

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

Roger Johnson, Mole End, 41 Sandford Road, Chelmsford CM2 6DE

e-mail: [rojerjohnson@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rojerjohnson@yahoo.co.uk)

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**Lyndsay Faye's** *Dust and Shadow: An Account of the Ripper Killings* by Dr John H Watson (Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, USA; \$25.00) is commended by the Conan Doyle Estate and praised by Caleb Carr, Daniel Stashower and Leslie Klinger. And it is very good. Ms Faye knows her two subjects, the Holmesian Canon and the Whitechapel murders of 1888, disturbingly well. There have been other attempts to link the great detective with the butcher of Whitechapel, but *Dust and Shadow* is the first I can recall in which just about every detail is accurate. Rather boldly, the author gives us a very broad hint as to the murderer's identity right at the beginning, so that we can watch the clues as they arise and see how Holmes deals with them. The numerous historical characters are presented very fairly, and they are all people who actually had a connection with the crimes or their investigation. No members of the royal family, no distinguished surgeons, no psychics. (I'm glad to meet, so to speak, George Lusk, head of the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, whose grandson was an early subscriber to this newsletter.) All the *dramatis personae* are memorable, a result, perhaps, of Ms Faye's theatrical training, and everyone behaves in character. The identity of the killer is perfectly plausible, as is the reason for his success in evading suspicion. He is, in a way, like GK Chesterton's Invisible Man. Though he has a different name, he is based on an actual person, but it's impossible now to know just what the real man was like. Lyndsay Faye captures the flavour of Dr Watson's style very acceptably, though there are a few sentences that could profitably be trimmed (Dr Watson was hardly ever verbose) and there are minor niggles such as references to 'the Baron' (technically correct, but he would be 'Lord Ramsden' or 'his Lordship'), 'the London Royal Mail' (just 'the Royal Mail' or even 'the Post Office') and 'St Bart's' (just 'Bart's') – but they're very minor indeed compared to the book's many triumphs. Ms Faye gives us the real Holmes and Watson, and the real squalid violent Whitechapel of 1888. She gives us atmosphere, excitement, suspense and terror. And she makes us think.

Some while back I recommended *Watson's First Drafts*, in which Jim Goehmann 'reconstructs' what he claims to be the suppressed or altered facts of various cases from the Canon. **Partha Basu** does something similar in *The Curious Case of 221B: The Secret Notebooks of John H Watson, MD* (HarperCollins Publishers India Ltd, A-53, Sector 57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301, India; 299 Rupees), though his approach and, I suspect, his intentions are very different. The notebooks were given by the elderly Dr Watson to his young Indian friends Kumar and Nellie, with the warning that these accounts 'will no doubt invalidate a number of the great man's affirmed achievements, and greatly affect the popular view'. On their tragic deaths, with which the book begins, the papers come, unopened, into the possession of Kumar and Nellie's son Jit, who rather reluctantly begins to read them. As Watson explains in his accompanying notes, with additional notes by his stepdaughter Emma Hudson, each case was different. In one instance he was persuaded to alter a single important fact in the published account ('The Invisible Client'). In another, the principals inform him, but not Holmes, of the truth only after his account has appeared in print ('Blunder in Bohemia'). In a third, Holmes and Watson learn the truth long after publication, and force one party to make reparation to another ('The Tale of the Sad Cyclist'). One narrative, 'The Missing Courier', is an admitted work of fiction, supposedly written by one Seamus Hyde and purporting to tell the story of Mr James Phillimore. It strikes an unexpected and false note, but the other tales are refreshingly bold, presenting a notably fallible Holmes and an intelligent, spirited Watson. I cheered when I read his unspoken response to Holmes's accusation of incompetence in the Lady Frances Carfax case: 'It was I who tracked

*Lady Frances; it was I who discovered the Shlessingers, and their hold on her and the fact that they spirited her away to London. I did not raise any alarm with the Shlessingers or with Lady Frances because they had already left the Continent when I happened onto their trail. You, on the other hand, ignored my accurate deduction that the three were in London and not in Montpellier where you landed up in your ludicrous disguise...'* But *The Curious Case of 221B* is far from being a mere debunking of the great detective. The last story, 'Judgement at the Abbey Grange', sees him investigating a notorious racially motivated miscarriage of justice. The book has its flaws. Dr Watson's name is frequently given as James, for no evident reason. Maiwand is consistently spelled as 'Mainwad', Altamont as 'Altamount' and Von Bork as 'Van Bork'. There are many anachronistic expressions: Kitty Winter is 'feisty', Holmes's mistrust of women is 'chauvinism', Philip Green is a 'stalker', Gemma Gold is 'aka' Violet Smith, and a character gets his 'comeuppance'. But I can't improve on a comment in *The Asian Age*: Partha Basu's book is 'blasphemously and deliciously audacious'.

The latest fruits of Paul Spiring's research are found in *Bobbles and Plum: Four Satirical Playlets* by **Bertram Fletcher Robinson** and **P G Wodehouse** (MX Publishing Ltd, 335 Princess Park Manor, Royal Drive, London N11 1JN; £9.99 or \$16.95). The plays, never intended for performance, appeared variously in the Daily Express, *Vanity Fair* and *The World* between 1903 and 1907. They're part of the tradition of satire that continues today, and though they date from a more respectful era they aim some pretty sharp darts at the politicians. Moreover, they're clever, well-written, and funny. The full annotations help us appreciate just how clever they are, and how harmoniously the two authors worked together. Wodehouse was just starting a career that would last another seventy years. Robinson's career was about to be cut short. Who can say what he might have achieved?

I recently recommended *The Dragon Tattoo*, the first of **Tim Pigott-Smith's** Baker Street Mysteries. The second is just out – *The Rose of Africa* (Hodder Children's Books, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH; £5.99) – and I'm very much looking forward to reading it. Meanwhile *The Haunted Horrors*, the sixth of **Anthony Read's** chronicles of the Baker Street Boys (Walker Books Ltd, 87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ; £4.99) was published last month and also promises to be great fun.

*The Pandora Plague*, a well-received 1981 novel about Holmes, Watson and Houdini by **Lee A Matthias**, is now available in a revised and annotated edition from BookSurge ([www.booksurge.com](http://www.booksurge.com); \$16.99). It is available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). So is a great deal more Sherlockian pastiche, most of which I've not encountered elsewhere, including *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective Vol. One* edited by **Ron Fortier** (Cornerstone Book Publishers, 1937 Veterans Blvd, Suite 334 - Metairie, LA 70005, USA; \$21.95) a collection of five new adventures.

Due in November from EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, Inc (PO Box 1714, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2L7; \$16.95) is *Gaslight Grottesque: Nightmare Tales of Sherlock Holmes* edited by **J R Campbell & Charles Prepolec**. This is a follow-up to the very successful *Gaslight Grimoire* (see DM 290).

Antony Richards reports that in November Breese Books (Baker Street Studios Limited, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridgeshire CB22 3DX; £7.50) will issue a new edition of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* by **Fergus Hume**, with an introduction by H R F Keating. First published in 1886, Hume's novel was phenomenally successful but fell out of favour with the rise of Sherlock Holmes. It's literate, ingenious and gripping, and deserves to be rediscovered.

**Vithal Rajan** tells me that a revised edition of *Holmes of the Raj* – his grand collection of stories, favourably reviewed in DM 266 – will be published next summer by Random House India (MindMill Corporate Tower, 2nd Floor, Plot No. 24A, Sector 16 A, Noida 201301, India).

Brian Pugh, via Oscar Ross, recommends *Reflections on the Cottingley Fairies* by **Frances Griffiths** (JMJ Publications, 1 Thornhill, Malone, Belfast BT6 6SS; [orders@cottingleyreflections.com](mailto:orders@cottingleyreflections.com); £8.99 plus postage). Frances and her cousin Elsie Wright were the two girls who claimed to have photographed fairies at Cottingley near Bradford. She died in 1986. Last year, her daughter Christine Lynch took her manuscript to the Antiques Roadshow in Belfast, and Paul Atterbury advised her to publish it as the only first-hand account of the affair.

At [http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e\\_times09-7.htm](http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times09-7.htm) is the July issue of *The Sherlockian E-Times*, full of tempting goodies, as always (**Classic Specialties**, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; [sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com](mailto:sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com)).

With *Nursing Holmes* **Cenarth Fox** completes his trilogy of plays about the great detective. About to leave Baker Street for the last time, Sherlock Holmes is astounded to learn that Mrs Hudson has been commissioned by *The Strand Magazine* to write her memoirs – *The Landlady of Sherlock Holmes*. As she says, ‘The world knows of your cases but nothing of your private life.’ But even her promise not to divulge any of his *really* unpleasant habits does not reconcile him to the idea. Nor does her intention of correcting the many mistakes made by Holmes and Watson. The ensuing conversation moves from the farcical to the profound, as each comes to understand and appreciate the other – and there’s a final astonishing and very funny twist. Like the first two, *The Real Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock, Stock and Barrel*, the play has been very successfully adapted for audio and is now available as a CD for £13.50 post-free from Fox Plays at [sales@foxplays.com](mailto:sales@foxplays.com). (All three CDs can be had for £30.00 post-free.) I haven’t seen Kirk Alexander and Eileen Nelson play Holmes and Mrs Hudson on stage but they’re superb in sound alone, doing full justice to Cen Fox’s excellent script.

Last year Naxos AudioBooks (2nd Floor, 40A High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ; [www.naxosaudiobooks.com](http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com)) released a superb unabridged recording of *The Lost World*, read by **Glen McReady**. Now we have an equally striking reading of *The Poison Belt*, the second chronicle of Professor Challenger, which tells how the earth comes into contact with a vast deadly cloud floating in the aether. The idea of a superfine substance that fills the space between all the particles of the universe was rapidly losing ground when Conan Doyle wrote *The Poison Belt*, but he wrote with such conviction that we can easily suspend disbelief. Besides, this is not a tale of adventure, like *The Lost World*, but a tale of wonder and a depiction of character. Mr McReady makes each personality distinct, without any hint of caricature – Challenger’s justified egotism, Professor Summerlee’s waspish scepticism, Lord John Roxton’s tolerant wisdom, Edward Malone’s healthy practicality, even Mrs Challenger’s devotion – so that we can appreciate the effect on each of the knowledge that their world is coming to an end. The science may be doubtful, but Conan Doyle’s description of the dead land, beautifully rendered by Glen McReady, is as good as anything in H G Wells. And I’m now convinced that Summerlee, not Challenger, ought to have been the focal character in *The Land of Mist...* This three-CD set can also be downloaded from the website.

A CD that had completely passed me by is the original cast recording of *The Baskerville Beast*, **Teddy Hayes’** musical version of you know what. It’s available from Dress Circle (57-59 Monmouth Street, London WC2H 9DG; [www.dresscircle.co.uk](http://www.dresscircle.co.uk)) at £9.99. **John Elnaugh** told me about the CD. He played Holmes in *The Baskerville Beast* and will shortly reprise the character in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* by Donald Thomas at the **Manor Pavilion Theatre** in Sidmouth, from 24 to 30 September ([www.manorpavilion.com](http://www.manorpavilion.com); phone 01395 514413).

This week **Nicholas Briggs** plays Holmes in his own dramatisation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* at the **Theatre Royal**, Nottingham (phone 0115 989 5555). At **The Space@Venue 45** at the Edinburgh Fringe until 22 August is *Broken Holmes* by Robin Johnson (0845 508 8387). Members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London can buy tickets at £5.50 – a reduction of £2.00. See [www.brokenholmes.co.uk](http://www.brokenholmes.co.uk). You can see *Sherlock Holmes & the Curse of the Werewolf* by Jonathan & Julian Kaufman in the garden of **The Dolphin** pub in Sydenham on 18, 19, 20, 25, 26 and 27 August. Tickets from Kirkdale Bookshop, 272

Kirkdale, Sydenham, London SE26 4RS (phone 020 8778 4701). See [www.spontaneousproductions.co.uk](http://www.spontaneousproductions.co.uk). On 16 September, at the **Quay Theatre**, Sudbury, Suffolk, **Robert Crighton** will read *A Study in Scarlet*, followed by *The Sign of Four* on 23 September, and all twelve *Adventures* between 7 October and 2 December, concluding with *The Hound of the Baskervilles* on 9 September (01787 374745, or e-mail [boxoffice@quaytheatre.org.uk](mailto:boxoffice@quaytheatre.org.uk)). See [www.quaytheatre.org.uk](http://www.quaytheatre.org.uk).

**Oliver Bruhns** offers a humorous Christmas cartoon-postcard (Toby the dog enjoys his festive season at the expense of Holmes and Watson). A set of twelve, post-paid, is €15.00 within Europe or \$25.00 to the USA, from Baltica Verlag, Oliver Bruhns, Waldstr. 6, 24960 Glücksburg, Germany. Please send money in cash to avoid bank charges.

At 6.00pm on 14 September, at Charing Cross Library, **Laurie R King** will read from her latest Mary Russell/Sherlock Holmes novel *The Language of Bees* and answer questions about her books. Admission is free. See [www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/news/chxevents/](http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/news/chxevents/).

See [www.ipetitions.com/petition/undershaw/?e](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/undershaw/?e) to learn about the campaign to restore Conan Doyle’s house **Undershaw** and enable public access and public use. An awareness day and fund raiser will be held on 27 August from 2.00pm with the opportunity to view the building in its current sad state. Entertainment, raffle, auction and murder-mystery at the Devil’s Punchbowl Hotel will all form part of the day, with a light evening meal. Contact **Lynn Gale** on [lynn2shirley@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lynn2shirley@hotmail.co.uk) for details. Philip Attwell points out that BBC Radio 4’s *You and Yours* (midday, 21 August) will feature the sad state of Undershaw.

Norfolk-based Holmesian **Kelvin Jones** will run a one-day course on short story writing at Fakenham Community Centre on 5 September. Get information from [cunningman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:cunningman@hotmail.co.uk) or phone 07976 507954.

**The Reichenbach Irregulars** last met in Meiringen in 2000. This summer four members – Vincent Delay, Marcus Geisser, Guy Marriott and Michael A Meer – decided to revive the Irregulars. On Sunday 27 September they will celebrate the revival with a meeting in Lucerne, including a cruise in a century-old paddle steamer and a visit to the Hôtel de l’Europe, where Arthur Conan Doyle stayed. If you’d like to join in, contact Marcus at [the.reichenbach.irregulars@googlemail.com](mailto:the.reichenbach.irregulars@googlemail.com).

The Irish-born actor **Harry Towb** died on 24 July, three days before his eighty-fourth birthday. In the early 1950s he took two or three rôles in Sheldon Reynolds’ *Sherlock Holmes* television series, and in 1974 was a memorable Forman to John Wood’s Holmes in the RSC production of William Gillette’s play, in the West End and on Broadway.

Periodicals received. *The Baker Street Journal*, Summer 2009 (Steven Rothman, 220, West Rittenhouse Square, #15-D, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA; subscriptions, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA; correspondence for **The Baker Street Irregulars** should go to Michael Whelan, 7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA). *The Camden House Journal*, July 2009 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Canadian Holmes*, Canada Day (July) 2009 (**The Bootmakers of Toronto**, Chris Redmond, 523 Westfield Drive, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2T 2E1). *Communication*, no. 290/291 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, August 2009 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Irregular Newsletter*, August 2009 (**The Conan Doyle [Crowborough] Establishment**, Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN). *The Moor: Magasin för Sherlockianer*, Juli 2009 (**The Baskerville Hall Club of Sweden**, Anders Wiggström, Byggmästarvägen 29, 168 32 Bromma, Sweden). *The Petrel Flyer*, May/June 2009 and Summer 2009 (**The Stormy Petrels of British Columbia**, Len Haffenden, 1026 West Keith Road, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7P 3C6). *Sherlockiana*, Nr 2-3 2009 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Bjarne Rother Jensen, Højbovängen 24, 9200 Aalborg SV, Denmark).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, July 2009 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net)).

*Roger Johnson*