



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION June 5, 2008

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, August 7th, at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

**"The Adventure of the
Blue Carbuncle"**

prepared by Carol Abramson.
This meeting's quiz: "The
Adventure of the Crooked Man"
prepared by Roger Burrows.

In Memoriam

Doug Grove

(1938-2008)

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of Doug Grove on June 10. A warm-hearted and generous member of the Society, Doug lent an air of elegance to our annual meetings. We extend our condolences to his family and pray they be spared further sorrow.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, June 5th, 2008 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, David Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Paul Billette, Roger F. Burrows, Marie Burrows, Patrick Campbell, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, David Kellett, Elliott Newman, Maureen Peters, Heather Witeman-Brown, Ronnie Zilman

Regrets: Wilfrid deFreitas, Joan O'Malley.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:32 by Jack Anderson.

Medical Alert

Due to carpal tunnel surgery on his writing hand a few days before the meeting, your Lowly Scribe brilliantly decided to use a small recording device to capture the memorable gems and apothegms of the BmQ. But what Man proposes, You-Know-Who disposes. In the absence of an omni-directional microphone, much of the playback was muffled and faint. We regret that some of the lively interaction may have been lost down the winding corridors of time. We apologize to those whose important and valued contributions may have been omitted or misunderstood by your L.S. (Come to think of it, how was this so very different from other meetings?)

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Hither and Yon, Amos 'n Andy, Buda and Pest)

1. Drilling for New Members

As a first item on our agenda, Chris Herten-Greaven paid a return visit to the BmQ after a 15-year absence. A dentist by profession, Chris has been the president of the Canadian Society of Forensic Science. He mentioned that he did have a connection with the police laboratory and another institution on Parthenais Street. He told us that if there were interest by our group, he would ask if we could tour their museum. Jack Anderson contributed to the discussion, and Chris said he would be willing to discuss the matter with a few people at those institutions, on our behalf. He described the museum as containing "rather arcane (mysterious knowledge known only to the initiated) and macabre artifacts ... different kinds of things with which criminals were convicted."

2. I Wasn't So Able When I Saw St. Helena

Chris Herten-Greaven shared with us a twin volume set of books about Napoleon's stay on St. Helena, written by the French emperor's Irish physician, and published in 1822. The reminiscence is entitled *A Voice from St. Helena*. Chris believes these books were rebound by his grandmother. In addition, Chris showed us an original Wedgewood piece with a slight crack in it, rescued from one of the many garbage cans adorning this clean city.

3. Remy Martin Mariano

Patrick Campbell recalled meeting Remy Mariano, at a Sherlockian colloquium at McGill, and then again at Stewart Hall in Pointe Claire. Remy is a long-time employee of the University, probably assistant registrar. After the event, Remy came across a sealed box marked "Sherlock Holmes." It contained some paraphernalia related to the proceedings, as well as some ties from (not "to") the London society.

4. M. Holmes

Paul Billette informed us that a member of a Sherlockian society in France came to our area. As a result, Paul went out for a social evening with this individual,

and learned a great deal about their group. Paul compared him to our own Patrick Campbell in that he had joined their group shortly after its founding. Paul added that their organization publishes a quarterly magazine, *Le Quin Cahier*, a play on *quincaillerie* or "hardware store." The society meets three or four times a year, each time for an entire week-end, and always in an area where Sherlock Holmes traveled to. They read and share scholarly writings and works related to the canon. They attract about 40-50 people to each of their week-ends. Since the founder of the society is a publisher, he also produces a number of Sherlockian works which are available for purchase, under the aegis of the Mycroft publishing house. The visitor from France expressed the desire to continue the contact with our group, and would like to receive soft copy of our minutes.

5. First Toast – To the Master

By Maureen Peters

Since Mister Sherlock Holmes was first introduced to the public in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887, the accounts of his investigations have never been out of print, an astonishing record for a man who, in some ways, is still such a mystery himself. The more he is studied, the more complex he seems. The more he is described, the greater the mutually contradictory accounts we have.

Perhaps we each have a quite different picture of him, and whose description is correct, I cannot say. He is, perhaps, all things to all readers, but he is, to quote his biographer, "... the best and wisest man whom I have ever known."

Please stand and raise your glasses ... To the Master.

6. A Beeton in the Sherlockian Bonnet

Do two Beetons constitute a hive? We think not, but they come close when they cause a stir and a buzz around the Sherlockian table. Patrick Campbell showed us facsimiles of original Beetons. One was "A Study in Scarlet." While not astronomical in value, these reproductions are nonetheless pricey and very hard to come by because they were printed in very limited editions.

7. More Beetons and the Sherlockian Buzz

Wilfrid de Freitas sent an e-mail to Maureen Peters from London. He announced that a copy of *Beeton's Christmas Annual* of 1887 – sans covers! – but containing the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes in "A Study in Scarlet," was sold recently at auction for around £18,000, or \$36,000 Canadian. The pre-sale estimate had been only around £6-8,000! The damaged volume had been donated to Oxfam in the UK, which then decided to auction it. We have it on good authority that a starving child ate the covers and was about to lick off the binding glue when the volume was snatched away by a concerned Sherlockian and was substituted for a month's supply of McDonald's (he wasn't really a Scot, you know) food vouchers.

Later in the evening, Marie Burrows read an announcement that items gathered by Oxfam shops across England would be auctioned in Oxford on May 20. The star item in the sale was to be "A Study in Scarlet," estimated to sell for between £7-9,000. The article did not describe the publication, nor if the covers were

missing. We might surmise that this is the same Oxfam auction alluded to in Wilfrid's e-mail to Maureen. In Marie's story, the final selling price was said to be £18,600.

8. Mystery Giveaway

David Dowse showed us the contents of a box of Sherlockian treasures. It contained knick-knacks of Sherlockian memorabilia, including coasters, notebooks, and other items of interest. David freely passed certain trinkets around the table for grateful members to take home, and announced that he would donate the remaining items to the children's library downstairs to be handed out as promotional paraphernalia during their summer reading program. He also retrieved photos from a colloquium at Stewart Hall on the lake in Pointe Claire. Apart from the Sherlockiana, David also showed us a small case of Peruvian and Australian butterflies. Their colors were startling and they didn't flick or twitch.

9. Sherlock's Audience

Paul Billette informed us that the library's summer program is well under way. He had seen a story-telling session for children, involving the exploits of Sherlock Holmes. We were also told that the Westmount *Examiner* had written an article on the program.

10. Semper Vigilens

David Kellett informed us that long ago, the society had erroneously ascribed "the bimetallic question" to Moriarty, when in fact the golden and silvered phrase that provided the name of our society had been an utterance of Mycroft Holmes. In the same vein, your Lowly Scribe was due for a patient reminder for mislabeling the now-famous portrait of David in his Oscar Wilde (not a euphemism for "birthday") suit based on a series of photographic studies taken by the talented Maureen Peters at our annual dinner. In fact, your L.S., who now has to look up to see the underside of rocks, unforgivably acting from imperfect memory, shifted one of the names in the title of the painting, which was against the intention of its subject. This mindless act unbalanced a carefully-wrought and ingenious plan which we shall now, however imperfectly and fallibly, unfold like thin, fresh cheese slices.

We need to understand that David has created a special purpose for his painting in which he is modeling his Oscar Wilde suit. His objective is far from trivial. In view of his serious surgery for a serious illness, David has reasoned that if Oscar Wilde's fictional subject, Dorian Gray, could have a portrait capable of absorbing all that character's evils and poisons, leaving Gray himself youthful, apparently healthy, and unblemished, why can not David himself replicate this experience? Ergo-1, the costume. If MSN were rating Victorian costumes of the proles, David would be the best-dressed Dorian Gray of the Year.

Ergo-2, the photo session. It was necessary to create the aura of pensive intensity to invoke the proper mood. David achieved this successfully.

Ergo-3, the painted interpretation of the most appropriate photo. With the magical application of pastels, the aura became a catalyst, and the pensive intensity signaled the deleterious forces winding around David to redirect their energies to the painting. David is testing the theory that pastels are as effective as oils in achieving this.

Ergo-4, the name which your Lowly Scribe had to go and mess up. It is now officially proclaimed on these pages of "The Bimetallic Newsletter" as

"The Picture of Dorian David."

Be it known by all who come to this place, that this official and intended title shall remain forever in the immortal galleries of Art, Spiritual Upliftedness, and a salubrious life.

And now we ask ourselves: Is it working? Is "The Picture of Dorian David" a lightning rod for bad vibes? Judge for yourselves: already in the painting, the corners of the subject's mouth are turning downward. A steely glint of uncertain import has appeared far within one eye. Thin shadows outline the deepening furrows across the brow of Dorian David. Yellow-orange nicotine stains are beginning to show on the edges of the first and second fingers. They spread daily. This is just the beginning, for the painting appears to be absorbing more clods and gore of history as time passes while David is definitely on the mend. Maybe he should franchise this. Again, David, well done!

11. Granada, We'll Meet Again

David Kellett reminded us of his investment in the Granada Sherlock Holmes series starring Jeremy Brett, and he generously shared this acquisition with us. Members of the society who had expressed interest in the programs will now spend many happy hours viewing them, thanks to David's generosity.

12. Oscar Wilde Revisited

Patrick Campbell raised a question about the authenticity of David Kellett's Oscar Wilde suit. David responded that he had gone to Malabar Costumes and had located an 1895 Victorian costume, detailed with the authentic piping, similar to the habiliments he had seen when perusing some 20 photographs of Oscar Wilde. We note that 1895 was the year Toulouse-Lautrec painted the famous portrait of Wilde. In that portrait, the writer's pursed, apparently rouged lips and creased eye edges seem to highlight the difficulties in which he found himself at that time. This mood of pensiveness and self-concern are offset by the elegance of the velvet jacket with the substantial black collar, and Wilde's immaculate coiffure. The shadow of what appears to be Big Ben over Wilde's right shoulder looms like the long, ominous arm of dire judgment reaching across the Channel from the Scepter'd Isle. David recounted that a US publisher visiting England, attended a dinner also attended by Oscar Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. At this venue, the publisher allegedly commissioned "A Study in Scarlet" and "The Picture of Dorian Gray."

13. From Our "To Air is Human" Department

Jack Anderson noted that Air Canada has lowered its allowable luggage weight limit on overseas flights, which is lower than British Air's. If TWGCD has to make a quick trip to this side of the pond, someone should tell him about these discrepancies. If we or our friends are planning to cross the pond with a lot of books, as some of us tend to do, we might want to make arrangements with booksellers to ship our purchases.

14. From Our “You Can Never Have Too Many Books” Department

Jack also mentioned that immediately across the Welsh border from England, is a bookstore that has become very successful. It has become so successful that it has been emulated by 55 other bookstores, including one in a castle. All this is in a small town, Hay-on-Wye which ordinarily would not support any bookstores at all. After some ad hoc sleuthing, we have determined why this phenomenon should be. We feel confident that no one else in the world with half a brain would reach our conclusions. We have come up with:

- a. The Enclosure Acts, 18th century England and Wales. The restriction of free-grazing and the use of lands without compensation made the plutocracy and landed aristocracy feel more secure. Rather than using books as fencing, they were about to go with the unoriginal idea of considering importing marble from Italy until a tally-ho genius in a red jacket and a black beanie was thrown from his rather brown Shetland Pony head first in a pile of field stones. In this manner did the upper class realize that stones were there for the picking, and while not as attractive as Italian marble, they would divide the country rather nicely. A network of stone fences crept up across the countryside faster than you could say “How would Pixar depict this?” A further rationale for indigenous stone was that its bland appearance would discourage would-be sculptors from pilfering it. It may be said that British fieldstone, like British cooking, is rather straightforward and without great imagination. Notwithstanding Mrs. Hudson’s and your dear grandmother’s cuisine, of course. Therefore, in the absence of Italian marble to work on, we notice a singular lack of motivation to sculpt in English stone. There is doubly a singular lack of noted English sculptors. More recently Henry Moore comes to mind, although he did have to work on imported stone, and certainly, while his pieces out of Elm are magnificent, one would have to wait a very long time for Elm to turn to stone, wouldn’t one? And even then, there is no guarantee that it would become marble. This brings us full-circle to the aristocracy, the plutocracy, and *Debrett’s Peerage*. Once the Us-and-Them was more clearly defined by the Enclosure Acts, the country began buying more books in anticipation of Oprah’s Book Club. They invited George Eliot to tea, discovered s/he wasn’t who they thought s/he was, and waited for remainders from Bloomsbury authors to go on sale, causing the Penguins to leave Pittsburgh and consider publishing as a change of occupation because of global warming.
- b. The Industrial Revolution. The introduction of machines and the extrodution of manual labor eventually drove more children into schools, after they did their mandatory 1.5 centuries’ service in the mines, mills, and sweat shops. This would eventually create a demand for books which the machines created during the Industrial Revolution would be only too happy to churn out.
- c. False Identification of “The Criminal Class,” Transportation to Australia, and Sherlock Holmes. In *The Fatal Shore* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1987) Robert Hughes traces the social and political influences around Britain’s policy of transporting offenders to Australia, beginning in 1787. The creation of Sherlock Holmes may have been a milestone in explaining the subsequent evolution of the so-called “criminal class” alluded to by Hughes, below. While detective fiction attracted a wide

readership when serialized in periodical publications, a strong case may be made that it was TWGCD who crystallized the image of the detective for a global readership and instigated the publication of the stories under separate cover, and in large quantities. Hughes provides a succinct optic for our understanding of this phenomenon (p. 165) when:

The idea of a criminal class, as understood by the English in the 1830s, meant that a distinct social group "produced" crime, as hatters produced hats or miners coal. It was part mob, part tribe, and part guild, and it led to a subterranean existence below and between the lower social structures of England. The criminal class had its own argot, its hierarchies, (and) its accumulated technical wisdom. It preserved and amplified the craft of crime, passing it on from master to apprentice. This idea emerged from the late-eighteenth-century perception that crime in England had risen so fast that Authority must deal with an orchestration, not just an accumulation, of criminal acts. The spectacular career of Jonathan Wild promoted a vision of "generals" of crime – criminal masterminds – leading "armies" of thugs. This proved a durable fantasy. It lasted right through the nineteenth century and culminated in the image of the pre-Mafia super-criminal – Arthur Conan Doyle's Moriarty.

- d. The Romantic Illusion. The great poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's claim to having been shot at by a devil at Tan-yr-alt in Wales may have present-day armchair psychologists wondering about schizophrenia in his family. Brits hoping to get to the heart of this matter decided to go first-hand to investigate. However, the possibility that the devil may well have been in that land of legends and trolls, and may be there still, prompted these literary investigators to keep one leg planted in England, while gently toeing into Wales with the other loose foot. Hence, the village of Hay-on-Wye on the border with all those neat bookshops.
- e. The democratization of Manors and Castles. The exorbitant taxes, along with the inability of some of the nobility to maintain its giant holdings, have had a trickle-down effect on the middle class. This phenomenon has seen the liquidation of giant libraries and the widespread availability of books hitherto kept in private collections.
- f. The Internet. As you know, the internet is, or soon will be, this planet's biggest medium for the exchange of goods. Although the tiny Welsh village of Hay-on-Wye has 56 bookstore fronts, the survivors will be those that plug in to the global market. The perpetuation of the "quaint" bookshop, like the Romantic Age and Shelley's homicidal devil, is an illusion to be press'd to our hearts like flower petals between the pages of a book.
- g. Support Services. As was pointed out around our table, the transportation of books through internet and in-store purchase is being refined and made more efficient. While this doesn't speak well for fuel-miles in transporting the books, this problem will inevitably be translated into a challenge with its attendant solutions. It appears that books bought in England, Wales, and even New York, are shipped through SwissAir (and possibly other airlines), and may even be routed back to Europe from New York, before being sent to North American destinations. And you thought your Lowly Scribe had a problem with logic? Transportation rates to consumers in these cases are far more reasonable than through

Amazon.com. A bookseller in London, The Book Depository, ships anywhere for free.

15. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson
by Rachel Alkallay

Rachel extolled Dr. Watson's loyalty to Holmes in glowing terms.

16. Hello? Hello?

Jack Anderson asked for at least three volunteers for a social committee. Its job would be to recommend events, plan them, and publicize them. We are a group of inquiring minds with a significant appetite for culture, fun, and socializing, so this should be a rewarding experience. Volunteers will be pleased to note that there are no height or age requirements.

17. Third Toast – To The Woman
by Patrick Campbell

I have been asked, at short notice, to prepare a toast to "The Woman." There was not time to prepare a properly researched toast, so I made a fast study of the Canon with the following results.

Irene Adler appeared in only one of the adventures, and was mentioned briefly in three others. In total she spoke only five words so one would think she was only a minor character. Yet, in spite of this, Irene Adler has become one of the best-known of all the characters in the Canon.

My brief count found that she is the only character named Irene of a total of 430 different Christian names. As to the surname Adler, it is unique among 819 different surnames in the Canon, according to my brief count. It is interesting to note that there are also 115 additional names of real people, as well as 37 members of the peerage mentioned. So, while we cannot say that *la belle* Irene is one in a million, she is demonstrably one in 971!

So I give you the toast ... to "The Woman" ... almost one in a thousand!

18. Partial Clothing

Several of those around the table recalled that they had been forced to wear short pants when children. Those of us who have been forced to bare our knees and thighs have assigned a broad range of developmental problems as a result. Chris Herten-Greaven remembered this phase well, and opined that it seemed to be some rite of passage to graduate to long pants around the time a young boy's voice broke into adolescence. Due to interruptions in the recording tape, your Lowly Scribe cannot recall why we were discussing this, but he does aver that he has seen pictures of his infant uncles wearing dresses. They will deny this, not that they can remember.

19. The BmQ Goes Bugs

On the one hand, we have a translucent container with a number of identical toy bugs in it. On the other hand, we have a Sherlock Holmes Pub cap from Edmonton. For guessing correctly that there were 50 bugs in the container, the cap went from the other hand to Jack Anderson's head. Congratulations, Jack.

20. Facts and Theories

Chris Herten-Greaven gave us a summary of a book related to intrigue and alleged espionage in the Pacific. He also described a successful lecture series given by a New Hampshire resident about the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers. His point was that people like SACD "alerted us to alternative theories where the whole train of events seem to lead in one direction, and then all of a sudden there are these factors that emerge." His reminiscence about Nurse Edith Clavell was profoundly interesting, illuminating, outrageous, and sad. The political intrigue and level of gamesmanship in the European theatre during the First World War and in anticipation of the Russian Revolution set the stage for a drama and assassination conspiracy cover-up that might well rival that of the Kennedy tragedies.

21. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Marie Burrows

Dear Mrs. Hudson, you are the most
Under-rated of those we must toast.

A wonderful cook and a loyal house keeper,
Sherlock Holmes had a gem, he needed to keep her.

What is more, she had her rôles to play,
Taking a part on many a day.

With his scribe Dr. Watson should our Holmes have been sterner?
In *A Scandal* ... is it she Watson calls "Mrs. Turner?"

But we are not here to give the Doctor a roast.
Raise your glasses now to Mrs. Hudson. A toast!

(Penned in January, this is Marie's first-ever poem. Notice the rhyming couplets?)

22. Where Were You When ...?

David Kellett was living in a commune in California when Bobby Kennedy was assassinated.

23. Quiz – Results

"The Adventure of the Crooked Man" prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 50

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Carol Abramson	48	?
2.	David Kellett	45½	<i>The Science of Sherlock Holmes</i>
3.	Patrick Campbell	35	?

The next quiz will be based on "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" prepared by Carol Abramson.

24. Non-meritorious Elucidation

David Dowse asked the meaning of "meretricious." He was informed that it means "cheap" and "tawdry."

According to one of your Lowly Scribe's *Websters*, "meretricious" comes from *meretric*, *meretrix*, meaning "prostitute." Notice the suffix "trix," which may be the origin of "turning a trick." Quebec Prostitutes used to have to pass a Latin exam, but since the inception of C.E.G.E.P.s, this requirement has been waived in favor of things we are not allowed to write about.

Webster's first definition is "of or relating to a prostitute," then, "tawdrily and falsely attractive."

"tawdry" can be a noun or an adjective. As a noun, it means "cheap, showy finery." As an adjective it means "gaudy in appearance or quality."

"gaudy" means "cheap," "showy," "tawdry."

When you start getting into circular definitions, you know it's time to quit, or learn another language.

25. Future Toasts

To The Master	-	David Dowse
To Dr. Watson	-	Roger Burrows
To The Woman	-	Paul Billette
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Maureen Peters
To The Society	-	Rachel Alkallay

26. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by David Kellett

David delivered an *ex tempore* toast extolling the Society and how much enjoyment he derives from it, unlike poker. He was particularly pleased to note that we offer so many eccentric people, which we hasten to add, is a good thing.

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favour upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, June 5th, 2008, at 6:30 p.m.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org