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WATSON'S TIN BOX

Irene's Cabinet

RESULTS OF THE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC ASPIRATIONS OF THE MEMBERSHIP IN THE FORM OF ESSAYS, POETRY AND ART, WITH PARTICULAR REGARD FOR THE VICTORIAN ERA IN HONOR OF ALL THINGS

SHERLOCKIAN

EDITOR: BETH AUSTIN
VOLUME 5
2007

COVER: JCS

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"And Mademoiselle's address?" he asked.
"Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood."
Holmes took a note of it. "One other question," said he.
"Was the photograph a cabinet?"
"It was."
"Then, good-night, your Majesty."
– A Scandal in Bohemia

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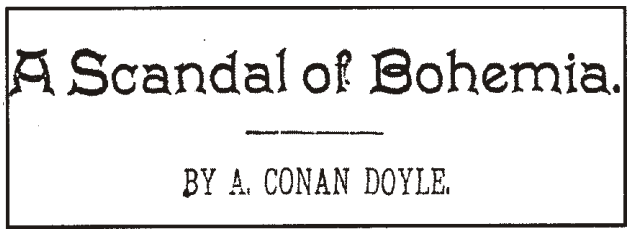
The Press, Watson, is a Most Valuable Institution. . .

– Andy Solberg, BSI

One of the most interesting things in studying Sherlockian culture is to see how Holmes, Watson, and the literary agent Conan Doyle were perceived during the period that the Canon was originally finding its way into print.


A Scandal of Bohemia.

BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

The *Washington Post* has digitized archives that go back to 1877. Of course, Holmes hit the public for the first time in 1887. I have searched the *Post's* archives for the earliest articles on Holmes. While the *Post* had published a couple of Doyle's early non-Sherlockian stories, the first reference that I could find to Sherlock Holmes was the publication in the *Post* of *A Scandal of Bohemia* on July 12, 1891. First, note the title. We know the story as *A Scandal in Bohemia,* but the *Post* found reason to change the title. *Scandal* is, of course, the first published of all of the short stories. It was the first of the twelve stories that were grouped as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.*

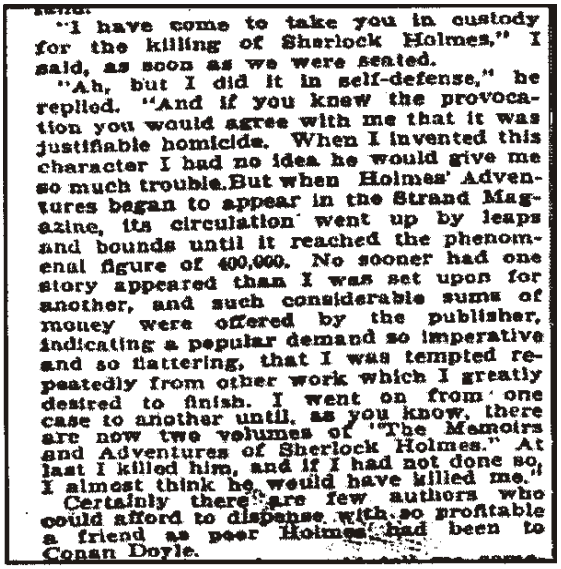
"I SAW IT AS SHE HALF DREW IT OUT"

Scandal was first published in London in *The Strand Magazine* in July of 1891, but the *Adventures* were not published in the U.S. in a magazine such as Harper's or Collier's, as future stories were. Instead, they were published in newspapers around the U.S. For example, in Baltimore, the *Baltimore Weekly Sun* published *Scandal* under the title, *Woman's Wit,* on August 8, 1891. No wonder, Conan Doyle or Watson sought out agreements in which he had more control (and probably remuneration) for future stories.

In the *Post's* publication, *Scandal* fit into seven columns, accompanied by two illustrations. Clearly, the artist was no Sidney Paget (the illustrator in the Strand). Paget's Holmes is endearingly idiosyncratic, while the Holmes in the *Post* looks more handsome, accessible, and boring.

The *Post* also published *A Case of Identity,* the third of the *Adventures,* on September 6, 1891. While *Scandal* had not been put under the title, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Identity* was. However, the art accompanying *Identity* was even worse than in *Scandal.* Clearly, no attempt was made to use art to make the character more appealing.

After the publication *of Identity* in the *Post,* it would seem that Holmes had not taken hold as a cultural figure because there would be no more articles published in the *Post* which used his name until 1894, after Holmes reportedly died at the Reichenbach.



"I have come to take you in custody for the killing of Sherlock Holmes," I said, as soon as we were seated.

"Ah, but I did it in self-defense," he replied. "And if you knew the provocation you would agree with me that it was justifiable homicide. When I invented this character I had no idea he would give me so much trouble. But when Holmes' Adventures began to appear in the Strand Magazine, its circulation went up by leaps and bounds until it reached the phenomenal figure of 400,000. No sooner had one story appeared than I was set upon for another, and such considerable sums of money were offered by the publisher, indicating a popular demand so imperative and so flattering, that I was tempted repeatedly from other work which I greatly desired to finish. I went on from one case to another until, as you know, there are now two volumes of 'The Memoirs and Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.' At last I killed him, and if I had not done so, I almost think he would have killed me."

Certainly there are few authors who could afford to dispense with so profitable a friend as poor Holmes had been to Conan Doyle.

The Washington Post (1877-1954); Sep 6, 1891; ProQuest Historical Newspapers pg. 15

THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES.

A Case Of Identity.

By A. Conan Doyle.

On June 10, 1894, a long, entertaining interview with Conan Doyle (*A Self Defense Plea*) appeared in the *Post.* Near the beginning, the un-named interviewer said to Conan Doyle, "I have come to take you into custody for the killing of Sherlock Holmes." Conan Doyle responded, "Ah, but I did it in self defense. And if you knew the provocation you would agree with me that it was justifiable homicide." Conan Doyle then went on to explain how Holmes kept him from his more serious histories.

The tone of the article indicates clearly that, despite the previous lack of Holmesian references in the *Post,* Sherlock Holmes had taken hold by 1894. Otherwise, why take on the role of public prosecutor regarding Holmes's death? Furthermore, in all, there were thirteen articles in the *Post* that mentioned Sherlock Holmes in 1894 (compared to a search for "Sherlock Holmes" for the year 2006, which resulted in 46 references). Some of the articles were about people who were good detectives, such as "SHERLOCK HOLMES IN CHICAGO," "SHERLOCK HOLMES IS HERE," or "SCOTLAND YARD MEN." Some reported on Conan Doyle, such as "CONAN DOYLE DEDUCES" and "DR. CONAN DOYLE IN EVIDENCE."

In 1895, there were thirteen more references to Holmes in the *Post.* Some of these were in introductions to fictional stories that the *Post* was publishing (just as it has published *Scandal* and *Identity).* One article, with the long title "SCIENCE AS A SLEUTH – The Old-fashioned Detective Opposes It Vigorously – HENRY CASE AN EXAMPLE" had an even longer subtitle, "Expert Testimony on a Few Faded Blood Stains Relied Upon to Secure Conviction.
– Easily Contradicted by Other Experts, and the Hawkshaws Are Gambling Against Conviction – Science in the Cases of Carlyle Harris and Dr. Buchanan. What Human Blood Is. Not a Good Test. Science as a Detective."

Another article (March 11, 1895) was:

What Conan Doyle Owes to Poe

> Of Poe's genius as a writer of short stories Dr. Doyle cannot say enough. He regards him pre-eminently the master of this literary form, and as the inventor of the detective story, to which the "Sherlock Holmes" series makes the most definite and extended English contribution.

Other articles mention the need for a Sherlock Holmes in the solving of specific crimes, and there are more reports on Conan Doyle's activities. Articles on "real Sherlock Holmeses" and the need for a Holmes were to continue down to the present day.

In 1896 (while new Holmes adventures were on hiatus), the number of Sherlockian references declined. There were only eight references. My favorite for that year was "Sherlock Holmes in Love," reprinted in the *Post* from the *Chicago Tribune.*

The years 1897 and 1898 were virtual droughts, with only one reference in 1897 and six in the latter year. But 1899 saw the play Sherlock Holmes with William Gillette, and there were 21 references to Holmes in the *Post* that year, nearly all having to do with theater. In 1900, the trend continued, as there were 37 Sherlockian references, again, almost entirely having to do with theater.

In one article, "COMING ATTRACTIONS," (Nov 11, 1900) the *Post* stated: "That master of deduction, he who 'by indirections found directions out,' Sherlock Holmes, the detective, will track criminals to their haunts and incidentally entertain audiences at the New National Theater for a week beginning Monday, November 10. This will be the first appearance of William Gillette in his celebrated play in this city." On November 20, the *Post* reviewed the play in "William Gillette in 'Sherlock Holmes' at the New National."

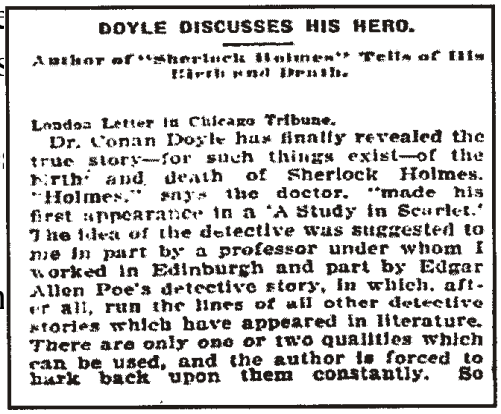
> Conan Doyle's celebrated detective appeared upon the stage of the New National Theater last night in the person of William Gillette, and not one person in the capacity-audience found the least flaw in either his mental or physical reproduction. Those who have read the book possibly expected, as is the case with so many stage versions of popular books that the personification would fall short of the original literary creation.

This reflects, not only on how much Holmes had arrived in the national psyche, but also on the importance that Gillette's play had, both in the theatrical world and also in boosting the visibility of Holmes. This phenomenon would occur many times in the next hundred years, from Basil Rathbone's movies and radio shows to Peter Cushing's movies to Nicholas Meyer's *Seven Percent Solution* to Jeremy Brett's Holmes on television. Periodically, in the midst of a slump in Holmes's popularity, another Sherlockian event or portrayal will capture the public's attention.

However, not all of the articles were about Gillette. An interview with Conan Doyle was published on December 30, 1900 in which he tells of the "birth and death of Sherlock Holmes." Near the end of the article, Conan Doyle provided a bit of a teaser.

> From that day to this, I have never for an instant regretted the course I took in killing Sherlock Holmes. That is not to say, however, that because he is dead, I should not write about him again if I wanted to, for there is no limit to the number of papers that he left behind, or of the reminiscences in the brain of his biographer.

This is the closest thing there is to a hint that the would be more to come. In 1901, there were 41 references in the *Post,* again almost all having to do with theater. However, there was no article trumpeting that Holmes would once again appear in the publication of the first new Holmes Story in nearly eight years, *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* which was published in *The Strand* in August, 1901.



DOYLE DISCUSSES HIS HERO.

Author of "Sherlock Holmes" Tells of His Birth and Death.

London Letter in Chicago Tribune.

Dr. Conan Doyle has finally revealed the true story—for such things exist—of the birth and death of Sherlock Holmes. "Holmes," says the doctor, "made his first appearance in a 'A Study in Scarlet.' The idea of the detective was suggested to me in part by a professor under whom I worked in Edinburgh and part by Edgar Allen Poe's detective story, in which, after all, run the lines of all other detective stories which have appeared in literature. There are only one or two qualities which can be used, and the author is forced to bark back upon them constantly. So

On April 20, 2002, after the publication of *The Hound,* the *Post* did include the following in the editorial section:

> It may be remembered that some weeks ago I told the story of how Conan Doyle's last story was inspired by Mr. Fletcher Robinson while they were both strolling over the golf links at Cromer, and how Conan Doyle, like the fine fellow he is, instead of annexing the idea without pay and without acknowledgment, as many an author, especially a dramatic author, has done before, gave Mr. Robinson a considerable share of the pay for the book and also promised acknowledgment of his services. Mr. Conan Doyle has fulfilled his promise, for the note is in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles,' now that it is published in book form.

In all, there were 41 references to Sherlock Holmes in the *Post* in 1902. Again, many of these had to do with the theater, but it appears that many were also literary in nature. However, the official resurrection of Sherlock Holmes did get more of a herald. On June 14, 1903, the *Post* included:

> LONDON LITERARY NOTES
> London, May 27. – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has laid "Brigadier Gerard" away, he says, permanently; has discontinued work on the revised edition of his "Great Boer War," and is now devoting himself exclusively to the new series of Sherlock Holmes stories, which are to begin in July. Of course, it has been revealed in the United States that the erstwhile "Doctor" Doyle has discovered that his old companion in Baker street was not killed after all in the Alps, but it may not have been stated that the new adventure of Sherlock Holmes will consist of eight separate stories.

While many of the 26 articles referencing Holmes in 1903 continued to be about Gillette's play, the decline from 41 articles in 1902 seems to indicate that Gillette was not the dominant subject he had been in the previous years. Many of the 1902 articles were literary in nature ("POPULAR WRITERS AND THEIR BOOKS" and more "LONDON LITERARY NOTES"), some were about real people ("WOULD-BE DETECTIVES" and "CABINET'S SHERLOCK HOLMES"), and some were about situations that required a Sherlock Holmes ("TALE OF A TATTOOED HAND" and "KNOCKED OFF HIS BOAT"). One article was about a production of *The Sign of the Four* at the Lafayette Opera House." However, my favorite was published on October 18, 1903 in the editorial section:

FACTS VS. FICTION.
What Scotland Yard Organization Thinks of Sherlock Holmes.
Special Correspondence of The Sunday Post.

> London, Oct. 7. – Sherlock Holmes confided to Dr. Watson so many times his unreserved opinion of the official detectives, or Scotland Yarders, that Conan Doyle's readers will be especially interested in what Sir Robert Anderson, head of London's criminal investigation department, has just written – apropos of Holmes's "return" – concerning the estimate which the "regular men" hold of the amateur sleuth-hound of Baker street.

The article continues:

Doyle's Hero

> Evidently, however, Sir Robert Anderson does not take Holmes' jibe at the expense of Scotland Yard with great seriousness. "There is a wide difference," he says, "between the work of the responsible police officer, whose business it is to bring criminals to justice, and the work of the 'private detective,' who has merely to ascertain the facts and to solve seeming mysteries. But the difference is not so vital as that which distinguishes the fancies of the novelist from the facts of real life. He must be a poor sort of creature who cannot solve his own problems. And it is delightful to notice how accurately the Sherlock Holmes keys invariably fit the Sherlock Holmes locks and how invariably his two and two makes four. But in real life the keys are apt to get mixed or mislaid, and two and two have sometimes a way of making twenty-two; all of which may be quite unpreventable and is always embarrassing."

Clearly Holmes had become the cultural phenomenon that he is today. The articles on theater, literature, "real" Sherlocks, and the need for a Holmes continued for many years. These days, many of the *Posts* references are about movie and television listings, but many touch on the same subject matter that was established while the stories were still being revealed to the world for the first time.

To the Woman

a series of Haiku

– The Hichar Family

Irene Adler
retired opera diva
held a photograph

The great sherlock Holmes
detective extraordinaire
vowed to recover it

Irene Adler
tricked by Holmes as a clergy
showed where she hid it

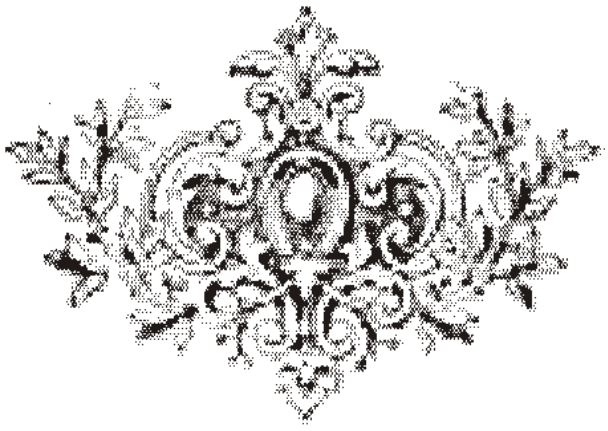
Irene Adler
as a master of disguise
bid Mr. Holmes good night

Irene Adler
she married the better man
And fled at daybreak

Irene Adler
what a queen she would have been
the King said, smiling

The great sherlock Holmes
a photo of Irene
his only reward

Irene Adler
she was always "The Woman"
revered by us all



Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest

2007 Clarkson Prize Winning Essays

This past year, Watson's Tin Box held its Third Annual Sherlock Holmes Essay Contest for seventh graders in Howard County, Maryland. Once again, the Tin Box partnered with Howard County Library, Howard County Public Schools, and Barnes & Noble of Ellicott City. Participating students read the *Adventure of the Speckled Band* and wrote essays. English teachers in the Public Schools voluntarily participated, and Howard County Library made the participation possible for home schooled and private schooled students. Once again, Barnes & Noble of Ellicott City graciously contributed to meeting the costs of the contest. Watson's Tin Box is very grateful to its partners for making this contest both possible and such a success. Over the last three years, the contest has brought Sherlock Holmes to approximately 1,000 students.

Each year, the Tin Box has awarded First, Second, and Third Place Prizes to the top three essays. The First Prize in the contest is *The Clarkson Prize,* an award named after Tin Box founder Steve Clarkson, BSI, who was a mentor to so many young Sherlockians. Steve started a Sherlock Holmes literary society for young people in the late 1960s. It included members from across the country. As it was before the advent of e-mail, the young Sherlockians would distribute their analyses of the Sherlock Holmes stories to each other by mail. Steve continued mentoring young Sherlockians until he passed away in 2004.

With the approval of the winners, the Clarkson Prize winning essays are published in *Irene's Cabinet.* While all of the essays that we have received have been excellent, the Clarkson Prize winners clearly stand out. This year, the judges were delighted to declare a tie for the Clarkson Prize. It is with great pride that we publish these two winning essays on the *Speckled Band.* They are presented in no special order, and these two students can be equally proud to be young published authors.

Cyndi Koster
Grade: 7
Age: 13
School: Home Schooled
School– Howard County
Class: Ms. Iammatteo

Harsha Neerchal
Grade: 7
Age: 12
School: Burleigh Manor Middle
Howard County
Class: Ms. Nellany

Man vs Manor

– Cyndi Koster

It is no mystery that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* would hardly be as intriguing without the presence of Stoke Moran, the manor in which Dr. Grimesby Roylott's sinister plot is very nearly carried out. The antiquity of the manor, its state of ruin, make the story come alive in an eerie and hostile way that makes this piece of fiction almost impossible to put down. The same thing can be said about Dr. Grimesby Roylott, the man inside of whom this twisted plot developed. His ominous threats, wild nature, and calmness about the homicides that he intended to commit make the readers' hair stand on end.

If one is to delve further into Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's masterpiece, however, one will realize that there is more to the mystery, more that is subtly hidden by the author. There are many startling similarities between the man and the manor – and it doesn't take too much sleuthing to find them.

The first similarity is the fact that both Dr. Grimesby Roylott and Stoke Moran had both fallen into a state of disheartening disrepair. Both were once beautiful and respected, but with time slowly deteriorated into ruin. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Stoke Moran as Watson first sees it is a perfect example.

> *The building was of gray, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out to each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin.*

Arthur Conan Doyle's description of Dr. Roylott is, if possible, more startling.

> *...A huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock coat and a pair of high gaiters with a hunting crop swinging in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross-bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun and marked with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes and his high, thin, fleshless nose gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.*

From these paragraphs, one can derive the idea that both doctor and mansion were once respectable, yet collapsed into misfortune and debt. The way that this happened to both of them is very alike.

The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage.

And Ms. Helen Stoner describes the way that the doctor's slow disintegration began, startlingly similar to the fall of the manor.

...A terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbors, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path.

Besides the similar state of ruin, Dr. Grimesby Roylott is much like Stoke Moran in the way that both are very strange and wild in an almost animal-like way. The presence of the dummy bell pull, the tethered bed, and the pernicious ventilator throw a shadow of erratic unpredictability over the manor, not unlike the strange twisted emotions that the doctor possesses.

He had no friends at all save the wandering gypsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represented the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end.

The presence of the baboon and cheetah again reveal the doctor's wild decisions. In fact, the animals are much like him in the sense that they are feared by the villagers and are capable of seriously maiming or even killing a victim of their wrath.

He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely around his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

Another similarity between Dr. Grimesby Roylott and his manor is the fact that both are very fearsome. It can be said that, when turned astray, they are both the most sinister of their kind. An example can be found in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writing below.

When a doctor has gone wrong, he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge.

And a spectacular mansion, towering and regal, is far more chilling in ruin than a small hovel or other structure of less noble origin.

Because of these similarities, it seems that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was telling the reader something more than is directly obvious. It seems that he was trying to symbolize that the doctor and manor perhaps even met the same fate – neglect leading to misuse, which finally lead to the downfall of some once glorious creation. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle states at the end of his story:

> *Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the very pit which he digs for another.*

Case closed.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" – *from a Workman's Perspective*

– Harsha Neerchal

My client this time was an old curmudgeon with a quick temper who obviously had no sense of the kind of repairs that were needed in his house. He was one of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, and lived in a ramshackle old mansion. The room that he was asking me to renovate looked perfectly fine to me. However, he was as bullheaded as he looked. As soon as I made the suggestion that it may be better to repair the kitchen or drawing room, he blew his top, and I narrowly escaped a beating at his hands.

The house, in years past, may have been an elegant structure, but now was falling apart fast. It seemed that my client. Dr. Grimsby Roylott, lived with his daughter in one wing of the house. I didn't examine the other two parts of the house, but it was clearly visible that they were in dire need of refurbishment.

Strangely enough, Roylott's daughter seemed scared stiff of moving into another room, and even more scared of her father. It wasn't long before I began to have suspicions about the whole affair. A room that didn't need remodeling, a domineering father, and a daughter who was irrationally afraid of moving into a room. This definitely pointed toward some foul play.

One day, as my fellow workers and I were leaving the house, I saw the doctor's daughter, a girl by the name of Helen Stoner, leading two men toward the house. Intrigued by this, I left my workers to go back to the house, on the pretext of looking for a dropped tool. After about ten minutes, I realized that the two men were actually detectives. That confirmed my suspicions about Dr. Roylott. Helen Stoner must have sought professional help to find out what her father was planning. As they passed by, I heard Helen Stoner mention a "speckled band."

What could the speckled band be? I decided to remember the name, in case it fell into place later. Helen Stoner then told the detectives about a cheetah and a baboon that her father had brought from India, and warned them that these animals were allowed to roam freely on the grounds. Upon hearing this, I cast a glance over my shoulder in alarm, expecting to see the cheetah or the baboon. Fortunately, neither animal was in view, but when I turned back to look for Helen Stoner and the two detectives, they were already setting foot into the house.

I left the premises of the house once the detectives entered the house with Helen Stoner. I deemed that it would be unseemly for me to be found following the detectives. Convinced that something fishy was going on at Stoke Moran, I left the house, determined to pursue an investigation of my own later.

Two days later, I commenced my investigation. My comrades had gone to purchase food, but I had remained, because I had brought my own lunch. During this time I entered the house to examine the rooms. Ignoring the room we were working on, for it was completely empty, I started to investigate the room that I assumed was Helen Stoner's. By chance, when I entered the room, I tripped over my own feet, and broke my fall against the room's small bed. Surprisingly, the bed did not budge. Once I observed the feet of the bed, I realized that they had been firmly nailed to the ground. Above the bed was a ventilator which was connected directly to the doctor's room. Beside the bed was a bell pull fastened below the ventilator. Out of curiosity, I yanked the bell pull expecting a loud resonant sound to emit from it. Shockingly, no audible sound was made! The bell pull was obviously fake! Deciding that this room had nothing else to yield, I moved on to the doctor's room. His room did not particularly fit that of one who was plotting any mischief. Ridiculously plain, the room had a camp-bed, a full bookshelf, an armchair, a table, and a heavy iron safe. A saucer of milk and a lash curled into a noose-like shape were the two oddities in the room. I went to lift the safe, and determined that whatever was in the safe was not of particular weight. Concluding that there was nothing else to search in the room, I left to eat my lunch, for my comrades soon would come back.

As I ate, the pieces seemed to fit together in my mind. I had heard the daughter speak to her father about her wedding the first day I came to work on the house. I thought perhaps that Roylott may not have particularly liked the man his daughter was engaged to, and given the man's terrible temperament, decided to kill his daughter, who must have strongly stood by her decision. However, I still did not know how Roylott was planning to murder his daughter.

The next day, as it was an off day for me, I spent the day reading a book given to me by my brother, a soldier posted in India. The book explained the history of India. A section in the book said that assassins used poison tipped darts to kill kings. The darts were inserted in a hollowed roll of wood which was blown into, to fire the dart. The answer to the case

hit me! I had heard Helen Stoner telling the two detectives that her father had spent many years in India. Roylott must have obtained poisoned darts in India. But no, Roylott did not need to have gotten the darts in India. He allowed gypsies to live on the premises of his property. According to my Indian history book, gypsies were very common in India, and specialized in making these poisoned darts. Helen Stoner must have been referring to the darts when she spoke about the speckled band. My book said that these darts were usually painted with bright colors. Roylott was now going to use them to kill his daughter! The ventilator directly above the bed in the room provided a place to shoot the darts. The bed had been nailed to the ground so that it would never be moved from its location under the ventilator. Since I now knew the answer to the case, I resolved to report my suspicions to the police as soon as possible!

When I read the paper the next morning, I was surprised to see that Roylott had been found dead, and the case had been solved by a famous detective named Sherlock Holmes! The doctor had used "the most dangerous snake in India," a swamp adder, to kill his first daughter, and attempted to kill his second daughter with it. Roylott had been bitten by his own snake and died within minutes! The doctor's late wife had left her husband a large yearly income, but decreed that each daughter must receive portion of the money on the occurrence of their marriage. Roylott conspired to murder both of his daughters so that he could keep the entire yearly income that he received. His plan had been foiled by Holmes who had driven the snake back into the ventilator where it had stung its master who had trained it to kill his daughter!

I went over the case in my mind. Where had I gone wrong? Had I not examined the room carefully enough? I realized that though Holmes and I had both seen the same clues, he had been able to arrive at the correct answer. He is obviously a detective with superb powers of deduction!

While I had interpreted the "speckled band" to be the poisonous dart, Holmes correctly deduced it to be the swamp adder that Roylott had obtained from India, along with his other dangerous pets. I had thought that the ventilator was the perfect passageway for the dart, and had dismissed the dummy bell pull. Holmes, however, correctly reasoned that the ventilator was a passage for the swamp adder, with the bell pull aiding the swamp adder in its descent. In his solution of the case, Holmes incorporated many critical clues that I had ignored. He found that the whip coiled into the noose was used by Roylott to hold the snake, the milk to reward the snake, and the metallic box to keep the snake when not in use.

This case presented many complexities and cleverly concealed clues. Despite this, Sherlock Holmes had masterfully solved the case through his superior intellect and aptitude for solving irregular crimes!

A Toast to Violet Hunter of *The Copper Beeches*

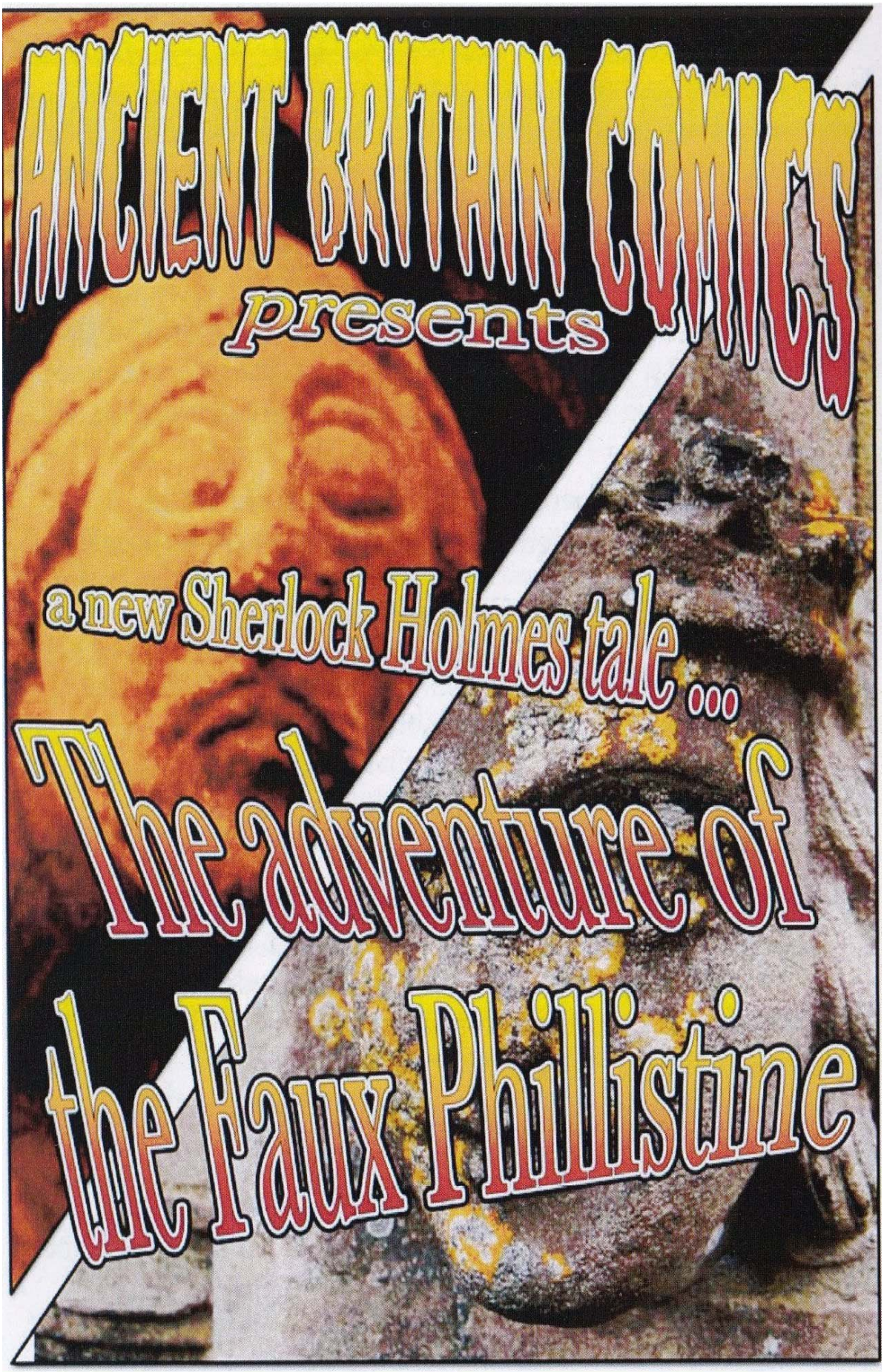
– JCS

Violet had her doubts about her job in Jephro's Hampshire lair.
Holmes had no doubt it was a pity she must cut her hair.
Violet's doubts were myriad by the time she neared that door
and saw that ghostly shadow move across the creaking floor.
But our doubts were diminished as the Duo reached the scene
and Alice with her Fowler made their getaway so clean.
I have no doubt that Carlo got his fill of Jephro's neck;
more violence seems needless – this left Rucastle a wreck.
No doubt dear daughter Alice felt no Anglophilia
when she fled to our fair shores and favored Philadelphia.
What doubts remain? Some say that Violet cast a certain spell
on Sherlock Holmes himself and that in love with her he fell.
But, no, I doubt such charms could sway a heart by love unseared.
A sister? No, I doubt that, too. She never reappeared!
I doubt Holmes held a lasting grudge for seeming such a fool that
he should give advice to women fresh from boarding school. So
let us toast this chronicle – it's quite redoubtable –
And its heroine as well. Our esteem's undoubtable!

A Toast to Mycroft Holmes

– Paul G. Churchill, BSI

He was big, he was smart, he could solve any crime,
If he had all the facts, if he had enough time.
His ambition was nil and his energy worse,
But he audited books for the Government's purse.
His omniscience was awesome, his knowledge immense;
If one gave him a problem, he could have it make sense.
He's the central exchange in the government trade,
Like a bank's clearing house where the balance is made.
There were times, it was felt, when all prospects were dim,
That the whole British Government rested in him!
What had started a shortcut, a mere easy way,
Now became an essential in things day by day.
From an armchair he'd ponder, give reasonings long;
If it meant getting up, he'd rather be wrong!
He was smarter than Sherlock, his brother, by far,
But at pounding the pavement, let's say, not a star!
The Diogenes, Whitehall, his Pall Mall abode
Were the rails that he ran on, the streets that he strode.
The arrival at Baker Street of this great brain
Seemed a tram-car misplaced on some far country lane!
With his brother in Mecca, Tibet and Khartoum,
Mycroft saw to the funding and cared for his room.
He's my hero, this Mycroft, the man I admire;
He embodies the life style to which I aspire!
To Mycroft!!!


ANCIENT BRITAIN COMICS
presents
a new Sherlock Holmes tale ...
The adventure of
the Faux Phillistine

WHO CREATED THIS EXQUISITE DUPLICATE OF THE CROWN DIAMOND, MR. RYDER? TELL US AND WE WILL TRY TO BE LENIENT!
FROM THE SECRET FILES OF WATSON'S TIN BOX OF ELLICOTT CITY, MARYLAND, USA, COMES THIS STRANGE SCENARIO ....
HAVE PITY! IF HE WHO MADE IT LEARNS I TALKED, HE'LL REVOKE MY MEMBERSHIP IN THE BAKER STREET BUILDERS!
AH, MR. RYDER, THEN CERTAINLY IT WAS ONE COROT, MANUFACTURER OF ALL THAT IS FAUX AND HALF THAT IS NOT GENUINE IN THE SHERLOCKIAN WORLD. THANK HEAVEN HIS AGENT MORAN FELL INTO MY TRAP, BUT NOW IT IS TIME FOR ME TO FACE THE EVIL ONE HIMSELF ...
... THE DEVIOUS MASTER FORGER WHO POSES AS A MILD-MANNERED LATIN TEACHER, MR. PAUL CHURCHILL!
TO BE CONTINUED ...

Martha My Dear, or The Unsung Heroine

– April Curnow

Of all the women we may toast,
There's none like Mrs. Hudson.
Irene's cleverer than most,
And yet– ah, Mrs. Hudson.
She's one we often overlook.
Yet Holmes called her a decent cook,
And she once got him off the hook,
The unsung Mrs. Hudson.

When first she met that dauntless pair
We know as Holmes and Watson,
She certainly was unaware
Of what she'd set her eyes on.
A moody sleuth, an Army doc.
How much could those two run amok?
It must have come as quite a shock
To peaceful Martha Hudson.

Yet valiantly she strove to please
And proved accommodating
To lodgers' eccentricities
And sundry clients waiting.
She cooked the meals, tidied rooms,
Put up with shag tobacco fumes
And strange explosions, one assumes,
Long-suffering Mrs. Hudson.

When Holmes played sick, she risked his ire
To summon Dr. Watson.
She feared the poor man might expire
Without such intervention.
He could be masterful and grim,
But she'd grown rather fond of him
And tolerated his every whim,
Soft-hearted Mrs. Hudson.

Holmes needed help to foil Moran.
His ally? Mrs. Hudson.
To outwit Moriarty's man,
With vigilant attention.
Crawling beneath the window's light
She turned Holmes's bust eight times that night.
No fear of bullets put to flight
Intrepid Mrs. Hudson.

By these proofs we may well conclude
This paragon of women
Deserves our heartfelt gratitude
And special commendation:
A tribute in a magazine,
The finest roses ever seen,
Perhaps a medal from the Queen
And, "Well done, Mrs. Hudson."

A Toast to Irene Adler

– Evelyn Herzog

One of the wise old sayings we learned years ago – and which no one seems to use anymore – is "A cat may look at a king." I used it in a conversation a while back, and there was a pause, followed by the question, "Just what does that actually mean?" Then there was another pause while I tried to figure out just what it does mean and how to put it in other words.

It seems to me that to say "A cat may look at a king" is to give some acknowledgment to the judgments that each of us makes about the world around us. A king, at least in olden times, was an immensely powerful person – he would have power of life and death over everybody. A cat (again, at least in olden times) was an utterly powerless creature. And yet even an alley cat, as the king's procession was going by, could look at that king and size him up – does he look like someone who would kick a cat or someone who would give a cat a bit of the royal scampi?

To look is to observe (there's our Canonical keyword), and to observe is to judge. We recall from a story we also learned years ago – The Emperor's New Clothes – that it is sometimes the powerless and disinterested observer (in that case the little child) who observes and judges best.

And so it was that, when Sherlock Holmes wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of Irene Adler, he not only listened to the first-hand but slanted story told by the King of Bohemia, he not only looked Ms. Adler up on the web – I mean, in the press accounts pasted into his Commonplace Book, he not only went to observe her from a distance himself, but he also interviewed the men-in-the-street – or I should say, the men-in-the-mews – people hardly more noticeable and hardly more powerful than the children he called the Baker Street Irregulars – to learn what the neighborhood working people had to say about her.

So if a cat may look at a king, an ostler may look at a diva, and let us now toast the lady who turned all their heads and whom they judged to be the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet: Irene Adler.

An Irregular Salute

– April Curnow

You may talk o' Scotland Yard
Wi' fine inspectors tryin' 'ard
To keep the bad 'uns down an' nab the ones that roams.
But that's just noise an' blather,
So me mates an' me 'ud rather
Choose to serve the great detective Sherlock 'olmes.

What wi' cutthroats, thieves an' squealers, forgers, smashers, double-dealers,
There's enough o' crime to plague both rich an' poor.
Mr. 'olmes gets lots o' cases.
Toffs in top 'ats, silks an' laces,
Common blokes – they all come knockin' at 'is door.

Then it's "'olmes! 'olmes! 'olmes!
Gawd a mercy, will you 'elp us Mr. 'olmes?
We know you're awful busy,
But it's got us in a tizzy.
You're the only one can do it, Sherlock 'olmes."

'E's a tall an' skinny gent
Wi' a keen eye on you bent,
Yet as kind a man as ever you could meet.
There's no need to tip your 'at, sirs,
But 'e calls us the Irreg'lars
'Cause we 'elp 'im out Sometimes on Baker Street.

If a problem takes 'is fancy
'E'll do everythin' 'e can, see,
To find out who stole the jewels or shot to kill.
An' when 'e needs sharp lads for spy in',
Creepin', peepin', pokin', pry in',
We've got eyes an' ears enough to fit the bill.

Then it's " 'olmes! 'olmes! 'olmes!
We're awaitin' of your orders, Mr. 'olmes.
Through an alley, down the river,
Up a chimney – we'll deliver.
We're your key to London, Mr. Sherlock 'olmes."

Now most folks look down their nose
At our rag-an'-tatter clothes.
Why, they treat us like we're mud under their feet.
An' since they 'ardly see us,
We can slip about – they free us
To prowl better'n a Peeler on 'is beat!
I know some o' you are thinkin'
It's the ruddy silver clinkin'
That's what sets us runnin' when we get the call.
But for Mr. 'olmes we're willin'
To work 'ard for ev'ry shillin',
'Cause 'e's someone that respects us one an' all.
So it's 'olmes! 'olmes! 'olmes!
Let's 'ave three cheers for Mr. Sherlock 'olmes!
There's those who court disaster,
Brag they're smarter, stronger, faster,
But 'e'll always be the Master – Sherlock 'olmes.

Limericks Must be Phurned Out Immediamundo

– JCS

Some folks would declare it a dim trick
to churn out a Sherlockian lim'rick.
But for me it's a joy
For each poem's a toy,
Though my critics exist just to nitpick.
– JCS

A Toast to Abe Slaney

– Paul G. Churchill,

Here's a toast to Abe Slaney, the dangerous crook;
He was tall, he was handsome, his nose like a hook,
In a grey flannel suit and a bristling black beard,
With a Panama hat, he was much to be feared!
In Chicago he'd learned all the tricks of his trade;

He had picked up the code that old Patrick had made.
To the gang leader's daughter he said he'd been pledged
(There's no proof of his claim; it is merely alleged),
But when Elsie escaped and to England did flee,
He was hot on her trail just as quick as could be.
Then he found out she'd married some jerk Norfolk squire,
Hilton Cubitt by name, and his heart burned with fire.
So he headed up northward with one single aim,
Off to Ridling Thorpe Manor to stake out his claim.
He would scribble some figures for Elsie with chalk,
In the hope that she'd see them while out for a walk.
But our *dis*honest Abe hadn't counted the fact
That the *husband* would find them, the code would be cracked
By a London detective called in on the case,
Who deciphered the men and to Norfolk would race.
In the meantime our villain had packed up his gun;
In a showdown his aim would be second to none.
He met Elsie, then Hilton; the room filled with lead;
In a moment the latter lay prostrate and dead.
So Abe fled in a hurry to Elrige's Farm
Where he thought that he'd probably come to no harm.
In the morning came Sherlock and Watson, too late,
To encounter the sadness of poor Elsie's fate.
It was now Sherlock's turn to employ the dread code
In an effort to settle the debt that was owed.
An unknowing Abe Slaney to Elsie did come;
He was captured by Holmes and was nearly struck dumb
When he heard that his sweetheart was laid up in bed;
She'd be charged with the murder, though shot through the head.
So our Abe simply broke down and poured out his soul;
He admitted his part and confessed his dire role.
Watson tells us that Slaney avoided the rope,
But he's dancing a new tune, a man without hope.
He is learning new steps in the school of hard knocks,
Where he digs in the mud pits and hammers on rocks.
Let us drink to the ill-fated crook of our tale,
To Abe Slaney who dances his waltzes in gaol!!!

Sherlockian Sudoku

– JCS

This sudoku-style puzzle has been designed specifically for Sherlockians in an effort to stimulate their collective brainpower.

The puzzle uses nine different letters (instead of numbers) and features a clue word (or phrase) whose answer is spelled out in one horizontal row or vertical column of the completed puzzle.

To solve the puzzle, make sure every column, row and 3×3 box contains the nine different letters. Apply pure logic to the problem and you can't miss.

K		U				R		Y
L	Y			H			E	S
U	S		E		C		L	K
H	L		S		Y		C	R
R	C			K			S	H
S		E				U		C

Here's your clue:
"This is among Holmes's nicknames at the Yard."

C	R	U	H	Y	L	E	K	S
H	S	Y	E	K	U	L	C	R
E	K	L	S	C	R	H	U	Y
R	C	E	Y	U	S	K	L	H
U	Y	S	K	L	H	C	R	E
K	L	H	C	R	E	Y	S	U
L	U	K	R	E	Y	S	H	C
S	E	C	U	H	K	R	Y	L
Y	H	R	L	S	C	U	E	K

Roaming Sherlockian Norfolk

– John C. Sherwood

I drove through the massive gate and along the shadowy, tree-lined lane. Ahead, I could see the dim outline of a huge, ancient building. Suddenly, I felt as though I knew where I was. It was as though I was coming home.

The trees weren't yew and it was still afternoon, yet I could easily imagine this place late at night, at a time when the forces of evil are exalted. In my mind, I could hear a nearby growl and the relentless pad of heavy paws.

Yet this was a real place – and, as I passed these substantial trees, the view opened up to disclose a broad expanse of flat, lush land to the left and a massive, four-century-old house to the right. Reverently, I murmured, "Ah! Baskerville Hall!" I was not in Dartmoor, which I'd explored twice before. On this 2006 visit to the United Kingdom, I was in the county of Norfolk. And this was the last place I expected to find a ringer for the Hound's famous haunt.

Business and pleasure had taken me on my third excursion to Norfolk since 1974, and provided time to kill – as well as a whim to check more deeply into that area's Sherlockian connections.

An initial glance into Jack Tracy's *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana* had produced several tidbits. The first was a passing reference – in *The Adventure of Black Peter* – to John Hopley Nelligan's attire, a sportsman's tailless coat known as a Norfolk jacket. Next came the expected references to *The Adventure of the 'Gloria Scott'* and *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*, both of which boast Norfolk settings – even though the Grenada series starring Jeremy Brett chose inexplicably to place *The Dancing Men* in Derbyshire.

Closer investigation revealed a host of intriguing details just beneath the surface.

Royal Cromer Golf Club, Norfolk

The Hound of the Baskervilles

As we all know, this supreme tale of Sherlock Holmes is set in Dartmoor, in the southwestern county of Devonshire. Even so, *The Hound* owes its genesis to Cromer, a resort town on Norfolk's North Sea coast, hundreds of miles away.

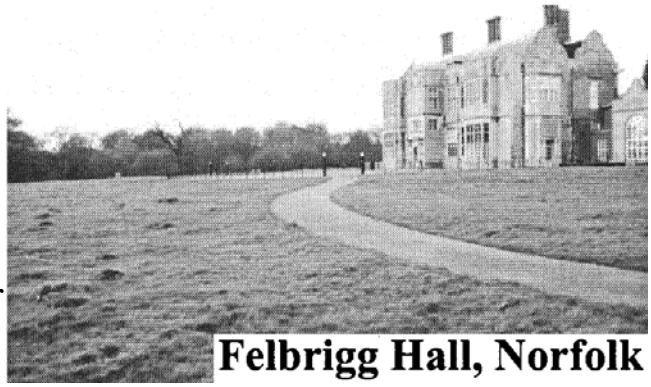
There, in early 1901, Arthur Conan Doyle (not yet Sir) and his friend Bertram Fletcher Robinson, a journalist and editor, chose to enjoy some rounds of golf at the Royal Cromer Golf Club, and stayed at the course's hotel.

According to the story popularized by a number of regional tourist boards, Robinson and Doyle chatted about the Norfolk's own hell-hound, "Black Shuck," which legend said roamed the hotel's grounds and the environs as far as the now-destroyed Cromer Hall.

As all Sherlockians know, Conan Doyle offered to write a story based on the tale told by Robinson, who invited the author to visit him at his home in Devonshire to work out further details. Their subsequent tour of Dartmoor convinced the pair to set their fictional story there.

Conan Doyle eventually wrote *The Hound* on his own, dedicating the result to Robinson. But, as there's no counterpart of Baskerville Hall in Dartmoor itself, where Conan Doyle derived its description remains – at least among Sherlockians – an unexamined mystery.

I suggest that one need look no farther than the location where it all began – Cromer. There, just two miles to the southwest, lies Felbrigg Hall, the sprawling 17th century home on 500 acres now maintained by the National Trust.



Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk

It's easy to imagine that, while visiting Cromer Conan Doyle would not have missed visiting this remarkable structure – and subsequently using its appearance in describing the location he associated with his own version of "Black Shuck."

We don't know for certain that Conan Doyle actually *did* visit Felbrigg Hall, but his other tales of Holmes suggest that he knew more about this specific county than is suggested by what's known about his personal history.

A glance at the dates of publication shows us that *The Hound, The Dancing Men* and *Black Peter* all were published within a span between early 1902 and early 1904, during the time that Conan Doyle is known to have frequented Norfolk as a visitor. Specifically, *The Hound* began to be serialized in April 1902, *The Dancing Men* appeared in its first magazine publication in December 1903, and *Black Peter* was published first in February 1904.

This leaves *The 'Gloria Scott'* as the oddity. Let's turn to that one next.

The Gloria Scott

This tale was published in April 1893, nearly a decade *before* any of the other "Norfolk tales." And yet, here Conan Doyle displays a familiarity with the Norfolk landscape that appears to be first-hand. He describes the attractions, the landscape, the houses and the type of people who labored there. And his details are accurate and true to Norfolk.

Conan Doyle paid no known visit to Norfolk prior to this publication, so it is difficult to understand how he came to be so familiar with the region. Did he get his information secondhand? If so, we don't know his source, but that source must have been well-informed.

What makes all this truly mysterious is that Conan Doyle names a specific village in Norfolk that has a unique name – Langmere. There is no other community or location by that name anywhere else in Great Britain. In fact, because Langmere is so small and relatively undistinguished, it's rarely shown on any map.

And yet, near here, Conan Doyle had his most famous creation recognize his personal destiny, at the home of Victor Trevor and his father, in the village of Donnithorpe – "a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere, in the country of the Broads."

Intrigued, I visited Langmere and – roughly two miles to the *south* – the village and parish of Thorpe Abbotts, on the banks of the Waveney and about a mile from the Suffolk border. Langmere itself offered little to see, but at Thorpe Abbotts I sensed the atmosphere, mood and setting of Holmes's first case everywhere I went, for many local structures meet the age requirement and correspond to Conan Doyle's description.

It seemed that, with Langmere within walking distance, Thorpe Abbotts was the likely location of Conan Doyle's "Donnithorpe."

An irony lies in this situation's heart. When I conversed with several residents of the immediate area, most displayed the same general knowledge the average American possesses when it comes to the topic of Sherlock Holmes – that is, close to nil. How frustrating that, here – in the place where Holmes learned that he should become a detective – his history goes unrecognized and ignored.

The Dancing Men

The situation is different to the east, in the Norfolk coastal village of Happisburgh. Ask anyone at the Hill House Hotel – or anyone who Googles its name and location on the Web.

The hotel proudly boasts a plaque that was put in place in mid-2006, commemorating the local legend that Conan Doyle wrote *The Dancing Men* there.

According to the legend, Conan Doyle wrote the story in the hotel's Boarding House, specifically in the Green Room, overlooking one of the finest bowling greens in the district, and was inspired by what one Web site describes as "a curious hand-written script formed by stick men that the landlord's son had written in the guest book."

The site goes on to say that the boy's name was Gilbert Cubitt!

The local claim comes from an area woman, Patricia Riches, who says she's descended from the hotel's previous owner, Robert Cubitt, and that Gilbert therefore was a great-uncle.

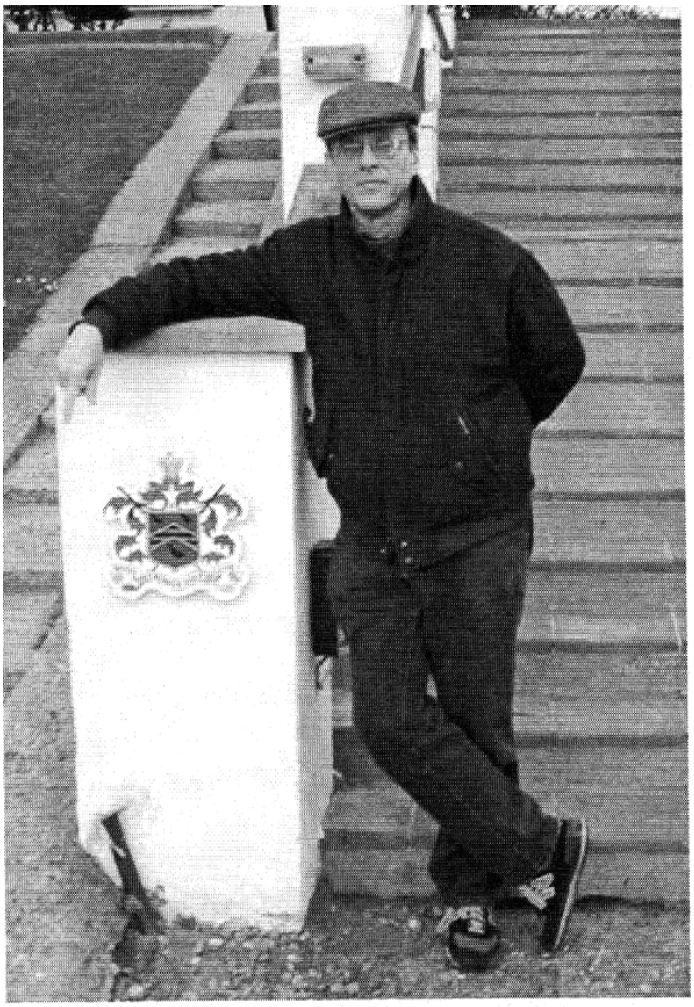
Now, in *The Dancing Men* Holmes is consulted by Hilton Cubitt, who's perplexed by the appearance of scrawled stick-figures in various locations on his estate, Ridling Thorpe Manor. If this particular family tale is accurate, this story owes much to specific facts centering on Happisburgh.

The account seems plausible, since we know Conan Doyle indeed did visit Norfolk during this period. And there's little doubt Conan Doyle was familiar with the area, as he borrows from local names – specifically, the villages of Ridlington and Edingthorpe – to create "Ridling Thorpe."

Alas, I never reached Happisburgh during my 2006 visit to Norfolk, but I did manage to make two visits to Norfolk areas associated with *The Dancing Men.*

One locale was Norwich, Norfolk's regional administrative center and county town. It's identified in the story as the administrative base for Inspector Martin, and it was at the Norwich Assizes that Abe Slaney originally was condemned to death – although he got off with penal servitude.

Also, I attempted to drop in on one spot that, according to Baring-Gould, has been identified as a possible site for Ridling Thorpe Manor. This is The Grange, situated a few miles south of – surprise! – Cromer. Now, this seems far afield from Happisburgh, but nonetheless its proximity intrigued me enough to take a look.



The author on the Links, Norfolk

Baring-Gould's notation is nearly a half-century old, but The Grange still exists. So proclaimed a hand-lettered sign near the entrance to the estate. Another sign, in essence, firmly suggested that visitors weren't welcome.

That second message – hand-scrawled with no more finesse than Abe Slaney's stick men – seemed to hint at the likely presence of Slaney-style weaponry, especially if I drove further onto what was obviously considered to be private land. It was the first time I'd encountered unfriendliness in Norfolk, but I decided to respect the scrawler's wishes and turned my car toward Norfolk's other charms.

Fortunately, there are many. They're not all Sherlockian in nature, but one can't have everything. In fact, the diehard Sherlockian is fortunate indeed to find so much in Norfolk to investigate and ponder.

Confessions of a Biblioholic

– Beth A.

Hello, my name is Beth, and I'm a biblioholic. I have been for as long as I can remember, even before I could read. Some children fall to sleep at night cuddling a soft, plush teddy bear. Others clutch their blankie, woobie, or other source of security. Me, I clung to a full color, oversized, gilt-edged volume of *A Child's Garden of Verses.* At the age of two, I am told, I would walk off with others' books – regardless of title, construction, or cover art. As long as it had paper and black squiggles on the pages, it was mine. Before long, I had a stash built up. I kept it in my closet. Waaaay in the back, where it was always dark. I'll never forget the time my Mother, my ultimate enabler, found my stash. She thought it was cute, how precocious. She decided it was time for me to learn to read. I would never be the same again.

All of my earliest memories, good and bad, seem to have books at the center of them. My best buddy was Mikey. He lived next door and our mothers were (and 45 years later still are) friends. Mikey and I – luckily – attended the same kindergarten. Our mothers love to tell the story, for some reason they think it's FUNNY! of when they each got a call from the kindergarten teacher asking for a *conference.* Oh dear. Turns out that Mikey and I refused to play with the other children and would only interact with each other. We would take the bookcase, turn it on its side, empty the toys – heaven forbid they actually have books in the bookcase – climb in and play. But no one else was allowed in, just the two of us. And no one had yet caught on. Even then the desire, the pull, the lure of the book was upon me. Mikey however escaped the addiction, I honestly don't know how because I know I fed it to him daily. Any way...

By the time I was eight I was reading adult books, visiting the adult section in the library, and reading things much too mature for me to understand. But the pusher who lived in my house allowed me to read anything I wanted, any time. I remember once she told another mother, in my hearing and much to my chagrin, that I was the only child she had ever seen take a book to the Ice Capades. I was embarrassed, I exclaimed that I had never done such a dorky thing – I'd never ever been to the Ice Capades! Mom was proud of her little reader, her budding addict.

How does an eight year old become an addict? An eight year old doesn't have money to buy her own stash with. Some adult must be doing the actual buying. Right? Right. And my provider, my pusher was my mother. If I wanted new books, well isn't that what all parents want their children to want? Isn't that supposed to be a *good* thing? My mother was a reader too, so it was never difficult to talk her into a trip to the bookstore. I can feel a Homer Simpson-like doughnut shudder coming on at the thought of a trip to Walden's Books.

I read Agatha Christies by the barrel full. I remember reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* in a single day, and then being really angry with myself because it was over and I had no more Atticus Finch to look forward to. I would read anything. I'll still read *almost* anything. Where do I draw the line?

I close my eyes and picture a wall of books. I can smell the musty pages – there's nothing quite like the smell of old books being opened for the first time in decades. Musty, dusty, tangy, thrilling. I read once about an alcoholic who got as much from the anticipation, the tinkle of the ice, the beads of sweat forming on the glass, the scent of the gin as she did from actually drinking the martini. Old books are like that for me. When Amazon started selling used books, I felt a shiver of anticipatory delight crawl up my spine.

The most discouraging part of all this is I *want* to get straight. But the pull is just too strong. I find my self starting to hide my stash. It's just too embarrassingly huge. Do you forget what books you bought by the time you get to the parking lot? Do you lie about how many books you bought today? Do you deny that you even *went* to the book store? Do you have a nice, juicy rationalization at the ready when someone points out that you already own a copy (or two) of that book already? You too, my friend, may have a book problem.

When I was an undergraduate, I was an English major – what else *could* I be? By that time I was firmly in the grip of the written word. I recall once, talking to my favorite professor, Dr. Rose. I was a senior and by that time was well known by the English teaching staff. Anyway, I mentioned a book that I was *reading for fun.* He stared at me, mouth open. "You read for pleasure?" he asked incredulous. "Of course," I replied, "If all I had to read was what you guys assigned I'd go nuts." I think he still tells that story to his freshman lit classes.

Still, it's not quite an obsession. Compulsion is closer to the mark. Or am I just deluding myself? I don't hide it as well as I could. My sister and I were heading to the shore for a long weekend. I stopped by her house to pick her up and her boyfriend asked me what book I had with me and was I sure I shouldn't take two – in case I got bored with one. I was shocked not only that he knew I was likely to have a book with me but that I usually do in fact carry two (or more) when I travel. Like I said, I don't hide it as well as I could.

What do I read? The answer is "Just about anything." But, I do still have my pride. I won't go begging. I refuse to have anything to do with a book recommended by Oprah. I do not yet require the advice of a *talk show host* to decide what to read. I won't read the tabloids, I don't buy *People Magazine* – but if that's all that's available in a doctor's office and I don't have my own reading material on me (yeah, like that'll happen), I have been known to browse.

While we are confessing, I have another bad habit. With books I really love, I quite likely have more than one copy. I have two complete sets – different mind you – of Jane Austen. I tried to start a book club at my office and when we read *Pride and Prejudice* I had enough copies to lend one to every member of the club. I have at least 5 sets of the Sherlockian canon that I can think of – probably more. I have 2 sets of my all time favorite – Stephen R. Donaldson's *Mordant's Need, Volumes I & II* – a hard cover set complete with pristine dust jackets and a paperback set, the set I actually read. I read both volumes every other year. The story begins in winter and when I can smell the crisp October air and know that winter is close by, my first reaction is to start volume I again. I buy used sets when ever I find them because I constantly hand them out to people to entice them to read – like a Hari Krishna in the airport.

The wonder of it is that I'll never be able to finish reading. There's simply too much out there. Whole generations of literature I've never touched, never even heard of. New books are being published every day. It's almost too much to bear.

The point is – I'm a biblioholic. Admitting the truth is first step, or so I've read.

Contributing Factors

Paul Churchill, BSI is a semi-retired Latin teacher at Hood College. He is one of the three original co-founders of Watson's Tin Box. He has illustrated many Sherlockian books and prides himself on his forgery skills in collecting relics from the Holmes saga. He likes long walks on the beach, quiet drives through the slums, and gentle breezes through his diminishing hair.

April Curnow first learned of Watson's Tin Box through the Howard County library system, where she works in children's and information services. She has happily added Sherlockian activities to her other interests, music and painting. Mindful of Mr. Holmes's observation about art in the blood, she is eager to discover what may come of this combination.

Evelyn Herzog, ASH, BSI, a Holmes enthusiast since childhood, first met John Baesch at a Sherlockian event, and their marriage brought her into the happy circle of Watson's Tin Box. She is the Principal Unprincipled Adventuress of the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes and a member of the Baker Street Irregulars.

The Hichar Family – Cliffie, an undergraduate student at Dickinson College will be spending her junior year acquiring a British accent at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England. Sheri is the keeper of a small private zoo which includes two unique specimens of collegium students and assorted other fuzzy creatures, including a cat named Sherlock. Joe is an electronic engineer, who enjoys maintaining the family's computers, quoting from his pun-abridged dictionary, and taking the dog for short walks on long piers.

John C. Sherwood of Pennsylvania is an editor for The News Journal Co. of Wilmington, Delaware, and runs **MysteryVisits.com**. He is a professional Sherlock Holmes impersonator, has written for the Baker Street Journal and is a member of the Hounds of the Internet and Watson's Tin Box. He can be reached at **jcs@mysteryvisits.com**.

Andy Solberg, BSI, Gasogene VIII & XVIII, enjoys writing Sherlockian analysis and verse. He is a frequent contributor to the *Baker Street Journal* and was the co-winner of the BSJ's Morley-Montgomery Award for 2004. After attending many Sherlockian societies' dinners, he considers the monthly Tin Box dinners his home.

Beth A. prefers to remain biblioholically anonymous.