people who have played Dr. Watson over the years since his departure from the literary scene, the more I have come to the conclusion that there were far more good representations of Watson than poor ones.

For me, Edward Hardwicke, who sadly went on ahead a short while ago, is the quintessential Dr. Watson. Hardwicke plays Watson the way he was: intelligent, with an inquisitive mind; athletic; and a skilled marksman.

Recently, however, I encountered a most unusual Watson, Jane Watson. She appears in a made-for-TV *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. She is a descendent of Dr. John Watson and one of the new owners of the Watson Detective agency, which she has inherited from her father in Boston. This Watson too, is a person of action – intelligent and thrilled to help the great detective. How old is the great detective in 1987, you ask? Well, since he's been in a cryogenic sleep for about 80 years, he's barely middle-aged. Sherlock is awakened from his sleep thanks to Ms Watson and has been saved from the plague, which was why Holmes had been frozen in the first place. They go on to solve a huge FBI corruption problem and much of the plot depends on *The Sign of Four*. The movie is pleasant entertainment.

Notwithstanding all the competent impersonation, nobody has succeeded in replicating the genuine article.

Here's to the inimitable Dr. Watson!

14. How Do They Do It Down There?

Chris Herten-Greaven asked our guest Walter Colby how Sherlockian meetings are conducted at the two clubs in southern Vermont and New Hampshire.

Walter informed us that the Hanover NH group meets in a library room, and moves quickly to a discussion of the canonical story of the evening. Members are sent questions regarding the story, to which they prepare answers for the meeting.

Walter drives about 100 miles from his home in Northampton, central/west Massachusetts to attend that meeting.

He is considerably closer to the meetings of The Baker Street Breakfast Club, held in private homes in the Bennington, Vermont area. There, the focus on food and drink provides a backdrop for the meetings which are organized and coordinated. Wafted into the aromas of a buffet dinner may be heard the gentle sloshing of wine in glasses, and the mellifluous tones of polite Sherlockian conversation. Here too, questions on the canonical story of the evening are discussed. The members review the content of the next meeting, and then move to dessert.

As it should be.

There are about 15 people at each meeting; possibly more at Hanover's. Both groups meet monthly, although Hanover skips June and July. Neither society gets a lot of new members. The Bennington group is not looking for new members. They are trying to vary the program.

15. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Roger Burrows

To the best of my knowledge, The Bimetallic Question has been toasting The Woman since its beginnings. At six toasts per year (seven including the dinner), that makes around 200 toasts, probably more words than the whole of “A Scandal in Bohemia.” So the question always is: what can I say that’s new and, even better, interesting?

My approach this evening will, I hope, fulfill at least one of these criteria. Instead of *The Woman*, I propose to toast the *woman*, that generic damsel-in-distress who appears in so many of Watson’s stories. She may be someone who makes things happen: in this case she is often not English, like Irene Adler, or Mary Fraser in “The Abbey Grange,” or Hatty Doran in “The Noble Bachelor.” Or she may be more passive, such as Violet Hunter in “The Copper Beeches,” Mary Sutherland in “A Case of Identity,” or Helen Stoner in “The Speckled Band”; someone to whom trouble comes through no action of their own.

The *woman* is often someone trying to make her own way in a male-dominated society with very limited opportunities. Apart from marrying or being a governess, there isn’t much a middle- or upper-class woman is allowed to do in Victorian society. But when trouble beckons, she always has the sense to call on Holmes for help, and he always helps. That’s why the *woman* is essential to Holmes and to us.

Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to the *woman*!

16. On the Lam – the Benefits of Anonymity

Carol Abramson didn’t see any announcement of our meeting in the *Westmount Examiner*. However, there is a listing of the year’s meetings in the glass case at the library.

We resolved that somebody will put meeting announcements in the local papers.

17. Quiz – Results

Story: *A Study in Scarlet – Part One*, prepared by Patrick Campbell

Possible total: 102 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score
1.	Roger Burrows	102
2.	Carol Abramson	60
3.	Raf Jans	45
4.	Marie Burrows	39
5.	Ron Zilman	36
6.	Chris Herten-Greaven	28
7.	Walter Colby	21
8.=	Louise Corda	19
8.=	Erica Penner	19

All prizes were books and memorabilia from Patrick’s collection.

The next quiz, based on *The Resident Patient*, will be prepared by Roger Burrows.

18. Feedback on the Story

According to Ron Zilman, *A Study in Scarlet* is a very important story since it sets the stage for the canon.

Roger wanted to know, "Why the time limit?" when Watson says the government has given him nine months to improve his health.

The subtitle of Part 1 of the story refers to Watson as "late of the Army Medical Department" over which we had some discussion. Often, we infer it to mean "dead", "no longer extant" and similar words and phrases. Here, however, Roger suggested that it actually refers to the adverbial function of time, meaning recently.

19. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Wilfrid de Freitas (via email)

read by Marie Burrows

Our Society has been in existence for thirty-two years, which means that nearly two hundred toasts to Mrs. Hudson alone have been proposed at our Society meetings – not to mention at those of the scores of other Sherlockian societies worldwide. Is there anything that can be said about her other than what we read in the Canon? Hmm ... I wonder. Perhaps we should consider what has NOT been said about her, and see if we can infer anything about her appearance, personal situation and general demeanour.

The quote about her having as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotchwoman is probably the thing that everybody remembers. What about Watson's remark about her "stately tread" in *A Study in Scarlet*? Might this indicate, as W.S. Gilbert says about Buttercup in *The Pirates of Penzance*, "a plump and pleasing person?" Certainly there's no question about her "unflappability," given the varied stream of characters that knocked on her door at all hours of day and night when Holmes was in residence. I'm sure she was as polite to Helen Stoner at her early morning visit, as she was to the gruff sailors who came looking for "Captain Basil." If Watson was right about Holmes's "princely payments," she was probably well-off too. Holmes's address, 221b (bis, French for twice, second time, etc.), indicates a second (usually subsidiary) address at the same street number. Mrs. Hudson's address (on the ground floor) would have been 221 but whether or not she was a freeholder or leaseholder we have no way of knowing. The British system of renting (leasehold) and owning (freehold) property can be quite bewildering to North Americans, and ... but I digress. Suffice it to say that Mrs. Hudson was one or the other which gave her the power to rent out rooms, thereby providing her with a steady income – an unusual situation to be sure, for a single woman in Victorian London. No doubt this would allow her a far more independent outlook on life, giving her a certain confidence when dealing with Holmes's callers. Her title of "Mrs." probably indicates that she was a widow – possibly accounting for her ownership of 221 Baker Street.

All of this is, of course, conjecture but I hope it will sow the seeds of enquiry in your minds. Meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, I give you Mrs. Hudson.

P.S. Can anyone remember when Mrs. Hudson was most definitely "flapped"? (Holmes's return to Baker Street in "The Empty House" threw her "...into violent hysterics ...")

20. Bimetallism Then and Now

David Dowse has offered the following information on bimetallism:

In honour of the name of our society, The Bimetallic Question, I have a few facts to offer to you concerning the bimetallism of gold and silver – to wit – the juxtaposing or melding of the two precious metals.

Silver (chemical symbol: Ag; pictorial symbol: concave left-facing quarter-moon)

- has the highest electrical conductivity and thermal conductivity of any metal.
- ductile, malleable, takes a high degree of polish
- tarnishes when exposed to air or water containing ozone or hydrogen sulphide
- sterling silver (standard silver) is an alloy of 92.5% silver and 7.5% copper
- used in dentistry, jewellery, tableware, photography, electronics, mirrors, optics, medical silver compounds
- costs about \$45/ounce

Gold (chemical symbol: Au; pictorial symbol: circle with center dot)

- dense, soft, malleable, and ductile
- bright yellow color
- no oxidation in air or water
- dissolves in alkaline solutions of cyanide
- degrees of purity: measured in carats (k); pure gold is 24k
 - mixed with other metals to make it harder and give different colors
- gold alloys:
 - rose gold – with copper, stamped 375 or 9k
 - blue gold – with iron
 - purple gold – with aluminum
 - green gold – with silver
 - white gold – with palladium or nickel

Historical asides:

- During the 19th century, bimetallism prevailed in most countries, but was undermined by the discovery of large deposits of silver in the American west. Fearing a sharp decrease in the value of silver currency, most states switched to the gold standard by 1900. After WW II gold was replaced by the system of convertible currency. Switzerland was the last country to tie its currency to gold and changed only in 1999.
- In 1968 the price of gold was \$35/troy ounce while in 2011 the price is over \$1400/troy ounce. This dramatic escalation led directly to the swift jump in the price of antique fountain pens. People were smashing their pens to collect the gold, melt it down, and cash it in. Those quality pens that remained have shot up in value.
- Those of us in The Bimetallic Question would never smash a pen for its gold. We are too humane, and too sensitive to the higher aesthetics of what vintage fountain pens represent to enlightened people who know truly that not only is the pen mightier than the sword, but each pen is a rung in Jacob's ladder, while its ink represents the parallel streams that set the rails for those rungs that lead to the celestial view of Hope for Mankind, and the universal applicability of the Sherlockian canon endorsed by David Dowse and Your Lowly Scribe.

21. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by David Dowse

Gold – the stuff of doubloons, Egyptian mummies, teeth, fillings, wedding rings, the famous Midas touch, and fountain pen nibs. Yellow, white, pink, green, and other colors depending on the metal mixes employed.

The precious metal is valuable today in the age of communication, yet was the standard for wealth for empires in the ages of antiquity. The lust for gold drove men to move mountains, to open up wildernesses to progress, and to destroy civilizations.

Had he wanted to, Holmes could have amassed a fortune in gold. His genius could have robbed and swindled men, companies, and countries out of millions of pounds of gold. Gold is the trappings of power, to be acquired not for its own sake, but to be used to manipulate and rule others. But here we come to touch the foundation, the true value of Holmes, for he was not an accumulator, a manipulator, or a ruler. Rather, he was a true servant of the society he lived in. He was the last and best man to appeal to for justice whether you were a baron or a bookkeeper.

Silver – white and shiny, 1/30th the value of gold. Some see silver as the more human metal, since it changes color with environmental conditions. It develops a patina, an accumulation of experiences.

Watson faced death on a grand scale in service to Queen and Empire. He made love to women on five continents. His silver shone like the surface of the moon as it reflected the energy of the golden sun. With Watson's talents as a story teller, he brings the brilliance of Holmes into the lives of millions.

In The Bimetallic Question, the joining of these two precious metals, we see how each makes the other even more valuable. Our society is founded on the idea of these two metals, these two individuals who brought wealth to the world.

(P.S. Never, never, never smash a fountain pen for its gold nib. Please see David or Elliott first. Lowly Scribes are particularly sensitive to such travesties. They feel the pain.)

(P.P.S. No pens were harmed in the preparation of these minutes.)

22. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

To the Master	-	Maureen Anderson
To Dr. Watson	-	Patrick Campbell
To the Woman	-	Rachel Alkallay
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Walter Colby
To the Society	-	Erica Penner

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, August 4th, 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>