

Minutes of the meeting of
The Bimetallic Question
October 6th, 2011

Date of next meeting

Thursday, December 1st, 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 Three Garridebs”
prepared by Roger Burrows

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, October 6th, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Mac Belfer, Florence Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Wilfrid de Freitas, Nitika Dosaj, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Marlene Mandiuk (new member), Elliott Newman, Carole Rocklin, Arlene Scher, Ron Zilman

Regrets: Maureen Anderson, Joan O'Malley

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:40 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Spaghetti and Meat Balls, Crackers and Pâté, Latkes and Sour Cream)

1. The No-Muss-No-Fuss Annual Dinner

Thanks to the foresight and dedication of Paul Billette, Wilfrid de Freitas, and Ron Zilman, we have secured the Atwater Club as the venue for our annual dinner.

In past years, we have gone through the rigmarole of discussing, presenting, voting, rehashing, recogitating, and pre-digesting the location, the contents, and all details pertaining to the when-what-where-why-who-how of this complicated deal. This year, we owe a debt of gratitude to our intrepid trio for grabbing the initiative from the lap of panic and presenting the package to us.

Here is what it should be:

- Saturday, January 21, 2012
- \$48 per person
- 4 canapés each (sharing permitted)
- Pear and leek soup
- Braised beef or grilled salmon or vegetarian
- Chocolate cake
- Tea/coffee
- Alcoholic beverages will be less expensive than last year (wine \$5, sterner stuff \$5.50)
- Parking available on side streets (Westmount: 4-hour limit) and on the college lot behind the property @ \$9
- We have not secured a speaker, although we are working on it. Crime writer Louise Penney, on the *NY Times* bestseller list, will not accept any more public engagements. Neither will Fyodor Dostoevsky. Wilfrid approached Josh Freed of the *Gazette*. The difficulty is to get a commitment, because of the last-minute nature of his assignments.

Rachel Alkallay wanted to know why we didn't have the opportunity to vote on the proposal for the dinner, as we have in previous years. We were told the process takes too long for us to research the venue, to discuss it at the meeting, to vote on it, and to ensure that the place is still available on that night. We expect, however, that we will not be flying blindly into midnight, and that a good time will be had by all survivors.

2. Contacting Each Other

Carole Rocklin suggested making members' email addresses available to everyone within the society in case we needed to contact each other. There was concern expressed over privacy issues. For the time being, if we wish to get in touch we can email Ron Zilman at ronzilman@hotmail.com.

3. Your Participation Requested

Although the footwork for the annual meeting has been completed, we still do not have a speaker. Ron Zilman has thrown it out to the membership to try to come up with recommendations. Please e-mail him with your suggestions at his address in #2 above.

4. More Pastiches

Ron Zilman informed us of the availability of *The Mammoth Book of **More** Sherlock Holmes Adventures*.

5. Sherlock Banned in Albermarle, VA

Paul Billette informed us that the novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, was removed from the school reading list in Albermarle, Virginia, since it was deemed inappropriate for Sixth Graders because of SACD's presentation of the Mormons. Immediately following the release of this information, the web experienced unprecedented high activity in downloads of the text.

6. The Westmount Agra (not to be confused with Wi-Agra, Westmount-India Agra)

Paul Billette showed us an Agra Treasure Brooch, produced by The Sherlock Holmes Society of London in honour of its recent diamond jubilee. Famed author Baroness Ruth Rendell was presented with one of these brooches at the Society's Diamond Jubilee Dinner in January 2011.

7. Meet Our Guest (Now a New Member)

Marlene Mandiuk was enticed into the Reading Room of the Westmount Library by Rachel Alkallay. Marlene works in Oncology at St. Mary's Hospital.

8. In Praise of Older Midgets

Louise Corda quoted Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who, in *The Sign of Four*, has TWGCD say – and we quote – " . . . the chief proof of man's real greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness." *Hon y soit . . .*

9. Billiards in Memoriam

David Dowse asked Ron Zilman about the David Kellett memorial billiards game, which we have been discussing. It was to have taken place at Unison Billiards, next to FireGrill Restaurant on Cote Vertu, across the street from the mall. We were to have combined billiards with a meal at the restaurant. Patrick Campbell said it wasn't necessary to know how to play; he would show us. While we all want to participate in an event that will honour the memory of David Kellett, we seem to be struggling uphill on ice. Ideas, anyone?

10. Modest Orators

Ron Zilman called for presenters of toasts at the next meeting. Initially, David Dowse was the only respondent. Gradually, we were overwhelmed by a landslide of volunteers.

11. Shakespeare in the Dark

Regarding our much-advertised “Shakespeare in the Park” invasion, where we would have had a nice picnic, brought lawn chairs and insect repellent, a flagon or two of wine (or Coca-Cola), and croissants, our plan to gather in August for such a joyous event dwindled down to a group of three including Paul Billette, Wilfrid de Freitas, and Louise Corda. For those of us who didn’t attend (just about everybody), we missed a funky presentation of modern MacBeth in pieces.

12. First Toast – To the Master

by Wilfrid de Freitas

What can one possibly have to say about Sherlock Holmes that hasn’t been said or written a hundred times already? Yes, we all know about his being the world’s first consulting detective, that he went to Oxford University, or Cambridge – depending which biographer one believes, came to London to set up his unique practice, met Doctor Watson, solved all those cases, etc., etc. What we don’t hear much about, in fact almost nothing – apart from his grudging admiration of Irene Adler – is, for want of a better word, his love-life. In fact, almost all his remarks to or about women paint him as something of a misogynist. But this, surely, is at odds with the rational, clear thinking Holmes whom we have all come to admire.

It has been said that all geniuses have some inexplicable trait which is at odds with an otherwise prodigious ability in their recognized field. To me, not enjoying the company of women would require superhuman ability; even then I would probably fail. In my book, that makes Holmes superhuman in yet one more field which I’ve not seen commented upon in the writings upon the writings.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you The Master, Sherlock Holmes.

13. A Study in Scandal

Wilfrid de Freitas announced that he would be in Toronto for the symposium, “A Study in Scandal.” Leslie S. Klinger would also be there doing, among other things, promoting a new “giant” book (5-1/8” x 8-3/16”, 385 pp., fits in a large pocket) he co-edited with Laurie R. King. Wilfrid kindly offered to pick up a copy for any member of our society who wanted to buy one. These would be inscribed by Mr. Klinger. And lo! it came to pass, and your Lowly Scribe is one proud possessor of such a paperback. This is networking at its finest. Thank you, Wilfrid.

14. A Study in Blau

According to Patrick Campbell, Peter Blau is now considered the leading world authority on Sherlockiana, after the death of Richard Lancelyn Green. Peter has been publishing a monthly ink-on-paper newsletter for forty years entitled *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, which provides all kinds of Sherlockian trivia and gossip. It can also be viewed for free, at <http://members.cox.net/sherlock1/scuttle.htm>. If you haven’t come across it before, it’s well worth taking a look at.

15. A Wales of a Read

Rachel Alkallay noted that she had seen a program on PBS about two bookstores, Keppler's, and Cody's, in Wales.

Jack Anderson reminded us about the small village in Wales, just over the border from Great Britain, in which there are over 30 major bookstores, housing possibly over three million books. This might well be the used books capital of the world.

The name of the town is Hay-on-Wye. Just think dried, cut long grass, and booze with a wisp.

16. Another John Smith?

Marie Burrows informed us that SACD's first novel, *The Narrative of John Smith*, is about to be published by The British Library. It can be pre-ordered on Amazon.

17. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Paul Billette

Tonight I would like to toast an aspect of Dr. Watson which is seldom addressed, that of a ladies' man.

To help me, I did a little research on the immense fount of knowledge which is found on Google.

We all know Watson's predilection for members of the opposite sex. He remarks on their beauty and dress an uncountable number of times throughout the canon. We know from him that his experience with women extends over "many nations and three separate continents." We know from Holmes that the fair sex is Watson's Department.

Reviewing various theories on how many wives Dr. Watson had, I came to find that there was a first Mrs. Watson whom he married circa November 1, 1886 (manuscript *Angels of Darkness*) and who died within fourteen months of assuming her title.

Then there was Mary Morstan who lost the great Agra Treasure. Afterward there was the first Mrs. Watson of "Five Orange Pips." Then the second Mrs. Watson of "Five Orange Pips" who had a mother in England. (sic)

Then in 1896 Watson takes up separate quarters in "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger." In 1902 Watson deserts Holmes for a wife in "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier."

This led Dorothy Sayers to remark in 1944 that:

There is a conspiracy afoot to provide Watson with as many wives as Henry VIII, but, however this may be, only one is mentioned by him and only one left any abiding memory in his heart.

Finally, it has even been posited that a case could be made that Dr. Watson had seven wives if the dates appearing in the stories are juggled around.

So, here's a toast to a man who indubitably could charm the ladies.

18. The Third Hand

Wilfrid de Freitas reread the poem "The Master's Hand" which Maureen had submitted as her toast for the previous meeting.

19. Holy Mackerel!

Chris Herten-Greaven keeps ascending to greater heights with his gourmet snacks in which we never indulge in the Reading Room of the Library. Tonight, it was Cajun smoked mackerel with cheddar cheese. This is not only generous; it's quite imaginative. As usual, Chris, thank you.

20. The One-Eight-Five

Chris told us about the Great Train Robbery in Europe during the Crimean War. A great amount of gold was put on a train bound for the Crimea, in order to pay the troops there. An intricate plot resulted in the disappearance of this precious cargo.

Quiz – Results

Story: *A Study in Scarlet (Part 2)*, prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 50 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	
1.	Roger Burrows	47	British candies
2.	Marie Burrows	46	ditto
3.	Ron Zilman	35½	ditto

The next quiz, based on *The Three Garridebs*, will be prepared by Roger Burrows.

21. The Third Toast – To the Woman

by Ron Zilman

(from www.shmoop.com)

Ah, yes, “to Sherlock Holmes, Irene Adler is always *the* woman.” She appears in only one story in the canon, but Watson takes care to point out that she remains a significant character in Holmes’s personal history nonetheless.

We don’t actually find out that much about Irene Adler as a person: she’s a contralto singer and a general lady-about-town who, after an affair with the King of Bohemia, has retired to London. The King hires Holmes to try and recover an unfortunate photograph of the pair – he doesn’t want it to reach his fiancée. While the photograph remains safe, thanks to a promise from Ms Adler, Holmes does fail to get the picture back from her. In fact, Adler manages to outsmart him entirely, and to sail away from the country with her new husband in tow.

Adler’s presence in “A Scandal in Bohemia” is less important for her own sake as a character than for what she allows Conan Doyle to emphasize about Sherlock Holmes. First, given that Holmes never speaks of “the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer,” he seems to assume that women aren’t capable of the degree of rational thinking he expects from, say, himself. Adler proves him wrong on the point of women’s intelligence, but the larger issue of Holmes’s complete lack of interest in romance remains.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you ... Irene Adler.

22. Patrick Campbell's Miracle of Conciseness

Patrick announced that he had a two-and-a-half-hour lecture prepared on *A Study in Scarlet* which he would "try to do in eleven minutes," whereupon he pulled out three books, one very old.

Whereupon began the tale ...

In 1884, Robert Louis Stevenson was very ill. He couldn't see or write. He was in a darkened room, and he dictated *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter* to his wife, who proceeded to write it down. (She was very good about writing in the dark, although not much else is known about her.)

This collection was printed in 1885.

In this collection is *The Story of the Destroying Angel* which concerns a child named Lucy found with Mormons who, it seemed, were getting short shrift from RLS and his wife. It seems the Stevensons were as little predisposed to the Mormons as was SACD.

Patrick went on to say that *A Study in Scarlet* (STUD) was "a Sherlockian sandwich", since it appeared in the 1887 issue of Beeton's Christmas annual, two years after RLS's book, and six years before its own publication in book form in 1893.

SACD received all of £25 from Ward Lock and Co. in return for full rights to the story.

Patrick said that the weird thing about STUD was that it was a completely different story from the one dictated by RLS to his wife.

In the suppressed play by SACD, *Angels of Darkness*, we meet some of the same characters as in STUD.

23. Swilling Sherlock

Roger Burrows showed us a place mat of a Sherlock Holmes pub sign. This, plus other Sherlockiana, is available from madeinbritainltd.com.

24. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Jack Anderson

Read from *The Bedside, Bathtub, and Armchair Companion to Sherlock Holmes*, Rick Riley and Pam McAllister.

25. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Patrick Campbell (pinch-hitting for Maureen Anderson who began her first night at her new job at the Veterans' Hospital at Ste. Anne de Bellevue)

Webster's defines a society as "the relationship of men to one another when associated." That one surely won't do. How about, "a body of persons united for the promotion of some object." Well, what are we really promoting? Let's try the Oxford. How about, "social mode of life, the customs and organization of a civilized nation." That's better. Then there's, "The upper classes of a community whose movements and entertainments and other doings are more or less conspicuous." Now we're getting warm. "Association of persons united by a common aim or interest or principle." So, we'll go with that.

Now our “common interest” is the life and times of Sherlock Holmes, particularly against the background of Victorian England, as well as his many friends, acquaintances, and, of course, his enemies.

Now from the first such group or groups of similar interests, it was agreed that Holmes, while evidently the subject of a series of curious stories, was indeed a real person in every sense of the word, and by no means solely a fictional character.

Some have questioned this, and I commend to you a sample of three events in my own experience that prove our supposition to be tenable.

While Holmes first became known to the general public in 1887 through the story we are studying tonight, you may note that these tales have been in print continuously ever since, a most unusual and striking fact.

Some years ago I was commissioned by our society to carry a memorial plaque over to Switzerland and install it at “that dreadful place” where Sherlock Holmes was believed to have met his end. I am one of the fortunate owners of the 27th edition of Karl Baedeker’s guide to Switzerland. On page 226, after a description of “one of the largest waterfalls in the Alps,” there is a footnote: “It will be remembered that Sherlock Holmes disappeared at the Reichenbach Falls.” Does that sound like a fictional character?

And, lastly, if you go out that door and ask the girl at the reception desk to look on her computer for two books, then ask where they are stored on the Westmount Library shelves, she will reply that *Holmes in the West Country* is shelved with the children’s books, and *Shades of Sherlock* is shelved under Non-fiction.

I rest my case.

Please raise your glasses to The Society!

26. More for the HolmesHeads

We have been informed that there is yet another symposium, this time in Cambridge, Ohio.

27. Next Meeting’s Toast Presenters

To the Master	-	Chris Herten-Greaven
To Dr. Watson	-	David Dowse
To the Woman	-	Raf Jans
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Carol Abramson
To the Society	-	Roger Burrows

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 1st, 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>