

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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no. 285 5th August 2008

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Humphrey Carpenter, who died in 2005 aged fifty-eight, was a jazz musician, a writer of children's books, and a radio producer and presenter – he fronted *The Secret History of Conan Doyle* during Radio 4's Conan Doyle Week in July 2000. He was also a perceptive, scrupulous and thoroughly engaging biographer, whose subjects included JRR Tolkien, Ezra Pound, Benjamin Britten and Spike Milligan. His last book, completed posthumously by Candida Brazil and James Hamilton, is *The Seven Lives of John Murray: The Story of a Publishing Dynasty, 1768-2002*, published, most appropriately, by John Murray (338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH) at £25.00. At the time of its sale to Hodder Headline, Murray's was Britain's oldest and most respected independent publishing house, having been run for 234 years by seven generations of John Murrays. Their authors included Jane Austen, Walter Scott, Charles Darwin, David Livingstone, Washington Irving, Freya Stark, Patrick Leigh Fermor, Osbert Lancaster, John Betjeman, Françoise Sagan, Kenneth Clark... and, most notably, Lord Byron. Oh, and Queen Victoria. And Arthur Conan Doyle, whose publisher, Smith Elder, was taken over just before the Great War. John Murray VI ('Jock') remembered: 'During one of my holidays from school, when my grandfather [John Murray IV, then in his last years] was ill, Conan Doyle called in with new stories, which we published as *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* in 1927. He treated me with such courtesy as though I was a grown-up... that I fell under his spell. If this is an author, I said to myself, what fun to be a publisher!' A later memory was of Adrian Conan Doyle, 'turning up at Albemarle Street dressed in chainmail, demanding the pistols owned by Sir John Moore, the hero of the Battle of Corunna, which had come into the possession of John Murray II'... I in turn remember Jock Murray as a regular attendee at our Society's annual dinners in the early 1970s, the guest, I think, of Lord Donegall. *The Seven Lives of John Murray* is a fascinating account of the people who made the firm and maintained it during its centuries as a family concern. It's also evidence in itself that the qualities instilled by seven generations of Murrays still flourish.

Just out from Breese Books (Baker Street Studios Ltd, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB22 3DX) is *The Three Poisoned Pawns*, a triad of stories edited by Antony J Richards. In 'Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Hamlet', Emanuel E Garcia has Holmes reveal, in almost Freudian fashion, who is really responsible for the destruction of Prince Hamlet and the end of his dynasty. Naturally not a tale of action, the narrative is set in 1938, when the detective and the doctor are well advanced in years, and there's a curious and, to me, slightly distasteful coda. "Sherlock Holmes and the Belgravian Letter" by Roger Jaynes takes us back to the iconic year 1895. The Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, has been murdered and certain important – and compromising – documents are missing, but there are deeper matters still to be uncovered. Eddie Maguire, in 'Sherlock Holmes and the Highcliffe Invitation', brings Holmes and Watson to a house-party in 1907, where the principal guest, Kaiser Wilhelm II, is the victim of a strange theft and an assassination attempt. (Mention of a newspaper called *The Clarion* sent me to me reference shelves, because there really was a paper of that name – but it would never have promoted the Kaiser as 'a great friend of our country'. It was a socialist weekly, much influenced by the philosophy of William

Morris.) All three stories in *Three Poisoned Pawns* are ingenious and entertaining. Copies can be bought direct from the publisher for: UK £7.50; Europe €12.50; elsewhere \$18.50. Prices include postage. Make cheques payable to Baker Street Studios.

I've received but haven't yet had time to read what appears to be an unusually interesting novel, *Wilde about Holmes* by Milo Yelesiyevich (Comic Masque, UPS Store #1052, PMB199 Zeckendorff Towers, 111 East 14th Street, New York, NY 10003, USA; 10 October 2008; \$19.95). 'Sherlock Holmes, in the absence of Dr Watson, presses Oscar Wilde into his service to help protect candidate Grover Cleveland from a sexual scandal in the 1884 US presidential election, but everything goes wrong. Oscar Wilde proves to be Holmes' intellectual equal; Professor Moriarty is the villain; and Lillie Langtry is the woman at the bottom of it all. Can Sherlock Holmes redeem himself and solve the story's mystery – perhaps even the mystery of himself?' You can pre-order *Wilde about Holmes* on Amazon.com. I'll review it in the next DM.

A correction: *The File on Colonel Moran – Vol. I: The Lure of Moriarty* by our member V A Meador will be published in September, and not in August, as I noted in the last issue. The publisher is The Clyvedon Press (95 Maes-y-Sarn, Pentyrch, Cardiff CF15 9QR; no price yet).

Also due in September is another biography: *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* by Russell Miller (Harvill Secker, Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA; £20.00). Mr Miller tells me, 'I started research around the same time as Andrew Lycett but delayed publication so that I could get full access to the Richard Lancelyn Green archive in Portsmouth – a veritable treasure trove, now largely indexed and catalogued. I have also managed to secure the agreement of the Conan Doyle estate to make unlimited use of Conan Doyle's letters, journals and diaries.' It sounds distinctly promising!

Francophone readers may enjoy *Le Fantôme de Baker Street* by Fabrice Bourland. In 1932, detectives Andrew Singleton and James Trelawney are requested by Lady Conan Doyle to investigate a possible haunting at a house in Baker Street – which has recently been assigned the number 221... (Editions 10/18, 12 avenue d'Italie, 75013 Paris, France; €7.00.)

The final volume in John Gardner's *Moriarty* trilogy will be published in November by Quercus Publishing (21 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NS; £12.99). *The Return of Moriarty*, which established the ex-professor as a sort of Victorian Vito Corleone, appeared in 1974 and *The Revenge of Moriarty* the following year. The new book is called simply *Moriarty*. John Gardner died just a year ago.

The distinguished detective story writer **June Thomson** was Guest of Honour at our Society's annual dinner this year. Besides her novels about Inspector Finch of the Essex CID, she has written five volumes of first-rate new Sherlock Holmes stories, and a biographical study, *Holmes & Watson*, which ranks among the great contributions to Holmesian scholarship. She told me recently, 'I have begun another collection of Holmes short stories which I'm working on rather slowly at the moment.'

Speaking of scholarship, in October our Society will publish *Holmes and Watson Country: Travels in Search of Solutions*, a two-volume set comprising all the best Holmesian writings of Bernard Davies. There are few books published these days that I regard as essential, but this is definitely one of them!

The same month Pierre Bayard's *L'Affaire du Chien des Baskerville* will appear in English as *Sherlock Holmes Was Wrong: Reopening the Case of the Hound of the Baskervilles* (Bloomsbury Press, 175 Fifth Avenue

8th Floor New York, NY 10010, USA; \$20.00). The erudite, intelligent and mischievous M. Bayard has already made a name for himself with *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* and *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. You can pre-order *Sherlock Holmes Was Wrong* from Amazon.co.uk for £9.06.

And Peter Blau reports that *In Spite of Myself: A Memoir* by Christopher Plummer will be published in October by Knopf, at \$29.95. Plummer played Sherlock Holmes in HTV's 1977 production of *Silver Blaze* and in the 1979 feature film *Murder by Decree*.

The July 2008 issue of the *Sherlockian E-Times*, is online at www.sherlock-holmes.com. This is the catalogue-newsletter from **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com), with an amazing variety of Holmesian books and collectibles. See also www.cafepress.com/sherlockholmes2.

Alistair Duncan, whose stimulating *Eliminate the Impossible* was reviewed in DM 280, reports that he's working on a new book 'about the history and connections of real-life locations to the Sherlock Holmes stories'. Finding that South Norwood has very little to show for Conan Doyle's years of residence, he's working with the owners of the *William Stanley* in the High Street to prepare a small display in the pub.

Following his report that the December 2007 issue of *Backtrack* features Nigel Digby's article 'The Railway Journeys of Sherlock Holmes', Richard Taylor notes that back issues now cost £5.00 postpaid within the UK (not £4.40) from Pendragon Publishing (PO Box 3, Easingwold, York YO61 3YS; website www.pendragonpublishing.co.uk).

For more years than I can remember, Geoff Bradley's magazine *CADS* has been a sort of criminous and detectival equivalent of the *Times Literary Supplement* – as erudite and informative, and considerably more entertaining. The latest issue is *CADS 54*, and I can't recommend it strongly enough. It costs £5.50 from Geoff at 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA (e-mail Geoffcads@aol.com).

Peter Blau notes that Mark Hime of Bibliotopus, who brought the manuscript of 'Lady Frances Carfax' to the London Antiquarian Book Fair in June and failed to find a buyer at £250,000, also failed to sell the (incomplete) MS of 'His Last Bow' at Sotheby's in New York on 19 June, where it was estimated at \$150,000-\$200,000.

In July, Doug Warwick's play *Sherlock Holmes & the First English Gentleman* returned to Toronto, where it was first produced in 2000. The 'gentleman' of the title is inspired by the Piltdown Man – but you don't need to guess how Holmes's investigation develops, as Mr Warwick has made the script available, along with a video clip from last month's production, at www.seventeensteps.com.

You may just be in time to catch Brian Clemens' play *Holmes and the Ripper* at the **Theatre Royal** in Nottingham, which finishes on Saturday 9 August. The box office number is 0115 989 5555. See the website at <http://www.royalcentre-nottingham.co.uk/>. Playing Holmes is Nicholas Briggs, currently famous as the voice of the Daleks in *Doctor Who*.

Illyria's highly entertaining four-handed production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is touring open-air venues again this summer. This month: 5-16 **CToo**, Edinburgh Fringe Festival (0845 260 1234); 17 **Gibside**, Newcastle upon Tyne (01670 773939); 19 **Duff House**, Banff (01261 818181); 20 **Haddo House**, Aberdeen (0844 493 2179); 21 **Walton Hall Gardens**, Warrington (01925 442345); 22 **Belton House**, Grantham (01476 566116); 23 **Fountains Abbey**, Ripon (01670 773939); 24 **The Temple Garden, Wanstead Park** (07806 766993); 26 **Wotton Fields, Theatr Brycheiniog**, Brecon (01874 611622); 27 **Cockington Court**, Torquay (01803 606035); 28 **Brading Roman Villa**, Isle of Wight (01983 406223); 29 **Fulham Palace** (020 7736 3233); 30 **Brockwood Animal Sanctuary**, Dudley (07521 194403); 31 **Sherborne Castle** (01935 813182). And in early September: 3 **Castle Fraser**, Inverurie (01330 833463); 6 **Ness Botanic Gardens**, Nesston, Wirral (0151 353 0123); 7 **Thornton Abbey**, Barton upon Humber (01652 660380). Full details are on the Illyria website at <http://www.illyria.uk.com/Current/Hound/index.htm>.

You can hardly have missed the fact that **Robert Downey Jr** is now definitely signed up for the title rôle in Guy Ritchie's film *Sherlock Holmes*. Shooting begins in October.

The One Voice Recordings website (the voice is that of the versatile actor David Ian Davies) is offering a Sherlock Holmes pen, based on

cartoons by the famous *Mad Magazine* artist **Tom Richmond**. You'll find details at <http://onevoicerecordings.com/PenPage.html>. At present, curiously, there seems to be no way to place an order, except to e-mail Mr Davies at DDavies858@aol.com.

Interested members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London are invited to the First General Meeting of **The Eccentric Club (UK)** at Pushkin House, 5A Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2TA, at 6.00pm on 29 August. The aim is 'to restore and re-establish The Eccentric Club – once an important social and cultural institution [whose] charitable and cultural achievements should not be forgotten. On the contrary, they should be renewed and continued in a manner of a proud tradition.' The proposal is supported by, among others, Lord Montagu, the last Chairman of the original Eccentric Club. If you are interested, check the website at www.eccentricclub.co.uk or contact the Secretary, Mr Imants von Wenden, at 27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AX.

One of the oddest things I've come across lately is 'The Sherlock Holmes Way of Exceptional Living', a brief lifestyle guide by Alex Shalman, 'creator of the Practical Personal Development Blog'. You'll find it at www.dumblittleman.com/2008/07/sherlock-holmes-way-of-exceptional.html, a website called *Dumb Little Man: Tips for Life*.

At www.circuloholmes.org.es/cholmes/, you'll find the website of the Spanish Sherlockian Society **Circulo Holmes**, whose Vice-President Miguel Ojeda has recently joined the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. And our good friend Maria Hayzen has joined Circulo Holmes!

We've just learned that **Raymond Mitchell** of Exeter, who was a member of our Society for more than thirty years, died on 22 June. He was also an early and enthusiastic supporter of this newsletter.

Spotted by Nicholas Utechin in last Friday's *Times*, the announcement that **James (Jim) Moriarty** 'passed away peacefully on Friday 25 July, aged 88'. He had been married to 'Vi' [**surely Violet**] for nearly sixty years.

Peter Blau notes the death on 23 April of **David Atkins**, whose long career as a supporting actor included playing Mordecai Smith in the 1987 Granada Television production of *The Sign of Four*.

Periodicals received. *The Camden House Journal*, July 2008 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Communication*, no. 282 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA) [**yet more eccentricity – this issue of Communication consists entirely of Dr Seuss parodies!**]. *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections*, June 2008 (Suite 111, Elmer L Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, 222 21st Avenue S, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA). *The Illustrrious Clients News*, July 2008 (**The Illustrrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, July 2008 and August 2008 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA).

The Magic Door, Summer 2008 (**The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection**, Doug Wrigglesworth, 16 Sunset Street, Holland Landing, Ontario, Canada L9N 1H4) [**Doug has stepped down as Chairman after ten years, succeeded by Cliff Goldfarb, but he continues as Chair Emeritus, publisher of The Magic Door, and will be no less busy than he was before! Cliff meanwhile is preparing the 1980s volume in the Baker Street Irregulars History Project...**]. *The Petrel Flyer*, Summer 2008 (**The Stormy Petrels of British Columbia**, Len Haffenden, 1026 West Keith Road, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7P 3C6). *The Vampire Empire Quarterly*, Summer 2008 (**The Vampire Empire**, 29 Washington Square West, Penthouse North, New York, NY 10011-9180, USA) [**As mentioned in DM 284, the Vampire Empire now has a branch called the Sherlock Holmes Auxilliary.**]

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, June 2008 and July 2008 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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