

Minutes of the meeting of
The Bimetallic Question
June 7th, 2012

Date of next meeting

Thursday, August 2nd, 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 Mazarin
Stone”**, prepared by Carol
Abramson

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, June 7th, 2012 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Maureen Anderson, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Nitika Dosaj, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, Elliott Newman, Karl Raudsepp, Arlene Scher, Ron Zilman, plus the following guests: Tash Akkerman, Alina D’Amicantonio, Geneviève Dubuc, Kayla Piecaitis and Rebecca Stacey

Regrets: Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Paul Billette, Wilfrid de Freitas, Joan O’Malley, Carole Rocklin

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:35 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Mulch and Nettles, Nash and Young, and Burns and Allen)

1. Reintroductions

We were pleased to see a return of new guests from the previous (April) meeting who are part of a new Sherlockian association at McGill University. When asked, they elaborated further on how and when they had become interested in the World's First (and Greatest) Consulting Detective:

Alina D'Amicantonio became fascinated with the performances of Basil Rathbone in his role as Sherlock Holmes.

Geneviève Dubuc was introduced, innocently enough, to SH through Robert Downey Jr.'s first Holmes movie. She then fell into an equally innocent pastime of watching the television series, and decided to make things official by reading the canon.

Rebecca Stacey is currently a student of Literature at Concordia University. She blames Sherlock Holmes for her decision to study Literature. When she and her group were asked at our meeting if they enjoyed their first experience with us in April, Rebecca responded that they did, which is why they returned. The implications here are huge. We need to keep our meetings engaging, lively, worthwhile, and well-fed.

Are we up for this?

Tash Akkerman confessed that she has been reading Sherlock Holmes stories since the age of eight. Our hearts go out to her and her family in this matter. Once hooked, there is no cure.

The only anodyne, in all of the above cases, is to continue to attending bi-monthly meetings of the BmQ and bring others along to share in the torment.

Deal?

2. Accuracy Counts

Karl Raudsepp raised an important point regarding the accuracy of the minutes. He first stepped into our morass at the February meeting, at which time Your Lowly Scribe scribbled his biographical notes wrongly, then transcribed them erroneously, and transmitted them for printing fallaciously. One would think that said Scribe likes writing more than truth. We won't at this time get into the "'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate" conundrum, but we must address Karl's valid point. It has long been the view of Your Lowly Scribe that the spelling of a person's name as well as the representation of information relating to that individual must be done accurately, not so much as obeisance to truth, but rather, as a mark of respect to that person. Any lapse in this process is an oversight for which we (royally) apologize.

Karl's corollary to that concern was, how can we fix it?

After some discussion around the table, we concluded that since the minutes come out only every two months, it could take up to four months to rectify an error, since the notice of the mistake would be proclaimed at the second meeting, the Lowly Scribe would hastily scribble more cross-wired information, and would write the amendment into that meeting's minutes which would then follow the typical trajectory of being written, sent for publication, and then mailed prior to the next meeting.

“All this is well and good,” which echoes the grandfather’s line from *Peter and the Wolf*, but it hardly sets the record straight in any convincing manner.

It would be best if facts were noted accurately, transcribed punctiliously, and printed with a clarity surpassing the illumination of the gods when confronting Destiny in hindsight.

If you perceive errors of commission or omission in these sullied minutes, we would actually appreciate your input in helping us to rectify them. To do so, please note the erroneous passages and tell us about them at the next meeting. If the matter is much more urgent, contact us by e-mail, and we will attempt to set up something on our web site where the proper amendment will be shown.

Another possibility is that we hold off posting the most recent minutes on our site until the following meeting so that members may have the opportunity to advise of said errors, they can be corrected, and then the penultimate set of minutes be posted in all its revised and pristine perfection.

3. Chalk it up to Sherlockiana

David Dowse showed a chalk figurehead of Sherlock Holmes, presumably from England, and expertly coloured. David pointed out the chips in its surface causing one to wonder if it had been used on a blackboard.

Karl Raudsepp showed a picture of a chalk figurehead (reproduced below), exquisite in detail.

1984 Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson Bossons Heads



4. **First Toast – To the Master**

by Elliott Newman

This was a dry toast to the Master, but heartfelt nonetheless.

5. **Paraprosdokians Anonymous**

David Dowse introduced us to the paraprosdokian (para = against, prosdokia = expectation). This is “a figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected; frequently used in a humorous situation.” (definition from somewhere in the www) Here is one:

“I used to be indecisive; now, I’m not so sure.”

“War does not determine who is right, only who is left.”

Roger Burrows was certain he knew of a Sherlockian Paraprosdokian, but it eluded him for the moment. In the meantime, can *you* come up with one?

6. **Thinking Inside the Box**

Chris Herten-Greaven described how to make boxes from flexible cardboard from Costco, based on his experience creating new boxes for the BmQ toasting glasses.

7. **New U.S. TV Sherlock Holmes Series**

Maureen Anderson advised us that Lucie Liu, the actress who lost part of her head in *Kill Bill*, has installed a prosthesis and will play Doctor Watson in a new Sherlockian series on U.S. television.

8. **Holmes with a Fringe**

Nitika Dosaj informed us that Sherlock Homo and Dr. Hotson will be appearing at Montreal’s Fringe festival. Spelling lessons, ear plugs, and eye bandanas will be provided.

9. **Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**

by Karl Raudsepp

I will begin with a rhetorical question: So ... Who was Ormond Sacker?

Dr. John H. Watson is more often than not portrayed as the Master’s minion and Sherlock Holmes’s Boswell. In a televised interview, Conan Doyle himself once described Watson as Holmes’s “rather stupid friend.” In too many dramatized versions of Holmes and Watson, the Doctor has been depicted as trailing round after the Detective like a slightly stupid puppy.

However, we are all aware that if pen had not been put to paper by Watson, we would have been deprived of the great genius whose remarkable skills lie at the centre of an ageless narrative.

But Watson was no simple henchman, underling, or stooge. He was neither a lackey, nor a hanger-on, nor was he an uninvolved disciple of Holmes. His place and influence were much more than that of an unadorned yes-man, servant, or lapdog.

What was this man’s background and what do we know about him?

His father had died some years ago and he had had an “unhappy” brother who had enjoyed some prosperity but had finally had taken to drink and died.

Watson was an educated man (University of London), a doctor, and an experienced army surgeon. He had been wounded in battle – the whereabouts on his body unclear – sometimes in the shoulder, another time in the leg, and yet again in the rather more vague “one of my limbs.” By these singular observations we are reminded that Watson was not one to let the facts get in the way of a good story and was thus distinctly unreliable in a very particular manner.

After being wounded, he returned to England on a meagre pension and frittered away his money (gambling was one of his passions) before meeting up with an old friend, Stamford, at the Criterion Bar, and who put him touch with Sherlock Holmes as a potential companion lodger.

We know that Watson was a smoker, enjoyed Beaune wine, was an accomplished rugby player and by nature not an early riser. He owned a bull pup, (mentioned only once in *A Study in Scarlet*).

Most fascinating is the extent of Watson’s marriages and stories of being a ladies’ man. He was married to Mary Morstan, but she had died around 1894. Yet he was married again in the story “The Illustrious Client,” which is set in 1902. Watson himself asserts in *The Sign of Four* that he had “experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents.”

But it is the relationship of Holmes and Watson that is of importance. Even though Holmes often passed unkind judgment on Watson, particularly regarding his writing, both men harboured a deep affection and respect for one another. Holmes relied on Watson at almost every turn, even stating in “The Dying Detective,” “You won’t fail me. You never did fail me.”

Watson was the rock, the utterly dependable man at Holmes’s side, his friend, partner and companion – the one person Holmes always turned to when he needed someone he could rely on without question, whenever he was in a tight place. And Watson never let him down!

Even more interesting is the very rare occurrence of Watson’s showcasing Holmes, the human being. This we see in today’s chosen quiz story, “The Veiled Lodger.” More often than not, Holmes is depicted as a machine, a cold and very calculating one – a brain without a heart. In this story we see the softer, gentler, and more understanding side of the Master. Watson was showing the world what he clearly saw and loved in the man.

So ... back to the question - Who was Ormond Sacker? That was the name Conan Doyle first chose for Sherlock Holmes’s companion before he settled on John Watson. “Watson” was perceived as a much more suitable Everyman’s name, that would resonate more clearly with readers.

Toast: To Ormond Sacker and what might have been. But long live Dr. John H. Watson!

(Main Source: *The Sherlock Holmes Companion – An Elementary Guide* by Daniel Smith)

10. Tides of the Wight – Mark Your Calendars

A small and dedicated cast of BmQ members will perform in a seated public reading of excerpts from Patrick Campbell’s Sherlockian pastiche play *Tides of the Wight*.

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Date: September 20, 2012

Place: The Green Centre, 1090 Green Avenue, Westmount, QC

Admission: Free. We’ve been considering paying the audience to come listen to us and we might have to take up a collection for this.

At the June meeting, a partial cast read from Act 2, Scene 3. The cast should be aware that there will be a complete read-through rehearsal on Sept. 13. Location to be announced.

Cast (alphabetically by performer):

Carol Abramson – Alice Keed and John Forrest's Boy
Natalie Akkerman – Vera Keed and "Ratzegger" Reading
Paul Billette – Rev. Ernest Keed
Patrick Campbell – Constable Spanner and Constable Williams
Wilfrid de Freitas – Inspector Pragnell
David Dowse – Dr. Watson
Ann Elbourne – Mrs. Hudson and Narrator
Susan Fitch – Mrs. Mawby
Chris Herten-Greaven – Commander Tutton
Raf Jans – Robert Beauchamp
Elliott Newman – Sherlock Holmes
Kayla Piecaitis – Iris Keed and "Ratzegger" Reading
Karl Raudsepp – Nathaniel Coleman and Charles Vasey
Nancy Walkling – (may participate if her schedule permits)

Trivia notes (we kid you not), so read, weep, and come to the performance:

- the intended producer of the original presentation of the play by the Hudson Players was murdered by a serial killer from Ontario.
- this crime had nothing to do with Patrick's fine play.
- Patrick recovered the script.
- the wife of the artist who painted the ship for the cover illustration fell to her death from the third-floor balcony of their apartment in the West Island.

Vient qui ose!

11. Third Toast – To the Woman

by David Dowse

Where in the vast annals of English literature has there been so much written about a character of which we know so little?

Were she someone Auguste Dupin encountered in "The Purloined Letter," would she have been celebrated to such a degree?

Would she have been held in such high esteem if it had been she who had battled for the Blue Cross with Father Brown?

Could she have utterly rejected, then collaborated with, and finally married Lord Peter to make his life so complete?

No!!

In my opinion Irene Adler is only visible to us through being illuminated by the shining brilliance of Sherlock Holmes.

A twist of fate put her in his headlights.

She is a shadow figure in the rest of the Canon, not really appearing, but faint images of her invade the Master's memory, being hinted at here and there.

"You see, but you are not perceived, Irene."

She is all smoke and mirrors, not really all that impressive in the real world, only held so high in Holmes's mind.

To paraphrase an old story, Irene Adler made her brief imprint in the sands of literature and then disappeared forever, to be carried on the back of Sherlock Holmes across endless beaches of time.

To Irene Adler!

12. Literary Contest

Patrick Campbell suggested the following contest, based on a reference in this meeting's story: Create your own outline for a pastiche play involving a politician, a lighthouse, and a trained cormorant. This should be an outline only, a sketch of ideas. Patrick offered to provide a prize and suggested Roger Burrows as the judge.

Collect your Tony at the Lost and Found.

13. Quiz - Results

Story: *The Veiled Lodger*, prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 50 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	
1.	Carol Abramson	37	Pastiche novel: <i>Prisoner of the Devil</i>
2.	Patrick Campbell	36	CD: <i>Silver Blaze</i> , read by Derek Jacobi
3.	Karl Raudsepp	30	CD: <i>The Red-Headed League</i> , read by Derek Jacobi

The next quiz, based on *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*, will be prepared by Carol Abramson.

14. Thou Shalt Not...

David Dowse queried: "Why is Holmes so sarcastically mean to Watson about smoking?"

Roger Burrows opined that Holmes is not being sarcastic; rather he is apologetic and self-critical. He acknowledges Mrs. Merrilow to be a kind woman who is allowing him to smoke in her presence even though it is a filthy habit. He is, rather, paying her a thank you for her understanding.

15. Further Feedback on the Story

Patrick Campbell queried, "What did Holmes do? He didn't solve anything in this story. The lion solved it."

Things have come to a sorry pass when our own SH is upstaged by a mangy lion. We suspect there may be a higher good to this twist in role fulfilment when a jungle creature takes the reins, roars once or twice, and encompasses Sherlock's genius with noise and the smelly things that lions do.

Roger Burrows got past the lion and observed that "this story shows Holmes's compassionate side."

Ever contemplative and direct, David Dowse said, "I found it hard to accept the change in Leonardo. He is a coward, since he doesn't defend the woman he loves."

Has anyone not speculated on the significance of the name “Leonardo” and the presence of a “lion,” both of which, etymologically, have something in common?

The buck should not stop there, gentle folk of the BmQ veldt, for we must leap now to the mind and soul of the Scribe-Above-All-Scribes, namely, SACD, who may have been playing not only at some kind of private game of words, but of meanings-through-symbols, with a view to the employment of literary devices (irony, personification), and perhaps, yea, the mapping of the story’s elements – consciously or otherwise – against his particular set of complex beliefs. If anyone care to foray into this hinterland newcrit, one might build a refreshing and innovative process of looking at the Canon and its author in a way which could only add to the dimensionality of both.

16. Another Read

Tash Akkerman showed us a book she had brought, *The Moriarty Papers, Compiled by Colonel Sebastian Moran: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes’s Great Nemesis*, printed 2011. Make room on your shelves!

17. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Chris Herten-Greaven

Who better to deliver a toast to Mrs. Hudson than our own provider of cheeses exotic, crackers with crunch, pâté with attitude, and helpful hints covering a smorgasbord of topics utilitarian and resourceful, than our own Chris Herten-Greaven who rose to deliver a strong case for Mr. Hudson who, we feel, would have stepped up to the plate with puddings both Yorkshire and Blood to be doused (yes, David) in a confected treacle that would have been the rage of the ages, lo! along the space-time continuum and unto the golden oak table of the reading room of the Westmount Public Library those sacred six times per annum?

(If you think this was a long sentence, read *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner for challenges in extreme syntax without the run-ons!)

18. To the Tea

Carol Abramson gave us directions to her house for Sunday’s Victorian Tea.

This, it turned out, was not a low-fat event. Nothing could be resisted. If desserts may be thought to flow in on waves, Carol’s confections poured in on a succession of *tsunamis* from depths of whipped cream, sauces, colours, and hues, with the flotsam and jetsam of delicious fruit, moist, flavourful doughs, imaginative presentations, and always, the unremitting succession of new things appearing, multiple choices of teas, and a hospitality and camaraderie by Carol and Jacob that suffused the parlour and atrium of Jacobson Manor under the iridescence of a rainbow’s glow.

Milia gratuum, Carol and Jacob!

19. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Susan Fitch

A Penny Toast to the Society

What’s the best thing to say when someone you know seems troubled, and is apparently suffering in silence? How about, “A penny for your thoughts.” Quite a few Canadians felt a bit troubled this spring, when the Royal Canadian Mint ceased its production of pennies. I always feel a bit sad when something good that links us with the past disappears in this way.

We belong to a society with a fascinating name: The Bimetallic Question. As *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans* opens, Holmes refers to his brother Mycroft's expertise concerning, "...the Navy, India, Canada and the bi-metallic question." In his paper, "A Brief Sketch of the Events," contained in the book *Musings from an Overturned Beehive: Twenty-five Years of The Bimetallic Question*, our co-founder Wilfrid de Freitas writes, "In the Victorian era Canada, too, had gold and silver coinage and there is no reason to suppose that we didn't also have the age-old problem of people hoarding the gold coins and using the silver ones more freely (which is essentially what the question/problem of bimetallism is)."

May I say that I do like very much the fact that our society's name essentially refers to a foible or aspect of human nature; because human nature is after all what Sherlock Holmes most importantly studies, along with sundry footprints and varieties of tobacco ash.

After choosing the above Canadian reference in the Canon for our society's name, Wilfrid and our other co-founder David Dowse, and other founding members who came to the very first society meetings in 1979, went further. Together they painstakingly studied all the references to coins in the Canon, and according to the relative prominence of the coins in the stories (rather than their monetary face value), named our society officers after these coins.

Hence our president is the Sovereign, our vice-president the Shilling, our secretary the Half-sovereign, our treasurer the Florin, and our sergeant at arms, Mrs. Hudson, the Half-crown. May I reflect: is it any wonder that as a regular foot soldier member of The Bimetallic Question I feel somewhat threatened by our Canadian mint's doing away with the Penny?!

Dear guests and members of The Bimetallic Question, let us raise our glasses now to ... The Society!

20. Christies for Free

Arlene Scher gave away copies of Agatha Christie novels to gleeful recipients.

21. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

To the Master	-	Elliott Newman
To Dr. Watson	-	Roger Burrows
To the Woman	-	Marie Burrows
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Chris Herten-Greaven
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, August 2nd, 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>