



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

P.O. Box 232, Westmount Station
Westmount, QC, Canada H3Z 2T2

Founded 1979

Minutes of the Meeting of The Bimetallic Question February 7, 2019

Date of our next meeting: Thursday, April 4, 2019 at 6:30 pm at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC H3Z 1G1

The quiz at the next meeting: *The Veiled Lodger*, prepared and presented by Paul Billette.

Next meeting's toast presenters: *The Master*: Raf Jans; *Dr Watson*: Ronnie Zilman; *The Woman*, Irene Adler: Rachel Alkallay; *Mrs Hudson*: Anne Millar; *The Society*: Kristin Franseen
Dear toasters, please send your April toasts to me at kristin.franseen@mail.mcgill.ca. Thanks!

Minutes of the meeting of the Bimetallic Question held on Thursday, February 7, 2018

Board: Sovereign: Bruno Paul Stenson, Treasurer: Paul Billette, Scribe: Kristin Franseen, Mrs. Hudson: Chris Herten-Greaven, Archivist: Susan Fitch, Telegraph Operator: Wilfrid de Freitas

Present: Rachel Alkallay, Mark Altosaar, Paul Billette, David Cameron, Geoffrey Dowd, David Dowse, Phil Ehrensaft, Kristin Franseen, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Thomas Jans, Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier, Anne Millar, Elliott Newman, Karl Raudsepp, Bruno Paul Stenson, James Turner, Finn Upham, Ronnie Zilman

Regrets: Louise Corda, Susan Fitch

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by our new Sovereign Bruno Paul Stenson at 6:32 pm.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

1. Welcome!

Welcome to our new member, Finn Upham!

2. Sovereign Update

Thank you again to Bruno for agreeing to be our new Sovereign.

3. Reflections on the Dinner

The Atwater Club is under new management, and has undergone some major renovations. This provoked some decidedly mixed feelings from the membership about the ambiance and food at this year's dinner. Following this meeting's discussion, Paul, Chris, and Elliott have formed a committee to research different options for next year. Possibilities include looking for a new venue and/or using the ITHQ for catering. All who have comments or suggestions they would like to have taken into account (and/or who would like to join the committee) are invited to contact Paul.

On an unrelated note, those who have pictures of the dinner should send copies of them to Susan for the archives. (susanruthfitch@yahoo.ca)

4. 40th Anniversary Plans (and beyond)!

May 25, 2019 will see the 40th anniversary of the first meeting of the Bimetallic Question! We have already received congratulations from the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. Raf, Chris, Rachel, and Bruno have formed a committee to plan suitable celebratory activities. Possibilities in the works include:

- A special brunch on May 5 at the revolving Portus 360 restaurant
- A potluck picnic (with a lamb roast by Chris)
- Museum visits and/or a walking tour of Old Montréal
- A public lecture or display at the Westmount Public Library
- Special prizes given away randomly at each meeting.

We are also holding a series of special events to take place throughout the year at meetings and our 2020 dinner. Our February meeting included a talk by Bruno on Sherlockian organizations prior to the establishment of our society (see Appendix 1). Upcoming presentations will include:

- April: David and Wilfrid on the founding of the society
- June: Kristin on Moriarty and Victorian astronomical quarrels
- August (or October): Raf on the *Hound of the Baskervilles*
- October (or August): Anne on Holmes in film
- December: Karl on a surprise topic

In order to fundraise for these and any other events, Bruno presented options for official Bimetallic Question merchandise. After a vote from the membership, we decided upon looking into ordering lapel pins.

5. Financial Report (prepared by Paul, presented by Bruno)

Prior to the dinner, our cash on hand was \$4303. \$2717 was payable for the dinner. Our current balance on hand is \$1586

6. Toast to the Master, by David Dowse

David poked gently at the tradition of calling Holmes "the Master," weighing the discrepancies between Holmes's personality and methods:

I feel that Sherlock Holmes would be embarrassed and very uncomfortable if a Baker Street Irregular addressed him as "Master." The title of Master must have lesser beings referred to as Subjects, or a band of Disciples attached to it. It implies a fawning or worshipping action on the part of the

underlings. I do not think that Holmes would have liked that kind of devotion. For him, it was all about the processes of close observation, deductive reasoning, thinking rather than any admiration of the person who employs those traits. He did not want a cult following, but hoped that his “Methods” would be adopted by law enforcement all over the world to enable them to bring justice for all.

On the negative side, Holmes was not above ignoring or breaking the Law of the Land if he felt that he was ultimately bringing a just conclusion to a case. It must be said that sometimes Holmes felt that he was above the law, and this is a sure sign of arrogance. Certainly Holmes and Watson could have faced serious charges in a number of cases for their illegal actions. Holmes knew that his royal and government connections (Victoria and Mycroft) let him get away with almost anything.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you a man like any one of us, but with high ideals and a supreme quest for justice, and a man ready to employ almost anything to achieve it. To Sherlock Holmes!



The Baker Street Irregulars (accompanied by the Master and a cat named Watson) in the French comic series *Les Quatre de Baker Street* (written by Olivier Legrand et Jean-Blaise Djian, et drawn by David Etien).

7. Toast to Dr Watson, by Kristin Franseen

Kristin challenged the notion of Watson’s untold stories, and the real reason for those gaps in the Canon:

What if very little of the Canon actually happened?

Now, I am still playing the game here, and certainly do not mean to suggest that Dr. Watson did not actually write the 56 short stories and 4 novels we all know and love. But it is often claimed that we know too little about our heroes outside of their adventures. Some Holmesians have attempted to fill gaps in the record, with speculations about Holmes’s time at university, Watson’s youth in Scotland (or perhaps Australia or America or somewhere even more far-flung), and those mysterious periods known as the Great Hiatus or the retirement. I propose to you, however, that we have too much, rather than too little, information about Holmes’s life and work. As we all know, contradictions abound in Watson’s accounts of Holmes’s cases. Cases seemingly occur during the Hiatus, when we all know Holmes was in Tibet...or Mecca...or the south of France (or possibly, given Watson’s spelling, Vermont). Names of politicians and celebrities are mentioned who cannot be found in any newspaper from the period. Police inspectors appear and disappear without a trace. And, most noticeably, Watson claims never to have heard of Moriarty in FINA, only to refer to him as “the famous scientific criminal” in VALL.

Now, some have mentioned that Watson must have changed the names of some of the most prominent figures in order to, as they say, protect the innocent and not-so-innocent. I fully understand this line of thinking; however, I would like to suggest that it does not go far enough. Instead of inventing fictional people, I suggest that Watson contrived entire original cases during the 1880s and 1890s, with the help of Inspectors MacDonald and Patterson (and with some covert help from Mycroft Holmes and Langdale Pike) to throw the likes of the Moriarty brothers and Moran off the scent. Better they think he was an amateur entirely preoccupied with bizarre domestic dramas and impossible political schemes than they know the truth: that Holmes was onto them and was beginning to collect the necessary evidence. And what better figure than Watson, who Holmes tells us over and over again is unobservant, credulous, and unduly fixated on romance, to report exactly what the Holmeses wanted their enemies to see. His writings boosted Holmes's popularity, but they also gave him time to investigate those figures whose connections and seeming respectability required more work than a dramatic reveal of a jewel inside a goose or a treaty under the breakfast dish-cover. Moriarty underestimated Watson at his peril, and was thus ultimately undone by both the detective who knew nothing of astronomy and the doctor-turned-pulp fiction writer who dared to insert a love story into a proposition of Euclid. To Watson!

8. Toast to the Woman, by Rachel Alkallay

Rachel improvised a thoughtful toast musing on the Adler-eagle connection, wondering who really bested who at the end of "A Scandal in Bohemia."



Gayle Hunnicutt (wearing a feather!) and Jeremy Brett as Adler and Holmes.

9. Toast to Mrs Hudson, by Chris Herten-Greaven

Chris reminded us how little we know about Mrs. Hudson's life beyond being the landlady of 221b, and reminded us of a possible real-life Mr. Hudson:

The quintessential landlady and housekeeper, as both terms are used in the Canon. Every rooming-house should have such a person to welcome the residents, and to make sure everyone is well-looked after, made to feel welcome, all the while being given to understand that proper behaviour is expected. The occasional behavioural aberrations of Sherlock Holmes notwithstanding, service, meals, and a sunny disposition were always included in Mrs Hudson's presence. It would seem somewhat unfair that she was given no greater recognition, particularly from Holmes, than courteous interchange, when she catered to him. We do not find any reference to her family, close or far-removed, her friends, nor even (a) husband(s), although I did try to create a possible link to a true life W.H. Hudson.

Mr. Hudson did indeed exist in real life, arriving at Southampton on the "Ebro" in 1876 from Buenos Aires. He led a life of very modest means until his death in 1922. He kept company with a woman who had owned a succession of failed boarding houses, though how this story may connect with Holmes's Mrs. Hudson, we are given no details. She was always just there, no family, next-of-kin, close friends, or even a suggestion of a social life of her own. Poor Mrs. Hudson, poor lonely(?) Mrs. Hudson! The vaguest of descriptions from Conan Doyle goes no further than her queenly tread, and the inference that her age is in the grey zone somewhere between middle-aged and elderly.

Recent recreations in Sherlock Holmes films give nothing new except those in the imaginations of the producer: a Russian persona (Rina Zelyonaya), a Japanese persona (Keiko Horiuchi), and several of English-sounding origin. None is helpful in further identifying this iconic lady, without whom the Canon would not stand on such a firm foundation.

Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses and toast Mrs. Hudson!



Rina Zelyonaya as Mrs. Hudson in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson* (Приключения Шерлока Холмса и доктора Ватсона), 1979-1986



Students Holmes and Watson, whose exploits are carefully monitored by housemother Mrs. Hudson (voiced by Keiko Horiuchi) in a NHK puppet show adaptation entitled *Sherlock Holmes* (シャーロック ホームズ), 2014-2015

10. Toast to the Society, by Karl Raudsepp

Karl brought our thoughts back to the definition of “society”:

What is a society?

SOCIETY in general refers to people and how they interact...i.e., the state of being together with other people.

It can be about people considered as a group, or a group of people who live together in an organized way, in a particular social system, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done.

It can be defined as the people who live in a particular country or area, and their way of life and customs.

Society in Business English is also used in the names of some UK banks to show that they are mutual (banks that are owned by the people who keep money in them), or that they were mutual in the past.

High society refers to that part of society that consists of a group of people who are rich, powerful, and fashionable.

But in our case, society simply refers to an organization comprised of people who have special interests or who want to support particular activities...in other words, like the Bimetallic Question, our society is one to which people who share similar interests can belong.

To the Bimetallic Question, our singular society!

Quiz and Story Discussion

11. Quiz on “The Blanched Soldier” prepared by Carol Abramson and presented by Paul Billette

Results:	1 st Raf	75	<i>Mrs. Beeton's</i>
	2 nd Geoffrey	57	<i>Prisoner of the Devil</i>
	3 rd David C.	55	<i>Success Secrets of Sherlock Holmes</i>

12. Discussion of the Story

Many members had a lot to say about the feasibility of this story, given what we know of firearms, medicine, and details from both recorded history and elsewhere in the Canon. Chris pointed out that being shot *through* the shoulder with an elephant gun would likely have been fatal. Finn asked how much stock we can place in Godfrey's and James's accounts of wartime and illness. Raf turned to the question of Holmes as narrator, noting that he recognizes both the difficulty of writing up a case and Watson's skill as a better storyteller at several points in his narrative. A few members also pointed out potential connections between this story and Doyle's medical career and changing views of war, with Phil wondering if perhaps prior generations of Sherlockians have downplayed Doyle's skill and success as a physician. Finally, Miyako pointed out a seemingly minor, yet potentially contradictory point: Holmes opens the story by claiming that Watson had “deserted him for a wife.” Who is this Mrs. Watson (and how many times was Watson married)?

Miyako also shared with me her extensive research on the context for this story, which can be found in Appendix II.

13. Close of the Meeting

Bruno adjourned the meeting at 9pm. Congratulations to Geoff for winning this month's prize!

Appendix I: A Short History of Sherlockian Societies, pre-BQ Bruno Paul Stenson, M.A.

The first Sherlock Holmes story written by the detective's assistant, doctor John Watson, was *A Study in Scarlet*, published in Beeton's Christmas Annual in 1887. During the next six years, this novel was followed by a second novel and 24 short stories. A growing legion of Holmes fans would await the publication of each new adventure in *The Strand Magazine* until, one day, tragedy struck in their belletristic world.

Watson's literary agent, one Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, had published several stories before taking on the Holmes adventures. His opinion of his own stories was such that he grew tired of the Holmes mysteries, finding them beneath the quality of stories which he himself was continuing to write. Consequently, Holmes was killed off in “The Final Problem”, a short story set in 1891 and published in 1893.

Within only a few years, certainly by 1897, a new phenomenon had arisen: fanatics of Sherlock Holmes creating what writer Scott Brown says was the first modern fandom, including the production of the first fan fiction, parodies and pastiches of the Canon. Alongside of this, the clamoring for new, official stories was quickly becoming a din.

In 1901, eight years after Watson's last short story had been published, and perhaps because Watson or Doyle missed the sound of ringing cash registers, Holmes reappeared in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a novel set in 1889, two years before Holmes's death. Customers for *The Strand Magazine* lined up for blocks to get their copies featuring the first two chapters of the novel. In 1903, in the short story “*The Adventure of the Empty House*”, Holmes was revealed to have faked his death and was now resuming his practice at 221B Baker Street. There were to be one more novel and 31 short stories published until the last of the latter, “*The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place*”, appeared in 1927.

The mass showing of affection for Sherlock Holmes on the part of the reading public can be seen as a sign of things to come. Neither the fake death of Holmes, the lack of new adventures, nor

the real death of Doyle in 1930 could stop the public's fascination with the world's first consulting detective. Even the 33 novels and more than 50 short stories written by Agatha Christie beginning in 1920 and featuring Hercule Poirot, a facsimile Holmes bordering dangerously on copyright infringement, failed to temper the ardor of Sherlockians for he whom they called The Master. So fascinated were factions of this public that some came together to read, discuss and even study the Canon of 56 short stories and four novels.

On ihearofsherlock.com, Anastasia Klimchynskaya begins her essay "A Brief Introduction to Sherlockian Societies" with this: "There's a piece of lore handed down in the Sherlockian community that states that all one needs for a Sherlock Holmes society is two Sherlockians, a copy of the Canon, and a bottle. In a pinch, one can do without one of the Sherlockians." She then goes on to say how she disagrees with this view, opining that "the love of a story, a character, a world, demands to be shared".

The first formally to share the Sherlockian world, its stories and characters, were people who joined writer Christopher Morley in New York, in 1934, to form The Baker Street Irregulars. The name of this society is that given by Holmes to the crew of so-called street Arabs or homeless children whose services he uses in *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of Four* and "*The Crooked Man*".

Throughout its history, 683 people have been members of The Baker Street Irregulars, and 300 of them worldwide are members today. Membership in The Baker Street Irregulars has always been by invitation rather than by application, and even then not for all. Women were not admitted until 1991, leading to the formation in the late 1960s of The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes, a society that did not admit men. Today both of these societies welcome members of the opposite sex. The first woman admitted to The Baker Street Irregulars was Dame Jean Conan Doyle, daughter of Sir Arthur.

After a very short-lived attempt to do so in 1946, The Baker Street Irregulars began publishing a journal, cleverly titled *The Baker Street Journal*, in 1951. Publication has continued to this day with subscribers numbering in the thousands. The entire collection of Journal issues up to 2011 is available on CD-ROM.

Hot on the heels of The Baker Street Irregulars came The Sherlock Holmes Society founded in London, also in 1934. However, unlike the New York group which has been in operation continuously since its founding, the Londoners folded their club in 1937 only to resume operations in 1951, in a rather roundabout way.

The St. Marylebone Borough Council in London had been looking for a way to celebrate the 1951 Festival of Britain when the Public Libraries Committee suggested a Sherlock Holmes exhibition. Some Council members wondered if "this character, associated with murky crime is the best we have to offer"! The Times, however, began publishing letters approving of the exhibition, letters signed by Dr. Watson, Mycroft Holmes, Inspector Lestrade... In the end, the exhibition, a full-scale reproduction of Holmes sitting room at 221B Baker Street, was built and attracted 54,000 visitors.

Inspired by their success, the creators of the exhibition decided to resurrect the defunct Sherlock Holmes Society. Membership numbered 130 individuals at the beginning and now surpasses 1,000. Membership is offered to all who apply. In addition, since May, 1952 the Londoners have been issuing their own semi-annual publication, *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*.

Since the founding of these two organizations, Sherlock Holmes societies have appeared around the world. The next to be formed in the United States was The Five Orange Pips in Westchester County, New York, in 1935. It was not until 1972 that a Sherlock Holmes society appeared in Canada.

The first Sherlock Holmes society in Canada was The Bootmakers of Toronto, named after a detail in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. A boot stolen from Sir Henry Baskerville leads to his death. The bootmaker's label reads "Meyers, Toronto". The founding of this society was inspired by "A Weekend With Sherlock Holmes" which was held at the Metro Toronto Central Library. In 1973, one year into its existence, The Bootmakers of Toronto founded their own journal, *Canadian Holmes*, which is published four times a year. Having had 350 people in their ranks in the past, The Bootmakers now boast 280 members.

Worldwide, there are currently 938 Sherlock Holmes societies. Unsurprisingly, a great many of these are in English-speaking countries. However, interest in Sherlock Holmes is such that many Sherlockian societies can be found in countries where English is a second or third language, if it is spoken there at all. Examples include The Blues Scarves Society in Uruguay, the Deutsche Sherlock-Holmes-Gesellschaft in Germany, and the Magyar Sherlock Holmes Club in Hungary. Because of

Sherlockians' love of citing the Canon in their society names, some confusion can occasionally arise. Examples of non-English-speaking societies do not include The Afghanistan Perceivers, The Giant Rats of Sumatra, or The Norwegian Explorers, all of which are Sherlockian societies found in the United States.

The most ardent, non-English fanaticism for Sherlock Holmes is perhaps found in Japan, where translations of the canonical stories began to appear in 1894, only seven years after the first story appeared in English. The Japan Sherlock Holmes Club was founded in 1977. On their website, under the heading "Message from Japan Sherlock Holmes Club" we read this: "Dear Sherlockian or Holmesian Friends: I, Akane Higashiyama, BSI, representative 'Japan Sherlock Holmes Club,' salute with my deepest heart to all around the world. Our club always accept the contact but our Newsletter and gazette are almost Japanese language." This friendly, informative approach to membership seems to be quite effective: The Japan Sherlock Holmes Club has more than 1,200 active members.

Like the rest of the world, Canada has not escaped the multiplication of Sherlockian societies, with Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton each having their own active groups in addition to that in Toronto. Of course, Montréal has its own Sherlockian society, The Bimetallic Question. Its story, however, shall have to wait until our April meeting when founders Wilfrid de Freitas and David Dowse shall regale us with the tale of its origins and history.

Appendix II: Miyako's Reflections on "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier"

This story was published in 1926 in the Strand Magazine as one of 12 stories of The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes, and as you know, it is one of only two stories narrated entirely by Holmes himself (the other is "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane"). The story takes place in January 1903, and Holmes says that he was alone. "The good Watson had at the time deserted me for a wife." How many wives did Dr. Watson have during the course of his life?? He proposed to Mary Morstan in "The Sign of the Four," and I presume that Mary is his wife in "A Scandal in Bohemia." Then, in "The Empty House," Holmes expresses condolences to Watson for his bereavement. Does this mean that Mary had passed away? Were the Watsons separated for a time? Is this Mrs. Watson in 1903 the same Mary? Is she someone else? (Or, perhaps Conan Doyle got careless about the timeline of the story and characters?)

Holmes writes that this story takes place just after the conclusion of the Boer War. The Boer people are descendants of the Dutch or Huguenot colonists who settled in South Africa, mainly in Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal, as farmers. Britain and the South African Boers went to war twice, in 1881 and 1899. The second took place when the Orange Free State and Transvaal declared war on Britain. Doyle volunteered as a medical doctor behind the lines (both for his sense of patriotism and desire for adventure).

The war was very bloody and long, and I wonder if he saw a patient who had ichthyosis during his stay as a doctor there. After he came back to Britain, Doyle campaigned for better medical treatment and methods in war zones and field hospitals, and also wrote a report on The Great Boer War. He was already a famous person, thanks to the success of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and Edward VII was a Holmes fan. Doyle was knighted for his services during the war. Some fans have speculated that Edward may have also knighted Doyle to unofficially encourage him to keep writing Holmes stories—is this perhaps the real story behind "The Illustrious Client"?

And yet, Doyle was extremely reluctant to accept the honour. In his epic report, he was critical of British military failure, and yet attempted to justify British involvement in the conflict. His mother pointed out that to refuse it would be an insult to Edward VII, so he was reluctantly knighted in August 1902. He was also appointed Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey, where he and his family were living. Like so many, Doyle came home very disillusioned after seeing the reality of war and horror in front of his own eyes.

As you know, the war was about taking control of the gold mines of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Is this an act of looting in the name of British imperial tradition? Although British forces

ultimately won the war, but for what cost? (Their victory came at an enormous cost of money and human suffering, including the confinement of Boer women and children in concentration camps, where many died of starvation!) Internationally, many Continental Europeans were appalled by British actions.

But most of the deaths in this war was caused by the scourge of typhoid, which is an acute infectious disease characterized by high fever. The character Godfrey Emsworth has ichthyosis. I have never seen anyone with this skin disorder, but I am glad to know it is treatable with skin cream (containing lactic acid). And personally, I'm happy to see the happy ending with a twist, and the story offers new criminal activity, just the solution to a mystery.



Doyle and others at Langman Field Hospital in Bloemfontein

Contributions? Corrections? Blatant Americanisms? Contact your humble scribe at: kristin.franseen@mail.mcgill.ca. Those who plan on contributing toasts, original fiction, and/or lengthier reports are especially encouraged to email their texts as soon as possible to be included in the minutes. I welcome creativity and contributions from old and new members alike! Longer reports may be edited and/or condensed slightly for space, as space is limited to 10 pages (5 sheets of paper).

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