



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

P.O. Box 232, Westmount Station
Westmount, QC, Canada H3Z 2T2

Minutes of the Meeting of The Bimetallic Question June 7, 2018

Date of our next meeting: Thursday, August 2, 2018 at 6:30pm at the Westmount Public Library, Westmount Room, 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, QC H3Z 1G1

The quiz at the next meeting: *The Sign of Four*, prepared and presented by Raf Jans.

Next meeting's toast presenters: The Master: David Dowse; Dr Watson: Rachel Alkallay; *The Woman*, Irene Adler: Frances Fister-Stoga; Mrs Hudson: Raf Jans; The Society: Anne Millar.

Dear toasters, please send your August toasts to Anne Millar at thesportingrabbit@gmail.com. Thanks!

Minutes of the meeting of the Bimetallic Question held on Thursday, June 7, 2018.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Paul Billette, Louise Corda, David Dowse, Phil Ehrensaft, Frances Fister-Stoga, Kristin Franseen, Chris Herten-Greaven, Raf Jans, Vivianne Lewis, Miyako Matsuda-Pelletier, Anne Millar, Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, Karl Raudsepp, Carole Rocklin, Bruno Paul Stenson, James Turner, Ronnie Zilman

Note: So as not to interrupt Sheryl's talk, the attendance sheet was passed around later than usual. If you needed to leave before the regular meeting began and would like your attendance noted for the record, please let me know, and I will ask Anne to include it in the errata for the August minutes.

Regrets: Mark Altosaar, Wilfrid de Freitas, Heather Wileman-Brown

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by our Sovereign Raf Jans at 6:30pm.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

1. Errata

My apologies to Frances for misspelling her name in the last month's minutes.

2. Welcome to New Friends!

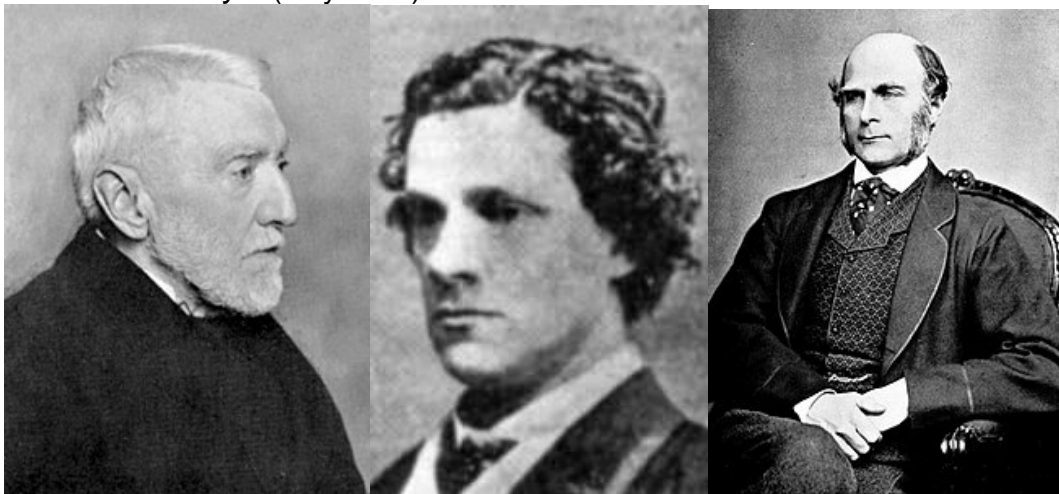
At this month's meeting, we were joined by Sheryl Mercer of Toronto. More on her enthralling presentation on the convoluted and controversial development of fingerprinting later in the minutes.

3. Future Event Updates

- We are still exploring the idea of a dinner at the Willow Inn. Much interest was expressed, although we will need to check their current prices.
- Carol and Jacob will be hosting another Victorian tea at their home at 4pm on August 11. Victorian/Edwardian dress is encouraged! Please RSVP to Carol at clz_abramson@yahoo.com.

4. Presentation by Sheryl Mercer

Our guest gave an exciting presentation, entitled "Loops and Whorls: The Men, the Malice, and the Fascinating History of Fingerprinting," which followed the cases, scientists, and debates that led to the widespread use of fingerprints for identification and crime scene investigation. I was particularly taken with the way she presented the different pioneers of identification systems, only to point out that another person or group had independently developed similar methods halfway around the world. Sheryl did not shy away from the less palatable aspects of fingerprinting's history. Her subjects' motives ranged from the practical (recognizing legal contracts) to the ideological (colluding to exclude one's colleagues from receiving credit, attempting to lend credence to the pseudoscience of eugenics) to actual scientific curiosity and commitment to justice. Her lecture took us from crime scenes and courtrooms in England, Canada, Argentina, and the United States to colonial government offices in India to hospitals in Japan and beyond. Those who are interested further may wish to consult Sheryl's article on the subject, "From Loops and Whorls to the Double Helix: A Century of Fingerprinting," published in *Canadian Lawyer* (May 1995).



From left to right: Henry Faulds, William Herschel, and Francis Galton
three of the scientists involved in the debate over who "discovered" fingerprinting.



The National Fingerprint Bureau (originally the Calcutta Anthropometric Bureau), established under the principles set forth by Azizul Haque and Hem Chandra Bose and supervised by Edward Henry

5. Toast to the Master, by Carol Abramson

Carol began the evening's toasts by pondering why we call Holmes "the Master," and what, exactly, he might be considered a master of:

We, the members of the Bimetallic Question, always refer to Sherlock Holmes as the Master. But what, exactly, is he the Master of? A Master of observation of the minutiae of life and subsequent deduction of facts, to be sure, having noticed a callused finger on a young lady, and deducing a typing career, or knowing the clay and chalk mixture on the toecaps of Watson's boots was from Horsham.

He a Master of logical thought, taking the slightest clue, working it over in his mind and bringing a mystery to its rightful conclusion, while often holding the opposite theory of that ventured by the police. Holmes is a Master of disguise, having appeared as everything from an elderly clergyman to a sailor, a drunken groom and even a plumber. He is a master of the violin, coaxing beautiful music from his Stradivarius. Sherlock Holmes is equally a Master of the written word, having produced expert writings and monographs on topics ranging from the distinctions between different types of tobacco ash to the surface anatomy of the human ear to the polyphonic motets of Lassus to his final work, the Practical Handbook of Bee Culture.

He is a Master of esoteric and obscure facts, which he often used to dazzle and amaze both Watson and the police.

But more important than any of these facts to us, the Members of the Bimetallic Question is that Sherlock Holmes is the Master of our admiration, our affection, our loyalty, and our attention.

To the Master!

Quiz and Story Discussion

6. Quiz on "The Noble Bachelor" prepared and presented by Kristin Franseen

Results:	1 st Raf	46 (out of 45!)	<i>Sherlock Holmes vs Dracula</i> (and pressed flowers from Miyako)
	2 nd Carol	35	<i>Poor Tom is Cold</i> (and flowers)
	3 rd Karl	35	<i>Élémentaire, ma chère Sarah</i> (and flowers)

7. Discussion of the Story

Louise mentioned that this was one of her favourite stories. Several other members noted that the phenomenon of the “wedding breakfast” was somewhat old-fashioned by the time the story is set, as the legal requirement that weddings take place before noon was abolished in 1887. Miyako provided some additional historical research on the origins of the name “Plantagenet,” as well as the trend of American debutantes marrying British aristocrats during the late Victorian period:

This episode of Holmes's story is one of my favourites in the Canon, because there is no murder. Also, we can see the British high society and an in-depth look at marriage and social background in 19th-century Britain. Conan Doyle wrote this episode, I think, to show what was happening among high society British bachelors and to expose “these charming invaders” (as Holmes calls them). Holmes reads in the Morning Post that “one by one, the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from the Atlantic.” WHY? The answer is simple: the British aristocracy was broke! As we all know, the TV show Downton Abbey shows the situation from the late 1800s and early 1900s, with daughters of America's new industrial millionaires marrying into the British aristocracy to obtain “prestige.” I heard that more than 200 American heiresses married British aristocratic men in those days! In real life, some marriages may have ended happily like fairy tales, but many did not end well. Many aristocratic bachelors went to the USA to look for rich wives to help their own estates and finances. As this episode shows, I think that Doyle wasn't thinking too positively about those marriages. The story was published in 1892, and America was going through a period of great economic prosperity, producing many financial tycoons through manning, railroads, newspapers, and all sorts of other businesses. We all know that Doyle was a very keen Americophile, travelling throughout the American continent. Yet he didn't like this story very much, personally rating it “about bottom of the list,”

The lady character, Miss Hatty Doran (an Irish name) is from San Francisco (before the Great Earthquake of 1906). From the photos I've seen of 'Frisch in those days, with old houses, cable cars, etc., it was truly a beautiful Pacific Coast city. No wonder why Doyle loved it very much, with all the free-spirited people there! And the fact that Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral (with both Plantagenet and Tudor heritage) was a 41-year-old bachelor—does that tell us something, eh? His sweetheart, the dancer Flora Miller, had NO money for his family or to maintain the large estate. How did the aristocrats become so cash-poor? Due to the Industrial Revolution, many people decided to look for work in the cities to earn wages. The aristocracy's income came from the land-based agriculture and rent from those who lived on their lands. By contrast, after the American Civil War, the economy really grew! The Republican Party, under Lincoln, passed legislation and pursued politics that made the federal government a “promoter and facilitator” of economic growth, expansion, and consolidation. Therefore, many Americans from the East Coast sought their fortunes in the settlements of the West, including San Francisco, to stimulate and encourage expansion of American infrastructure. The railroads also made the raw materials easier to transport for sale. Like Hatty's father and husband, a few people became extremely rich! On the other hand, many British aristocrats were getting poorer because their agricultural goods couldn't compete with cheaper US imports. They were still living in those magnificent old mansions, but their coffers were empty, and hundreds of them looked for ladies (and their fortunes) to save their estates! As Holmes says (perhaps echoing Doyle's own voice?), “thank our stars that we're never likely to find ourselves in the same position.”

Also, the name “Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St Simon” sounded strange to me when I first read the Canon many years ago. Why a French name like “de Vere St Simon”? Holmes says that the family inherits Plantagenet blood by direct descent. Totally by accident, I was watching the movie Becket, starring Richard Burton as Thomas Becket and Peter O'Toole as Henry II. I found out that the name of Plantagenet is a surname that came from Henry II's father Geoffrey, Count of Anjou. The legend says that Geoffrey used to wear a sprig of flowers as a badge. This badge was called “Planta Genista.” This habit was thought to have originated when, retrieving his hat after it fell off while hunting, he scooped up a handful of yellow broom flowers. How did Henry II end up being King of England? Although his father was French, his mother Matilda was English, which gave her and Henry full support from the dukes of Normandy, Robert of Gloucester in England, and the Pope. Henry II ended up invading

England in 1153 to assert his claim to England, as well as the Angevin Empire, Aquitaine, the Pyrenees, etc., and became ruler of the largest kingdom in 12th-century Europe. This, I suppose, is the origins of Lord St Simon's French-sounding name.

The Plantagenet era consisted of 14 kings, including the houses of York and Lancaster, for over 300 years. Surely there are people living in England today who are direct or indirect descendants. Doyle's portrayal of St Simon as not so honourable is perhaps a reference to the supposed "one family trait" of a volatile spirit shared by the Plantagenets. Richard I ("the Lionhearted, who reigned from 1189-1199) stated "from the Devil we sprang, and to the Devil we shall go," and those kinds brought England into seemingly never-ending warfare for centuries, with France and Scotland, through the Crusades, and even among family members! With all of that, who would want to be king? Both Henry II and Richard I spoke and wrote French and spent very little time in England. Being kings, however, gave them revenue for the Crusades and other wars. From these ancestral kinds all the way to Lord St Simon, everything was money! As for Lord St Simon's Tudor family tree, I suppose it is from James I's side, since Elizabeth never married and had no children. Henry VII's eldest daughter Princess Margaret Tudor married James IV of Scotland in 1503. So, as Holmes says, Lord St Simon's family is "one of the highest in England." What a long history, indeed!



French Brooms (left) and Geoffrey, Count of Anjou (right)

Show and Tell

8. "...about some episodes in his American life."

Bruno brought his DVD of the 1950s television adaptation, produced by Sheldon Reynolds and starring Ronald Howard as the Master and Howard Marion-Crawford as Dr Watson. It was observed by the members that, while loosely inspired by the Canon, some of the episodes are a bit silly.

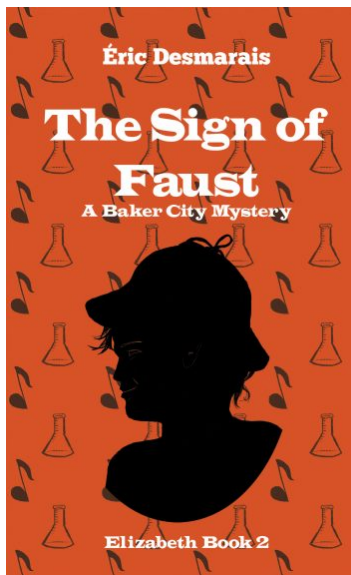


Ronald Howard as Holmes in the 1954 series

9. “It is not his only novel, you know.”

Anne shared her recently acquired copy of Éric Desmarais’s *The Sign of Faust*, the second in the Baker City-Elizabeth series of Holmes-inspired YA novels featuring sleuth (and over-scheduled high school student) Elizabeth Coderre. The series is published by Renaissance Books Press, an Ottawa-based publisher of Canadian fiction that aims to promote stories and authors not normally represented in mainstream publishing. Some members of the Society might also be interested in their *A Match Made in Austen*, a storytelling game involving matchmaking characters from different Jane Austen novels.

Anne also shared some new additions to her collection of miniature books: tiny, doll-accessary copies of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.



Cover of Éric Desmarais’s *The Sign of Faust*

10. “Underneath the vigorous headlines which our client had quoted...”

Louise alerted us to two references to Holmes in the news. First, “the game’s afoot” appeared in the headline to *Montreal Gazette* analysis by Philip Authier about QS and CAQ campaigning ahead of the October 1 elections. Secondly, a May 2018 CTV poll asking “who was the greatest crime fighter ever?” revealed that viewers prefer Sherlock Holmes (70%) to James Bond (30%). One wonders what those Sherlockians who propose Mycroft Holmes as the original “M” might think of the question.

11. Toast to Dr Watson, by Paul Billette

Paul gave a spirited reading of the poem “A Toast to Dr Watson,” by Nea Dodson, current Gasogene of Watson’s Tin Box (of Ellicott City, Maryland, US):

*A doctor, a soldier, and a trusted right-hand man
He thought it was all over when shot in Afghanistan
How little did he know that his life would just now start
When Stamford introduced him to that weird guy at St. Bart*

*Sherlock liked to think he was the greatest problem solver
But Watson could cure anything with brandy or revolver
From vampires to napoleons, missing bride to glowing hound
He followed Sherlock faithfully — and then he wrote it down*

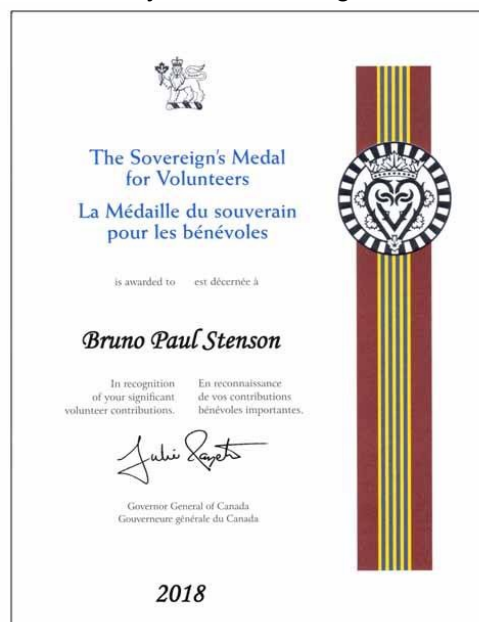
*But — 60 stories only! How paltry! What a loss!
 Except . . . there are more waiting in a bank at Charing Cross
 Just as Watson never lived and thus can never die
 He has left behind adventures that never can run dry*

*Like the pledge before school classes, anthem before a game
 Almost every pastiche has disclaimer just the same:
 “I didn’t make this up, I found these notes” they claim
 “In a battered old dispatch box painted with his name!”*

*So let us lift our glasses, let us shout “Salute!”
 To noble Doctor Watson, Sherlock’s and our dear
 But also to the dusty vault beneath the bank of Cox
 Protecting for eternity our Watson’s Tin Box*

12. “a present from a certain gracious lady”

Congratulations to Bruno, recent recipient of the Sovereign’s Medal for Volunteers! According to the Governor General’s website, the medal “recognizes the exceptional volunteer achievements of Canadians from across the country in a wide range of fields.”



The Sovereign’s Medal for Volunteers

13. “...the more dreadful parts of the tragedy”

Rachel alerted us to the media coverage surrounding designer Kate Spade’s recent tragic death.

14. Toast to the Woman, by David Dowse

While most toasts to Irene Adler tend to focus on her brief appearance in the Canon, David explored her side of the case: her motivations for leaving the limelight, feelings about the King of Bohemia’s threat, and marriage to Godfrey Norton:

“I love and am loved by a better man than he.”

How did Irene Adler meet, fall in love with, and decide to marry lawyer Godfrey Norton?

Irene had an international career on the stage and probably a long string of romantic liaisons. What made Godfrey special?

Typically, it started with Godfrey attending one of her performances in London. He would have sent flowers to her dressing room, along with a touching note. Something in his written word made an impression on Irene. Then came an invitation to a private dinner and later a casual stroll in the park on a Sunday afternoon. Their conversation would allow Irene to regale him with stories of her world travels and the many dramatic roles she had played. Always discreet, she would have kept secret any past lovers, not that Godfrey was not somewhat aware of them from the society columns of the newspaper. For his part, Godfrey would not have tried to bore Irene with lawyer shoptalk, but would have played his cards best by just listening to this fascinating woman with whom he had just fallen in love.

As Irene became more committed to Godfrey, she saw too that storm clouds were gathering, threatening their happiness. The King of Bohemia was in England, and had a meeting with the famed consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes. This business of a compromising photo with the King and the resulting performance of the Sherlock Holmes ensemble outside her home of Briony Lodge were but stumbling blocks, distractions from her true destiny of becoming Mrs Irene Norton.

I believe she had fallen in love with Godfrey because he was such an honest man with no pretenses or airs. She saw in him someone with whom she could share her innermost secrets and not be judged. She had made up her mind that she wanted stability, honesty, trust, and faithfulness from a man she loved. Perhaps she wanted to settle down and start a family. She did not want to be merely someone else's eye candy, but wanted an equal partner. So she played her part in the drama to give the illusion to the King and Holmes that they had won. It was to soothe their male egos and to show that she was no longer a threat.

Irene Norton said goodbye to an old life of glitz and glamour and superfluousness and subservience, and joined with a good man named Godfrey.

I give you Irene Norton, a happy woman.

15. Toast to Mrs Hudson, by Bruno Paul Stenson

Bruno mused about how little we know of Mrs Hudson, even compared to many other more minor Canonical characters:

In his famous accounts of Sherlock Holmes's adventures, the good doctor Watson is almost invariably generous in his supply of details. Most of the characters to whom we are introduced in the Canon are fleshed out to a point where we would stand a good chance of recognizing them upon meeting them in the flesh for the very first time. Most of the characters, that is, but not all. One glaring omission in this parade of recognizables is Mrs. Hudson, Holmes's faithful landlady at 221b Baker Street.

We are given so little detail about Mrs. Hudson that we don't even know her given name. For that matter, we don't know her husband's first name either or if the fellow is dead or alive. For all we know, Mrs. Hudson is the wife of the Gloria Scott crew member who tried to blackmail his fellow survivors. Or she might be married to Morse Hudson, the seller of Napoleon busts in Kennington Road. Was it in honour of her husband that Hudson Street in Aldershot was named? Watson does not say.

What little we do know about Mrs. Hudson, however, paints a portrait of a devoted woman as dedicated to Holmes and to bringing wrongdoers to justice as is her most famous lodger himself. Indeed, we find her tolerating foul odours emanating from Holmes's rooms, early-morning visitors - including criminals - arriving at the door, a tribute to Her Majesty written in pistol calligraphy, and she even puts her own life at risk to animate a mannequin surrogate for Holmes.

So while we know little about the landlady, we know enough to feel confident in raising a glass to she without whom Holmes could never have been as successful as he was. Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, please raise a glass to Mrs. Hudson.

16. Toast to the Society, by Vivianne Lewis

Vivianne celebrates our Society in considering the multiple meanings of “bimetallic” and the enduring passion of our members:

Upon learning of the name of our society, my first thought was to the properties of a bimetallic strip, which I had recalled from physics class. The description of this strip is that it consists of two metals with different coefficients of expansion which when heated causes the strip to bend which then can be used as a switch to turn devices on or off. Subsequently, I discovered, our society had been named not for the properties as just related, but to a reference to a comment Holmes used to describe the “great brain” of his brother Mycroft and the influence he commands in matters of politics at home and abroad, using the bimetallic reference regarding monetary policy. However, what’s in a name.

Over the 39 years of its inception, people from all walks of life have been attracted to enjoy each other’s company within the society, whilst indulging in their mutual, dare I say passion, for the endeavours of the Master. During our bi-monthly meetings, members exchange stories, books, and social commentary of times current and past, quizzes and generally enjoy the repartee concerning all topics Sherlockian. New members are welcomed and the society thus benefits by renewal of numbers as well as new topics of interest brought into the fold. Every meeting promises an enjoyable evening of discussion and camaraderie.

Our society is certainly not unique as there are numerous similar groups worldwide, some much older than our own. But this toast is dedicated to our own, dear Bimetallic Question, with hopes and anticipation of many more enjoyable and stimulating years to come. Therefore, please raise your glasses, to all members past and present and to the Society.

17. Close of the Meeting

Raf adjourned the meeting at 9pm.

Appendix: Totally British Report, by Miyako

The April 2018 issue of *Totally British* magazine offers a lot of coverage of series three of *The Durrells*! (How time flies!) Milo Parker, who played young Roger in *Mr Holmes*, is already 15, and he certainly looks older as Gerald Durrell. Thanks to this ITV show, I hear that many British people today have something to look forward to watching with their families on Sunday nights! We certainly need a good, old-fashioned cozy family drama to make ourselves feel more than ever in this uncertain world! My husband got Gerald Durrell’s *My Family and Other Animals*, and we’re pleasantly surprised to find out that the Durrell family members really were oddballs, who (according to the book) actually really lived like this TV show! Despite the financial issues, I think Gerald lived in an idealistic childhood, surrounded by nature and animals on Corfu Island. When I look at many children today, I feel really sorry for them. Don’t we need “the gloriously comical adventures of nature,” etc., as kids?! Especially here in Canada where the winter is very long, this show offers the time for the sunshine, blue sea, and cute animals on the island of Corfu!

The actress Una Stubbs, who plays Mrs Hudson in *Sherlock*, also appears in *The Durrells*. Her ex-husband, Nicky Henson, seems to be going through hard times due to his health issues and treatment at the moment. Do you remember the character Mr Charles Grigg on *Downton Abbey*? Mr Henson played this comic stage actor, who was having a hard time financially and tried to extort money from Mr Carson. He was one of the golden boys of British entertainment back in the 1960s, and was famous for being a ladies’ man. He has publicly apologized to Una for hurting her, as, when he was young, he didn’t take commitment so seriously. He also has talked openly about his ordeal with cancer for the last 18 years, saying that he’s very thankful that he has had extra time to live. As a cancer survivor myself, I do hope he’ll be okay and feel empathy for him. When we go through cancer treatment, we learn to look on the bright side of life and enjoy ourselves as much as possible!

As *Downton Abbey* ended, the actors became well-known faces in public, and we wonder what roles they’re playing now. Do you remember Phyllis Logan, who played Mrs Elsie Hughes (the housekeeper

who married the butler Charles Carson in a later episode)? She is currently on the ITV medical drama *The Good Karma Hospital*! It takes place near Mumbai, India, although it is filmed in Sri Lanka. (My husband wanted to Amanda Redman and Amrita Acharia from *Game of Thrones*.) The Good Karma Hospital building looks like a cottage, and is extremely underfunded. The director is an Englishwoman, Dr Lydia Fonseca (played by Amanda Redman), who has spent over 30 years as a local doctor. Through the patients, we learn about lots of medical, social, and international problems. Personally, I'm scared of snakes! I scream at the TV each time they appear on-screen, like when Dr Walker had to move around the giant python on the road near her motorbike! (Or when a patient is bitten by a snake!) Ms Logan plays a retired Englishwoman who came to India with her husband for her daughter's wedding, fell in love with the country, and decided to stay until her death (she has a brain tumour and has 6 months-1 year to live). The couple decided to spend the rest of their life together in a beachside villa in India, not bothered by their children, family members, in-laws, etc. Season 1 of this show was so successful that now Season 2 is going strong. Surprisingly, many British men tune in on Sunday nights to watch Dr Lydia Fonseca, a very strong, good-natured, and fair human being, trying to do her best when things are so difficult. When things are so tough and challenging, how do people accept the situation and handle it? The situations Dr Lydia has to handle are extremely challenging, and NOT boring at all! I hope that viewers will receive the "Good Karma" from viewing this show!

Contributions? Corrections? Blatant Americanisms? Contact your humble scribe at: kristin.franseen@mail.mcgill.ca. I will be in Utah for a professional conference during our next meeting, so Anne Millar (thesportingrabbit@gmail.com) will be compiling the August minutes. Those who plan on contributing toasts, original fiction, and/or lengthier reports are especially encouraged to email their texts as soon as possible to be included in the minutes. I welcome creativity and contributions from old and new members alike! Longer reports may be edited and/or condensed slightly for space, as space is limited to 10 pages (5 sheets of paper).