



2007

# Communication No. 274

The Pleasant Places of Florida

Vol. 11 No.6

## From the Papers on the Sundial:

Hope your summer was filled with delights both Sherlockian and un. We're in need of someone to arrange a Fall Gathering post haste (November?) or we may skip it this year. Time is flying by!

## The View Elliott City, MD Baker Street Irregulars at Home in County

By Bryna Zumer  
August 14, 2007

Sherlock Holmes could unravel almost any mystery in his day, but one recent development might have even him puzzled: why so many clubs devoted to all things Sherlockian have popped up around the country and the world, including one right in Howard County.

Starting in 1934, when the Sherlock Holmes Society was founded in London and the Baker Street Irregulars (referring to Holmes' London address) formed in New York, groups

have met to discuss the Sherlock Holmes universe and learn more about their favorite sleuth.

In the late 1980s, that universe came to Howard County, when three local aficionados -- including Ellicott City resident Steve Clarkson, who died several years ago -- founded the club Watson's Tin Box as a "scion society" of the Baker Street Irregulars.

Since then, the group has maintained roughly 25 members and regular monthly meetings, making it one of the region's more successful Sherlockian groups, according to current president Andy Solberg.

"The Tin Box is really the most relaxing," the Columbia resident said, noting Annapolis, Washington, D.C., and the Eastern Shore also have groups.

"It's a nice mixture of seasoned Sherlockians and people who are reading the stories for the first time... I think people feel welcomed at the Tin Box, and it does not surprise me that we have grown so much."

Like most groups dedicated to a fictional topic, Watson's Tin Box uses some jargon and allusions to maintain its unique universe -- in this case, Holmes' early-20th-century, British world.

The president is called a "gasogene" (a soda-water dispenser that was used to mix with alcohol) and the quizmaster, in charge of creating monthly quizzes, is a "tantalus" (a locked container that held liquor). Both are objects mentioned in the stories.

Being in the group also means "playing the game" -- discussing Sherlock Holmes as though he were a real person and working to analyze the intricacies of his world.

"You have to realize that we are all grown-ups, so we are all starting with our tongue planted firmly in our cheek," explained Solberg. "This kind of pseudo-analysis is a nice diversion from our day-to-day business lives."

Some members are deeply involved in the stories. Carroll County resident Paul Churchill, one of the Tin Box's founders, has a box of artifacts (some authentic, some "faux-authentic") for each of the Holmes' adventures and a house that is virtually a Sherlock Holmes museum.

"A good portion of my life is dedicated to a literary character," admitted Churchill, who taught at Centennial High for 26 years and now works at Hood College.

The Hichars, of Ellicott City, who have been members for several years, also say it is primarily an extremely nice group of people. Cliffie Hichar, 20, began going to meetings as a Howard High School student and eventually got her parents, Joe and Sherri, interested in it, too.

"My mom used to read the stories to my brother and I as bedtime stories," said Cliffie Hichar about the Sherlock Holmes adventures. She is now an English major at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa., and is planning to study in England this school year.

(Cont. on pg.5)

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## The Chemical Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of Three (PART 3)

Thomas R. Rybolt and Thomas G. Waddell

Chemistry for Everyone 448 Journal of Chemical Education Vol. 79 No. 4 April 2002 JChemEd.chem.wisc.edu

### PART 3

(A clockmaker is hit on the head and left for dead in the middle of the night. He is known to take items in trade for his work and recently told his wife that he had been cheated.)

"Of course, I'll do whatever I can," I said.

"Good. Read aloud, if you will, Watson, from these pieces of paper while I set up the lab equipment. These were the contracts of Mr. Wickersham with each of his recent customers."

I examined the scraps of paper that Holmes offered me and read the contents of each one to Holmes while he bustled about in the corner of the room.

"The first note says, Mrs. Nellie Sigler employed on the line at the Royal Arms electroplating factory. One clock in exchange for standard price equivalent in copper.

"The second note says, Dr. Harold McGinness, Professor of Geology at the University. One clock in exchange for standard price equivalent in gold."

"I learned last night that the Professor's nickname is Rock, owing to his large bulk and developed muscles as well as his profession," interjected Holmes.

"The third note says, Mr. Gilmore Gilreath, accounting clerk at the Norris Firm," I said. "One clock in exchange for standard price equivalent in silver."

"Do any of the notes bear the signatures of the customers?" asked Holmes.

"Each note bears the signatures of Mr. Wickersham and the person who engaged his work," I replied.

"Excellent," said Holmes, "I will examine them in detail as soon as we have completed our measurements. Spread open your hands."

I opened my hands with my palms facing up and looked at Holmes for some guidance as to what I was doing. As if to answer me, he turned the paper bag that Mrs. Wickersham had brought upside down and emptied the contents into my hands. Pieces of metal reflected in the room's morning light. Indeed, as I looked down into my cupped hands I saw what I could easily identify as pieces of gold, silver, and

copper.

On the table before him, Holmes had arranged bottles labeled acidum hydrochloricum, acidum sulphuricum, and acidum nitricum (3) and had placed on the table nine small beakers—three in a row in front of each of the three bottles.

"You no doubt recognize the names of hydrochloric, sulfuric, and nitric acids. All extremely interesting and useful substances," said Holmes.

He proceeded to pour acid from the hydrochloric acid bottle into each of the three beakers in front of it. He repeated this process for the sulfuric acid and the nitric acid bottles until each of the nine beakers contained a small amount of colorless liquid.

"Observe, Watson," said Holmes, as he plucked three small pieces of silver from my hand. He dropped one piece into a beaker containing hydrochloric acid. At once I observed an incredible sight. An extremely vigorous bubbling began at once, the colorless liquid turned white and a white smoke issued forth from the liquid. This continued for about twenty seconds and then just as suddenly it stopped. The smoking stopped and the liquid cleared except that I noticed it had a very slight greenish tint to it. However, most amazing to me was the fact that the metal was completely gone. It had vanished, as if by some magician's trick or sleight of hand. I looked to Holmes and he smiled, but before I could ask him what had happened, he dropped the second piece of the silver metal into the beaker of sulfuric acid. At first, it seemed as if nothing had occurred, but then I bent down to take a closer look. I observed an extremely slow, almost imperceptible, bubbling at the surface of the metal. I would classify this occurrence as a very lazy reaction, if indeed one would call it that at all.

Holmes grabbed a beaker containing nitric acid and moved to the front of our fireplace where a small blaze burned and smoke drifted up the chimney. "Of course in a proper lab we should have the protection of a fume cupboard (ventilation hood), and though I don't usually bother with my safety as I should, here we must at least take some caution." He set the (Cont. on page 3)



(Cont. from page 2) beaker in front of the fireplace and dropped in the third piece of silvery metal.

At once, a most remarkable and astonishing sight greeted me. Bubbles began again, but this time a brownish gas issued forth from the liquid, filling the beaker. Then, continuously drifting out of the beaker and pulled by the draft of the fireplace, the brown gas went toward and up the chimney.

As the brown gas continued to form and bubbling could be seen and heard, the liquid slowly turned a slight brown color until it was the color of a weak whiskey.

"The brown gas is poisonous. I have placed the beaker here so the gas can be removed from our room and go up the chimney," said Holmes.

After a brief interval of time, perhaps a total of twenty or thirty seconds, the vigorous reaction stopped and no more brown gas was formed. However, the liquid retained its light brown color. And again, as in the hydrochloric acid test, the metal had vanished!

"Now, you have destroyed another portion of Mr. Wickersham's payment, Holmes," I cried out. "But what does all this mean?"

"It means, Watson, that things are not always what they seem."

TO BE CONTINUED

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After 40 years of collecting books on Sherlock Holmes, I have sold the collection to Otto Penzler of The Mysterious Book Shop, New York City. It is an almost complete collection of books, pamphlets, parodies, pastiches and many very rare items, many in rare original dust jackets. The only items I was never able to add were the Beeton's or Ward Lock "Younger" & Younger" 1888 editions of *Study in Scarlet*. The books will arrive mid September, but Otto will entertain inquiries about the collection. If there is something specific you would like to know if I owned, feel free to email me at [221bee@comcast.net](mailto:221bee@comcast.net) and I will try to answer your questions. It has been a great pleasure to acquire this incredible material. I am not out of the collecting world as I continue to amass the world's largest collection of original cartoon art and illustrations dealing with Sherlock Holmes. I have done that for the last 40 years as well.

I wanted to let collectors know about my books in hopes that others will get the thrill I have had discovering that rare little volume that will just fill that space on your shelf to paraphrase someone we all know!!

Happy hunting to all.  
Jerry Margolin, BSI (Hilton Cubitt)



The Sherlockian horse races the "Silver Blaze Sweepstakes" and the "Professor Moriarty Memorial" were run at Aalborg Væddeløbsbane on August 6. These races date back to 1963 and 1976 respectively and were both initiated by the late Mr. Henry Lauritzen BSI.

This year, the "Silver Blaze Sweepstakes" was won by "Amber Lady" with Louise Møller up. Louise Møller previously won this race in 1994 and 2004.

"Moune Shine" came second with Ann-Charlotte Nielsen up, and third was "Catabound" with Nicolaj Stott up.

The "Professor Moriarty Memorial" was won by "Turtle Due" with Rikke Munk Sørensen up. Second was "All Steel" with Cathrine Weilby up and third was "Bull's Eye" with Louise Møller (winner of the Silver Blaze) up.

Jens Byskov Jensen  
Denmark



**HE'S EVERYWHERE ...** Daedalus Books advertises in their early summer 2007 catalog *The Sherlock Holmes Triviology and Quiz Book* for \$10.95 (pb) Author Kathleen Kaska seems to have gotten published by doing what scions all over the world have been doing for years.. She offers 80 quizzes, each introduced with a description of the story or character to which it is pertinent, along with trivia sidebars and a quintet of crosswords. . . Planning on visiting Philadelphia next summer? Catch The People's Light and Theatre Company's premiere of a new play, *Sherlock Holmes and The Case of the Jersey Lily*, June 18 thru July 13, 2008. The brochure states "Accompanied by that consummate wit, Oscar Wilde, the beautiful actress Lillie Langtry (the Jersey Lily) seeks help from the brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes in a small matter involving blackmail, some missing jewels, and the royal family. Perhaps that master criminal Professor Moriarty has a hand in this?" ... Internet savvy? go to [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn03\\_oHXASI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn03_oHXASI) to see the new trailer promoting *From Gillette to Brett II* . If you have trouble, just do a search for Wessex Press ... How about Sherlockian talk radio? You can hear a podcast (you don't need an iPod) of Burt Wolder, & W. Scott Monty II at [www.ihearofsherlock.com](http://www.ihearofsherlock.com) It's been compared to a Sherlockian version of "Car Talk." ...John Gardner, prolific British author, died Aug. 3. Among many novels, he wrote three featuring the character of Professor Moriarty ... Check out a new site called The World of Sherlock Holmes at [www.mrsherlockholmes.co.uk](http://www.mrsherlockholmes.co.uk). The home page has a panel link to Top Sites ... The tourist town of Kitano-cho in Kobe, Japan has about 20 western-style houses left, that were built about 100 years ago. On October 7, a re-creation of the Baker Street sitting-room will be opened in the English House. Domo Arigato ... The Swiss Post Office is offering a set of stamps representing Switzerland as seen by Classic English writers. CHF1.80 is Reichenbach falls... In the September 207 issue of *The Atlantic* , an article entitled "Beautiful Minds" discusses TV shows like *CSI* and *Numb3rs*. Author Virginia Postrel says, "The shows do more than repeat the traditional portrait of the Sherlock Holmesian scientific detective, who identifies the guilty and restores the social order. Science here speaks for the victim and also for the wrongly accused."

(Cont. from pg.4) its vast rock exposures was a mecca for geologists from Europe as well as America, and just as the cowboys and the range entered the world's storybook—even detective fiction—so did the scientific discoveries from the land of basins and ranges enter the world's textbooks and journals.

The literary style of the Sherlock Holmes stories is growing quaint with the passage of time, but the character of Holmes remains strikingly modern. It is no wonder; his type is still hard at work today.

Don't just sit there, go read some Sherlock Holmes yourself!

(Cont. from pg. 1)

"The group of people is so fantastic," she said. "It's definitely a fun thing, to play the game and pretend that (Holmes) is real, and talk about him as though he is a real person."

In recent years, the Tin Box has also reached out to the wider community, sponsoring an essay contest in local schools and a traveling Sherlock Holmes display at county libraries.

"The essays have been phenomenal," said Solberg, noting Holmes' keen observation and deduction continue to make the stories favorites generation to generation.

"(Author) Arthur Conan Doyle said mysteries up until that point were kind of a cheat," he said. "Sherlock Holmes wanted to make it so it was something the readers could say, 'I could have seen that'... Sherlock Holmes is going to be known for his level of thought."

#### **CALENDAR SHERLOCKIANA**

**September 27-30** - *Bouchercon38* Anchorage, AK. Visit [www.bouchercon2007.com](http://www.bouchercon2007.com)

**October 26-28**—*Magna cum Murder Writing Festival* at the Horizon Convention Center, Muncie, IN. Contact Kathryn Kennison, E.B. Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

**November 16-18** - *From Gillette to Brett II* Sponsored by Wessex Press at the Hilton Indianapolis North Hotel in Indiana. Scott Allen Nollen, Terence Faherty, David Stuart Davies, Kathryn White, Julie McKuras, Jeremy Paul, Patricia Garwood. Friday evening reception, Saturday morning Film Festival, evening banquet. Register by Oct. 5. to [www.wessexpress.com](http://www.wessexpress.com) online.

#### **2008**

**March 7-9**—*Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium*, Holiday Inn, Miamisburg, OH.

**July 6-8**—*Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas: A Sherlock Holmes Conference* begins early Friday afternoon with presentations throughout the weekend, luncheon & banquet Saturday. Registration is \$95 for all presentations, the Norwegian Explorer Omnibus & keepsakes. Luncheon & banquet prices separate. Get on the mailing list by contacting (Sponsored by The Norwegian Explorers of MN, Friends of Sherlock Holmes Collections & the U of MN's Special Collections & Rare Books.

**October 9-12** - *Bouchercon 39 Charmed to Death* in Baltimore, MD at the Wyndham (410-385-6605). Guests of Honor Laura Lippman & John Harvey with Toastmaster Mark Billingham. See [bouchercon2008.blog.spot.com](http://bouchercon2008.blog.spot.com)



**Sherlock on the Rocks: The great detective Sherlock Holmes is the geologist's exemplar**  
by Andrew Aldren at about.com

It has been well over a century since the world—the readers of Beeton's Christmas Annual, anyway—first met the remarkable character of Sherlock Holmes. I reread that first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, recently, and it struck me how profoundly Holmes is like the geologist.

We see the great detective in our mind's eye with his magnifying glass and deerstalker cap, but in *A Study in Scarlet* Holmes first appears in a medical laboratory, his hands burned and mottled from working with acids. Dr. John Watson arranges to share rooms with him and, one day, makes a list of his puzzling roommate's set of skills. One item on the list is "Knowledge of Geology.—Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them."

Real geologists have the same habit, of course, and can hardly turn it off. John McPhee writes, in his great Basin and Range, of a Western movie that had a scene with a villain tumbling down a dusty hillside. The filmmaker got calls from one geologist after another, asking where that hillside full of clinoptilolite was located. (My own version of this is trying to identify the localities where MTV videos are shot.)

Holmes, upon meeting Watson for the first time, astounds him by saying, "How are you? You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive." Later, Holmes recounts the facts he had observed—the war-wounded doctor's deep tan, nervous exhaustion, and so on—and the chain of inference he followed: "Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan. The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished."

The things that geologists have learned

are also astonishing—where to drill for oil, why the sea is deep and the mountains high, where humankind came from and where the dinosaurs went—but those things too are the result of trained observations and rigorous logic. And just as Watson was at first put off by his friend's seeming arrogance, so are Biblical literalists deeply threatened by the facts the Earth has taught us (I've given this rant before).

Holmes goes with Watson to visit a murder scene, but on the way there he chats about violins, not the crime: "No data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence," he says. "It biases the judgment." And so it is in Earth science, too.

Holmes, of course, gets his man. We then have a long and melodramatic flashback to the mountainous American West, where the murderer's story began, full of the sort of erroneous history that's exciting to read if you don't know the real facts. Finally, back at 221B Baker Street, Holmes tells Watson something about his method of reasoning:

"In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backward. That is a very useful accomplishment, and a very easy one, but people do not practice it much. In the everyday affairs of life it is more useful to reason forward, and so the other comes to be neglected. There are fifty who can reason synthetically for one who can reason analytically."

"I confess," said I, "that I do not quite follow you."

"I hardly expected that you would. Let me see if I can make it clearer. Most people, if you describe a train of events to them will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backward, or analytically."

The geologist, too, seeks to explain the steps that led up to today's landscape. Some geologists even specialize in Holmes's sort of forensics, studying sedimentary evidence from crime scenes. Sherlock is their patron saint.

It is curious that part of "A Study in Scarlet" occurs in the desert of Utah. The American West not only is a great stage for historical fiction, but it's also the country where the science of geology made enormous advances a century ago. That spacious land with (Cont. on pg. 5)

For the Record:

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(Master of

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Wanda & Jeff Dow, The Papers on the Sundial,

(Communications and Bookkeeping)

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