

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



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

no. 296 7th September 2009

On 30 August 1889, J M Stoddart, editor of the Philadelphia-based *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, invited Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle to dinner at the **Langham Hotel** in London. That evening he commissioned a novel from each of them: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Sign of the Four* respectively. The Sherlock Holmes Society of London, in collaboration with the Oscar Wilde Society, the Langham Hotel and the City of Westminster, has commissioned a plaque to commemorate that remarkable event, which will be unveiled at the Langham on 19 November, at 11.30 am, by **Gyles Brandreth**, whose Oscar Wilde Murder Mysteries have been enthusiastically reviewed world-wide.

2009 sees the 120th anniversary of that dinner, Conan Doyle's 150th birthday, Wilde's 155th birthday, the release of Oliver Parker's film *Dorian Gray*, the release of Guy Ritchie's film *Sherlock Holmes*, and a good deal more besides. *The Valley of Fear* will feature in Gyles Brandreth's series (in BBC 1's *The One Show*) on places that have inspired famous works of fiction. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* will feature in *John Sergeant's Tourist Trail*, an ITV 1 series, in which Sergeant accompanies overseas visitors to Britain. STV is preparing a documentary, *The Search for Sherlock Holmes*, to be presented by David Hayman, and a series *The Greatest Scot*, which will include Arthur Conan Doyle. All these programmes will have some input from members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London.

The Rose of Africa (Hodder Children's Books, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH; £5.99), second of the Baker Street Mysteries by **Tim Pigott-Smith**, is as exciting as the first (*The Dragon Tattoo* — see DM 293). Sam Wiggins, Titch Simpson, Edie, Potts and Billy the page-boy must take matters into their own hands when Potts's uncle is accused of theft and murder. Sherlock Holmes has an urgent summons to the Continent, and Inspector Lestrade and Dr Watson aren't keen on the idea of children investigating crime. But the Irregulars don't give up easily. As Holmes himself said, they can go everywhere, see everything, overhear everyone, and they discover that the tangled trail of the missing diamond leads to an old adversary of the great detective, a cold-hearted criminal named Irene Adler... This is a very different view of the woman from the romantic image that has long been popular among Holmesians, particularly in America, but it's not actually new (see, for instance, the 2007 TV film *Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars*) and in Tim Pigott-Smith's gripping story this *belle dame sans merci* raises the tension several notches. Wiggins and co. are thoroughly engaging characters. I'm looking forward keenly to their next adventure!

Tim Pigott-Smith will be at the **Bath Festival of Children's Literature** on 27 September, discussing the Baker Street Mysteries (Box office: 01225 463362).

Aimed at a slightly younger readership, I think, is *The Case of the Haunted Horrors* (Walker Books Ltd, 87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ; £4.99), the sixth chronicle of The Baker Street Boys by **Anthony Read**. (There is actually a seventh book, technically the first: *The Baker Street Boys* by Brian Ball, published in 1983, and based on two of the scripts for Anthony Read's television series broadcast that year. What makes matters more complicated is that one of them is *The Captive Clairvoyant*, which Mr Read himself later adapted as the second of his own books. However...) These Baker Street Irregulars are not the same young people as Mr Pigott-Smith's Irregulars. Billy the page-boy is definitely not one of their number. And in any case they prefer to call themselves the Baker Street Boys, even though three of them are girls. But any confusion is quite extraneous to the thrilling exploits of Arnold Wiggins, Beaver, Shiner, Queenie, Sparrow, Rosie and Gertie, as a

haunting at Madame Dupont's Waxworks uncovers a murder and entangles the youngsters with a group of Russian dissidents. I wish all Holmesian pastiche could be as honest, as knowledgeable, as enthusiastic and as well-written — in short, as good — as these children's books.

In the early 1980s Webb & Bower published three Sherlock Holmes Murder Dossiers, compiled by Simon Goodenough to tell the cases of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* through cleverly designed 'original' documents (and other items, such as Lucy Ferrier's wedding ring). Now we have *The Case Notes of Sherlock Holmes* by **Guy Adams** (André Deutsch, 20 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JW; £19.99), which claims to be a facsimile of Dr Watson's notes for *The Hound* and five short stories: 'A Scandal in Bohemia', 'The Red-Headed League', 'The Boscombe Valley Mystery', 'The Dancing Men' and 'The Final Problem'. It's understandable that Mr Adams has used computer fonts, where Mr Goodenough's handwritten texts actually were reproduced from handwriting — I've done the same myself — but only two or three of them are convincing, and it doesn't take a detective to see that the note 'The Red-Headed League is dissolved' and Hilton Cubitt's letters were apparently written by the same person. All the newspaper cuttings are in the same modern typeface, and none of them looks like newsprint of the period. I could overlook this sort of thing, perhaps, but there's rank carelessness elsewhere. The supposed marriage certificate of Irene Adler and Godfrey Norton is the sort of fancy-schmancy document that would more probably certify 'Highly Commended' at a village flower show. John Turner's confession is taken on an official Metropolitan Police form by Inspector Lestrade — from whom Holmes and Watson promised to keep it secret. Abe Slaney's confession is taken by Inspector Martin of the Norfolk Constabulary — on an official Metropolitan Police form. Dr Mortimer's drawing of the Hound's footprints shows them to have been only two inches across, and someone has appended a note: 'Smaller feet than anticipated'... (The point of that simply baffles me.) Guy Adams claims to have been the youngest actor to play Sherlock Holmes on the professional stage. That he's now a full-time writer is rather disturbing, given such horrors as: 'Wilson — like I — had no knowledge of the league' and 'That last sentence beared up to rereading.' *The Case Notes of Sherlock Holmes* is 'officially endorsed by the Administrator of the Conan Doyle Copyrights'. Oh, dear. The book could, and should, have been very good indeed — what a wasted opportunity!

Fortunately *The Sherlock Holmes Companion: An Elementary Guide* by **Daniel Smith** (Aurum, 7 Greenland Street, London NW1 0ND; 29 October; £20.00) actually is very good indeed! Like others with similar titles, this book neatly summarises each of the sixty stories — without giving away the endings. But it also contains well-researched and well-written profiles of Conan Doyle, Holmes, Watson, Mrs Hudson, Scotland Yard, Joseph Bell, Professor Moriarty, *The Strand Magazine* and Sidney Paget. And equally good essays on Holmes as a scientific detective, Holmes's pleasures, the literary lineage, women in Holmes's life, Holmes's politics, Holmes's legacy, and Holmes on stage screen and radio. Plus (a real bonus, this) interviews with Roger Llewellyn, Philip Franks, Douglas Wilmer, Caleb Carr, David Burke, Bert Coules, Catherine Cooke, and Edward Hardwicke. And *The Sherlock Holmes Companion* is exceptionally well illustrated. The inevitable sprinkling of Pagets and Steeles is leavened with depictions by other artists, old (W H Hyde, A Gilbert) and new (Nis Jessen, Barry Moser), book jackets, posters, period pictures of places and people, photos of the contributors, and more, including one of Eric Conklin's beautiful Sherlock Holmes Mystery paintings. It's a book I'm happy to recommend.

On 8 October comes *A Study in Scarlet*, the second Sherlock Holmes Graphic Novel adapted by **Ian Edginton** and illustrated by **INJ Culbard** (SelfMadeHero, 5 Upper Wimpole Street, London W1G 6BP; £14.99). *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies* by **David A Crowder** is due on 16 October from John Wiley & Sons (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 8SQ), priced at £14.99. On 30 October Robert Hale Ltd (Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT) will publish *Sherlock Holmes's London* by **David Sinclair**, at £16.99 — it can be pre-ordered at www.halebooks.com for £11.99.

Ruth Rendell will be Guest of Honour at our Society's annual dinner next January. She has written the introduction to a new edition of *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, due on 5 November, in hardback at £30.00 from Viking and in paperback at £18.99 from Penguin (both at 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL). There's also a new edition of **Christopher Redmond's** excellent *Sherlock Holmes Handbook*, to be published on 23 November from Natural Heritage Books (Gazelle Book Services Ltd, White Cross Mills, High Town, Lancaster LA1 4XS) at £14.00. And on 29 November IDW Publishing (5080 Santa Fe, San Diego, CA 92109, USA) will publish *A Study in Scarlet*, illustrated by **Ashley Wood**, in their Graphic Classics series at £12.99.

Aziz Bin Adam reports the publication by PTS Publications (No 12 & 12A, Jalan DBP, Dolomite Business Park, 68100 Batu Caves, Selangor, Malaysia) of *Sherlock Holmes: Wira Kota London* ('Sherlock Holmes, Saviour of London City'), the third translation from the Canon into Malay. Details at http://pts.com.my/index.php/buku/sherlock_holmes_-_wira_kota_london/.

The August issue of *The Sherlockian E-Times*, full of good things, is at http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times09-8.htm (Classic Specialties, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com).

See havantlitfest.org.uk for information about the **Havant Literary Festival**, running from 25 September to 4 October. In this anniversary year, Arthur Conan Doyle features largely, with an exhibition at the Meridian Centre of material on loan from Portsmouth Museum's Conan Doyle Collection, and talks by Michael Gunton, Amanda Field, Madeleine Selby, Russell Miller and Sam North. Tickets are available from Havant Arts Centre on 023 9247 2700.

Conan Doyle and Joseph Bell is the title of an exhibition that can be seen at the **Royal Society of Medicine** (1 Wimpole Street, London W1G 0AE) until 29 January. Entry to the exhibition, staged in collaboration with the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, is free. Also free is a public meeting, *Sherlock Holmes, Forensic Medicine and Fictional Crime Fighters*, to be held at the RSM on 29 October at 2.00pm. Speakers include Andrew Lycett and Anthony Horowitz. In the chair will be Emilia Fox, star of *Silent Witness*. To view the full programme and to book a free place, see www.rsm.sc.uk/sherlock.

At the Bishopsgate Institute near Liverpool Street Station on 10 November, **Dr Esme Miskimmin** will give a talk on *Fictional London: Investigating the City: London in Detective Fiction from the Victorian Era to the 'Golden Age'*. Tickets are £7.00 (concessions £5.00) from www.wegotickets.com or 020 7392 9220. The talk starts at 7.30 pm.

Olaf Maurer announces the first issue of *Sherlock Holmes Magazin*, a full-colour 28-page Sherlockian magazine in German, available to all interested parties. (Members of **221b-Deutscher-Sherlock-Holmes-Club** will receive a supplement, 'Baker Street News.'). For information about subscribing, contact Olaf at Kerschensteinerstr. 48, D-67071 Ludwigshafen, Germany (info@221b-DSHC.de).

Besides his humorous Christmas cartoon-postcard (Toby the dog enjoys his festive season at the expense of Holmes and Watson) **Oliver Bruhns** offers the same amusing design on a coffee mug. See www.baltica-verlag.de. A set of twelve cards is €15.00 (Europe), US\$ 25.00 (USA and overseas). The mug is €20.00 (Europe), US\$ 35.00 (USA and overseas). Prices include postage. Please send orders to info@baltica-verlag.de.

Our member **José Luis Errazquin** has designed a rather splendid Tarot deck. See <http://www.sshf.com/index.php3?file=news&num=697>. More details from Juan Requena, C/Rios Rosas, 52-28003 Madrid, Spain. (Thanks to our friends in **La Société Sherlock Holmes de France**.)

Thierry Saint-Joanis reports the discovery in the basement of a Polish church of a copy of *Der Hund von Baskerville*, the last Sherlock Holmes

film of the silent era, and long considered lost. The German-British production was made in Berlin in 1929 by Richard Oswald, with Carlyle Blackwell as Holmes and Georges Seroff as Watson. This copy was one of a collection of old movies, often subtitled or dubbed in Czech, that had belonged to the former pastor of Sosnowiec, Father Jerzy Barszcz, who died in 2004.

It now seems that any attempt to develop **Undershaw**, Conan Doyle's house at Hindhead, for any use that would enable public access will fail, purely on economic grounds. All praise to those who fought for so long! The house is saved from dereliction, which is the essential thing.

On 8 October the Royal Mail will issue its set of ten **Eminent Britons** stamps, which naturally include Arthur Conan Doyle. The Royal Mail Online Shop is at www.royalmail.com — or phone 08457 641 641 (overseas +44 131 316 7483). On 29 October the island of Alderney will issue a set of six **Sherlock Holmes** stamps. Guernsey Philatelic Bureau (Envoy House, La Vrangué, St Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands GY1 1AB; phone 01481 716486; philatelic@guernseypost.com) will sell the set of six at £3.97, First Day Cover at £3.97, Presentation Pack at £3.97, and a Sherlock Holmes Mystery Pack at £9.99.

Roger Llewellyn is touring again with David Stuart Davies's splendid play *Sherlock Holmes — The Death and Life*. His schedule for the next six weeks is: 17–20 September **Ellen Terry Barn Theatre**, Tenterden (www.ellenterrybarntheatre.co.uk; 01424 440484); 24 September **Arts Depot** North Finchley, (www.artsdepot.co.uk; 020 83695454)*; 26 September **Island Arts Centre**, Lisburn (www.islandartscentre.com; 028 92 509254); 30 September **Cramphorn Theatre**, Chelmsford, (www.chelmsford.gov.uk/theatres; 01245 606505)*; 15 October **Off the Shelf Festival**, Sheffield (www.offtheshelf.org.uk; 0114 2734716 / 4400); 16 October **Town Hall**, Loughborough, (www.loughboroughtownhall.co.uk; 01509 231914); 25 October **Memorial Theatre**, Broadstairs (www.sarahthorne-theatreclub.co.uk; 0845 2626263); 30 October **Cornerstone**, Didcot (www.cornerstone-arts.org; 01235 515144). (*At these theatres the play is *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!*)

A Gallery of Rogues: The Adversaries of Sherlock Holmes is the title of the thirtieth annual Saturday with Sherlock Holmes, presented at the Enoch Pratt Central Library in Baltimore, Maryland, by **The Six Napoleons of Baltimore**, **The Carlton Club** and **Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City**. Speakers include John Pforr, Evelyn Herzog, John Baesch, Andrew Lee Solberg and William Hyder. The event begins at 10.00 am on 7 November, and admission is free. Phone for details to 410 396 5494 or 410 997 9114.

Producer and writer **Harry Alan Towers** died on 31 July, aged eighty-eight, after a career distinguished for its length and prolificity. In 1954 he produced a memorable Sherlock Holmes radio series, with John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson, and returned to Baker Street in the TV films *Sherlock Holmes and the Leading Lady* and *Incident at Victoria Falls*, with Christopher Lee and Patrick Macnee.

Periodicals received. *The Baker Street Bugle*, 1 July 2009 (**The Deerstalkers of Welshpool**, Roy Upton-Holder, Baskerville, 146 Little Henfaes Drive, Welshpool, Powys SY21 7BA [*a notable issue — number 50A!*]). *The Camden House Journal*, August 2009 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Communication*, no. 292/293 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, September 2009 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Mayday Mayday*, September 2009 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarney Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *The Passengers' Log*, 22 May/7 August 2009 (**The Sydney Passengers**, Rosane McNamara, 4/2a Merlin Street, Neutral Bay, NSW 2089, Australia).

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

Roger Johnson