Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question December 2nd, 2010

Date of next meeting

Thursday, February 3rd, 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 Copper Beeches"
prepared by Marie Burrows

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, December 2nd, 2010 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Maureen Anderson, Paul Billette, Brian Blicher (guest),

Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Louise Corda (guest), Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Judith Glass (guest), Chris Herten-Greaven, David Kellett, Elliott Newman,

Clifford Ryan (guest), Arlene Scher, Matthew Surridge (guest), Ron Zilman

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Joan O'Malley, Mietek and Naomi Padowicz

Message from our Sovereign

Since I attended only two meetings in 2010, members might, understandably, have forgotten that I've been Sovereign for the past two years. Many of you know that my absence was due to a very heavy business travel schedule; in fact, if it weren't for changing the August meeting date to the last week in July, I'd have made it to precisely one meeting the whole year. Why am I telling you all this? Well, I think it shows that our Society functions well as a cohesive unit, with several members contributing behind-the-scenes to ensure its smooth operation.

The Sovereign's tenure is two years so this is the time to pass the baton to someone else. Most of you will know that the main duties of the Sovereign are to run (or ask someone else to run!) the bimonthly meetings, and to emcee our annual Birthday celebration in January; otherwise the job is what one makes it: new ideas, more publicity. So, if there's anyone who would like to put their name forward or suggest (with their approval!) someone else, please let me know by phone (514-935-9581) or e-mail (wilfrid@defreitasbooks.com) by January 17th. Remember, it's your Society and we'd very much like to hear from anyone wishing to volunteer for any aspect of our activities.

Sincerely, Wilfrid

CALL TO ORDER:

Wilfrid de Freitas called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Forward and Backward, Touch and Feel, Come and Eat)

1. Happy Birthday, Sherlock Holmes!

Having been born on January 6, 1854, Sherlock Holmes will celebrate his 157th birthday early in 2011. In a career spanning over 30 years, The World's Most Famous Consulting Detective investigated some "five hundred cases of capital importance" and has subsequently lent his name and image to countless marketing campaigns in many countries. Although he hasn't made it to the cover of *US* magazine, he is still ahead of the Kardashians in fame and achievement.

2. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in Montreal

In 1923, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made a second visit to North America, this time to promote his research into spiritualism. Although unsuccessful in launching a worldwide movement in spiritualism, SACD did succeed in gathering a crowd of 2,000 spectators to his one-hour-plus lecture at the Mount Royal Hotel. Despite his many attempts to redirect attention from Sherlock Holmes and onto his prevailing interest in spiritualism, it is now generally agreed that SACD's major contribution to the improvement of this planet has been the discovery of the birth of Sherlock Holmes, his private arrangement with the physician-turned biographer, Dr. John Watson, and the public airing of the exploits of Mr. Holmes through the placement of prose pieces in various periodic publications in Great Britain. It appears, in great hindsight, that the medical profession's loss – in the cases of Drs. Watson and Doyle – is posterity's gain.

3. Matthew Surridge in Westmount

We are able to bring you the foregoing note on SACD because of the efforts of journalist Matthew Surridge. Matthew's comprehensive and very interesting historical article on SACD's visit to Montreal in 1923 was published in the November 20th, 2010 edition of *The Gazette*, on page W8 under the title, "Spirited Welcome for Conan Doyle." We were honoured to have Matthew as a guest at our meeting. He talked about SACD's visit to Montreal, and the book written about it, published probably in the same year as the visit. The book is available for perusal in the reserve section of the Westmount library, in the basement.

David Kellett and Matthew discussed SACD's belief in spiritualism, and David mentioned he had appeared on Dr. Joe's radio program, on that same topic.

4. Advertising Pays

We were honoured with five new (to us) faces. Matthew Surridge wrote the article on SACD, and the remaining guests had read the article, and its reference to the upcoming meeting of the Bimetallic Question. We believe this is the first time we have had so many new guests at one meeting. We are also indebted to Matthew and *The Gazette* for publicizing our society and the meeting.

5. First Toast – To the Master

by Paul Billette

First, let me set the scene by quoting Christopher Morley's second principle:

"The characters in the stories are not fictitious creatures of some author's imagination. They are real people!"

Let us ponder the appeal that the Master holds over us.

He is unsocial, cynical, does not suffer fools gladly, is addicted to the most unhealthy vices ... he is even unkind at times to his best friend and biographer. He is simply a man devoted to his craft, breaking new ground in his work, marching through life to his own drum.

But of course, it is much more than just the Great Sleuth by himself, with all his keen powers of observation and deduction aside. It is that rich tapestry of plots, characters, places, and details, woven together in excellent and enjoyable English prose. Beer commercials tout drinkability ... the Canon delivers readability.

Where else would we be exposed to baritsu, monographs, crossed cheques, brain fever, palimpsests, etc., etc. ...PLUS tantalizing untold stories that tease us with unknown perils. Forget about oil spills, tsunamis, or collapsing economies ... KID STUFF, I tell you.

Are you ready now, in the 21st century, for the Giant Rat of Sumatra? It's lurking out there ...

So, members of The Bimetallic Question, followers of the "Grand Illusion," let's lift our glasses to the Master!

6. The Annual Dinner I - Size Matters

How can an informed discussion among intelligent people over where to hold our annual dinner include the reference to "size matters?" Are we totally out of control in the staid reading room of the Westmount Library with its oaken tables and extinct fireplace? Read on and discover why "size matters" was perfectly appropriate under the circumstances, and why no one was offended.

7. The Annual Dinner II - The Creek, the Paddle, and the BmQ

Sherlock Holmes came close to being up the creek without a paddle on a number of occasions. The most notable, of course, was his minor difference of opinion with Professor Moriarty at the brink of Reichenbach Falls, although in that situation, we doubt that a paddle would have done any good. Another instance was the race along the Thames in the dead of night. True, the Thames is not a creek, and the vessel they were in had no need of a paddle, but when one is desperate for a metaphor – even a bad one – no holds are barred.

Thus, our beloved BmQ was sent up the creek without a paddle when we were informed that the Montefiore Club on Guy Street would no longer be available for our annual dinner. In fact,

The Montefiore
Is no more.
The venue of our salubriousness
Is slipping from our consciousness.
The hearth to which in January we went
Is the cause of our rue and Sherlockian lament.

You get the picture.

We needed to find another place for our annual dinner.

8. The Annual Dinner III - The Quest

The aging king was plunged into blind despair. His white beard had almost reached the stone floor on the dais at the foot of his throne, which signifies, in all epics, sagas, lore, and television commercials, the quick approach of the end-of-days of a ruler. He was about to shuffle off this mortal coil, and he had not fulfilled his destiny, which had been to bring satiation, contentment, and flowing spirits to his adoring subjects.

An angel looking a lot like Billy Crystal dressed up like a beggar with the telltale Brooklyn/Yiddish accent descended a crystal staircase to the foot of the royal bed and in the puff of a flash and a shimmering halo of platinum light, went, "Oy. Ow. I could never get used to those flashes. I like the dramatic effect, but the skin burns are something else. Oy! Oy! Oy!"

"Who – who are you?" the depressed king uttered when he awoke with a start, gathering his beard around him in some kind of protective measure against the stranger.

"I am the ... uh ... just a sec ..." the angel began, pausing to thumb through his *Angel's Manual*. "Yeah. Here it is." And he read, "I am The Angel of Unfulfilled Mandates."

"Unfulfilled what?"

"Mandates. I'm a solution provider sent from on high."

"What?" the king said again.

"What? What? Is that all you can say? No wonder the kingdom is in trouble and you're depressed," the Angel Billy said, somewhat aggressively. "A consultant. I consult. I listen, I provide solutions."

At the word "consultant" the king shrank deep into his cushions and his beard. An ancestor of his had once hired a consultant, whose work had taken the monarchy six centuries to undo.

"You shouldn't worry. I've got the Harvard MBA, and I'm not related to Howard Abramov."

With the recommendation of the Angel Billy, the king ordered three of his most trusted ministers to go into the three directions of the compass. (Civilization had not yet evolved into the N-S-E-W compass points we know today. We anticipate at least two more variable compass points in the near future, notably Forward and Reverse.) If they followed the king's directions implicitly, they would be successful, and contentment would return to the kingdom.

The king would retire with grace and aplomb, leaving management of his vast territories to a chosen successor.

He chose Rachel, Ron, and Wilfrid. They donned their armour, mounted their well-muscled steeds, and thundered off, colours flying like gaily coloured ribbons from the tips of their lances.

9. The Annual Dinner IV – An Informed Discussion Among Elegant People

Ron Zilman, the Minister of Numbers, passed seven mountain ranges, a burning desert (in November!) and the Decarie Expressway, reining in his exhausted horse at Le Biftheque on Cote de Liesse. The horse was understandably nervous. Ron negotiated a menu with a price tag of \$42.77, all inclusive. If all went well, the kingdom would dine in the Jacques-Cartier Room.

Lord Wilfrid of the Book broke through the undergrowth of Vieux Montreal, broadsword in hand, his legs a mass of gashes below his leather tunic. He stanched his wounds, confabulated amicably with le Restaurant du Vieux Port, and arrived at a pact signifying \$40.00 for a decent menu including three canapés, or for \$3 more, an average of 6 canapés per person. These prices would be all-inclusive of service charges and taxes. (Taxes not having been introduced into his native land, Lord Wilfrid asked the Minister of le Vieux Port to explain the concept).

Last was Lady Rachel of the Ancient Habit who descended past the Swamp of Deathly Aloes, the Creek of Midas, and the Flame of Eternal Knowledge, and unto the doorstep of the St. Sulpice Hotel, in Old Montreal. She heard Heavenly Hosannas from within. The eyes of the Good Humor ice cream man twinkled merrily beside his cart. Yes, his eyes were in his head. The deer of the forest, the bears of the woods, the cougars of the mountains, and the rabbits of the yawning cooking pots mingled together without fear or intimidation around the kitchen door of the hotel. Rachel negotiated a price of \$45 per person, including service and taxes. This was Nirvana, except not all was vegan.

When all three emissaries retraced their steps to the castle of the ancient king and presented their findings, the wise monarch put it to the people. Almost to a man and woman, they agreed to crowd into Salon Le Moyne Le Ber on the evening of Saturday, January 22nd. It was further agreed that written invitations and reservation forms would be sent by Her Majesty's post to all concerned, in the expectation of an early reply. The location of the hotel would be made evident in that correspondence.

The king and his subjects heartily thanked Ron, Wilfrid, and Rachel for their excellent service, and wished them Godspeed with sharp numbers, a keen blade, and excellent visions.

(The reference to "size matters" in Item 6 of these Minutes in no way intends to compare our annual dinner with the bacchanalia leading to the demise and fall of the Roman Empire. Rather, in comparing menus and portions among the establishments vying for our business, Rachel Alkallay pointed out noted that some restaurants gave bigger portions than others, and that we should be aware of this when making our decision as to which venue to select. As we observed on a previous occasion, it is sad when, after being disgorged from an annual dinner late of a Saturday night, some among us were casting about in the blizzard for a place to eat.)

10. The Annual Dinner V – The Guest Speaker

Our guest speaker will be Robert Landori, member, Crime Writers of Canada.

11. Second Toast - To Doctor Watson

by Naomi Padowicz, read in her absence by David Kellett

(David explained that Naomi's toast was in the form of a note written by Mary Marston to her future husband, Dr. John Watson. The obvious, unremitting sexual innuendo (no, Naomi, this is not a case of **Honi soit qui mal y pense**) was most unlike our understanding of the primness and propriety we associate with what nice Victorian ladies kept hidden under their bustles. David said that although he had agreed to read the toast, he accepted no responsibility for its content and for the offence it might cause some of our members. We will present the toast herewith, and include some of the comments following.)

My Dearest, Darling John,

How may I encourage your secret desires and attentions? Do not think that they would go unanswered. Let not my modest feminine demeanour dissuade your advances, for my feelings towards you are mutual and heated like the embers of the hearth. I pray you pay heed to my words, lest I may be forced into actions that could bring dishonour to yourself and my family, but be under no illusion that I have not done these things in my mind a thousand times. Many evenings have I indulged in the idle dreaming of a virgin maid as yet untouched by man, tasting for the first time the love that only two souls destined to explore each other dare dream. Your witty organ deeply penetrates my very soul and mind to reveal truths before unknown. Hands so strong and nimble hold me in warm embraces leaving my body quivering like rose petals in the wind. My maiden bosom heaves with anticipation of our belated reunion. Too many weeks have passed since our encounter behind the shelf of books; I crave to continue our fascinating intercourse

begun then. I beseech thee join me for one last feast on Yuletide eve, so we may dance beneath the holly, for I would have a gift of such splendour that I had been saving all these years not knowing it was for you and you alone. Do not tarry or I may despair ever to know the touch of a man. I crave to kiss you until I am a maid no more.

Yours lovingly,

Mary M.

The ensuing discussion led Wilfrid de Freitas to observe: "This is the first time we're voting on a toast"

The crux, of course, was the explicit sexuality of the note to Watson, playing on inference that he was a ladies' man of vigorous appetite. In the above love note of explicit encouragement and absolute surrender, Mary Morstan steps outside the bounds of Victorian propriety.

Some of the BmQ thought that the note was a little too explicit.

"Would, for example," Roger Burrows mused, "Dr. Watson have actually gone ahead and married a woman who through this missive came across as nothing less than a tart whose emotions, for whatever reason, she had allowed to run away with her better judgment? What kind of wife would such a woman have made?"

"'Witty organ' is the deal-breaker," Watson fumed. "Egad, a hound is better than this!"

Other voices opined that if Dr. Watson were to have taken her up on her offer, it would have been only for carnal satiation. Certainly, had he done so, the good doctor would have not gone ahead and married her afterwards.

The toast was provocative, certainly. Does it speak to the accuracy of SACD's characterization of Morstan and Watson? Probably not. But it did make for lively discussion and probably more titillation than the venerable Westmount Library Reading Room had seen before.

12. Sherlock, Rachel, and Destiny

Rachel Alkallay visited her grandmother's grave in Finland in 1990, and noted that the date of birth read: January 6, the reputed birth date of Sherlock Holmes. It was then that Rachel knew she was fated to be a Sherlockian.

13. A Prose by Any Other Name

Marie Burrows passed around a book entitle Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Prose. Thank you.

14. The Emerging Sherlock Holmes

We discussed the new Sherlock Holmes series of three made-for-television movies from England. We concluded that this is an attempt at modern entertainment. According to David Kellett, "At least it's good ... I get a feeling this is what it might have felt like when A Study in Scarlet first came out."

David Dowse added that there are two considerations:

- (a) The displays of SH's analytical genius now are just as impressive as they were then;
- (b) The character of the man is different. The new character doesn't show the respect and politeness that the original did.

Maureen Anderson said she doesn't like the present-day police force. "They are too bumbling."

According to Roger Burrows, the modern-day SH uses and manipulates technology brilliantly, making inductive leaps equal to the incisive flashes of the original character.

Maureen added, "Some parts of it are so brilliant that I need to watch it even if I object to the portrayal of Sherlock Holmes, at times."

The Lowly Scribe was too busy writing to contribute at the time, but he was thinking: The creation of Sherlock Holmes, his personality, character, affiliations, and reasoning were at the dawn of a certain kind of time. His creation represents a novelty in the sense that his ability to grapple with reality, illusion, and delusion are a paradigm in detective literature specifically, and in literature generally. If we accept the formulaic brand of reasoning of Sherlock Holmes as a paradigm, we can trace its influence throughout detective fiction and other genres, in many languages. Today, detective and literary fiction has exploded exponentially from the meagre numbers of sleuths and their ways in the late 1800s. Simply, despite our consumption of huge planets of detective entertainment, there is nothing new in the genre that ranks with the brilliant innovation of SACD at the time of the conception of SH. The London detective expanded consciousness and raised the name to a household word around the world. The new Sherlock is a permutation and adaptation, a mapping of old genius against the tableau of a new context. It's techno-lit – suitable for the times, but far from the only intelligent treatment accorded some of today's sleuths and their predicaments.

15. No, Virginia, Not Everyone Shaves

Paul Billette read the excerpt of a note written by SACD to the thespian portrayer of SH, William Gillette.

16. Plaque at the Crest

Wilfrid reminded us that there is a plaque sponsored by our society and the Swiss Sherlockian society, in the granite wall at Reichenbach Falls.

17. The Dismantling of a Landmark

Wilfrid pointed out that there was an auction of Montefiore Club artwork and other property in Toronto.

Rachel had been to the local auction and had purchased upholstered chairs @ \$10 each, but passed on the operating upright piano that also went for \$10.

Wilfrid added that in our four years of annual dinners there, we had been truly spoiled. They had taken very good care of us, in excellent surroundings, at a reasonable price.

18. Open the Gates!

Wilfrid invited our five new guests to join us at the annual dinner. We promised to send them information on the venue, along with a reservation form. We gathered their contact coordinates for this purpose.

19. A Celebrity Among Us

David Kellett showed us a CD from his appearance on Dr. Joe's show.

20. Divestiture Sad and Celebratory

David Kellett continued to give away memorabilia from his personal collection. David, please hang onto your clothes. We hope to have you with us for a long time yet.

21. Stanley Baker

Rachel Alkallay reported that a memorial for Stanley had been held at the Greene Community Centre, organized by Paul Billette and herself. She suggested that we do something in his honour at the dinner

Your Obt. and Hmbl. Lowly Scribe has completed a researched, 2,600-word written tribute, and with the assistance of several others, is preparing a photographic remembrance of Stanley to welcome us to the dinner.

Paul said he'd like to have some kind of perpetual memorial to Stanley, such as a trophy in his name

22. Entertainment for the Masses

Wilfrid de Freitas invited us all to consider providing entertainment at the dinner.

23. Quiz - Results

Story: The Adventure of the Empty House prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 100 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Marie Burrows	99*	Sherlock Holmes DVD
2.	Roger Burrows	94	The Lost World by SACD
3.	Wilfrid de Freitas	881/2	Box of shortbread

^{*}Highest score ever on a BmQ quiz?

The next quiz, based on *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*, will be prepared by Marie Burrows

24. Third Toast - To the Woman

by Elliott Newman

In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Irene Adler is noted as being born in New Jersey in 1858. According to other sources, she was modeled after Lily Langtree, born on the Isle of Jersey and known as "Jersey Lily." Irene Adler followed a career in opera as a contralto, performing at La Scala, Milan and also a term as prima donna in the Imperial Opera of Warsaw, Poland, indicating that she was an extraordinary singer.

Dr. Watson refers to her as "the late Irene Adler" at the time of the story's publication. "Late" can also mean "former", as she had married Godfrey Norton, making Adler her former name.

We are aware by now of her role in *A Scandal in Bohemia* and how her erstwhile lover, Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and hereditary King of Bohemia, makes an incognito visit to Holmes in London. The King asks the famous detective to secure a photograph from Adler. Of course, Holmes's acceptance of the case is so far off his moral compass that he can only fail. What right, after all, does he have in meddling in an affair of the heart?

Let us honour her tonight as the first woman of mystery ever to embody a plenitude of the history and complexities of any heroine in any language until that time. She is a breakthrough in the art of detective fiction and possibly an inspiration in future world literary fiction as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen of The Bimetallic Question, let us raise our glasses to the female character worthy of our homage and our dreams, The Woman, Irene Adler.

25. Fourth Toast - To Mrs. Hudson

by Roger Burrows

My toast this evening is to the most mysterious woman in the Canon: Mrs. Hudson. Although she is mentioned by name in fifteen stories (sixteen if you decide that Watson or the Literary Agent meant "Hudson" when they wrote "Turner" in *A Scandal in Bohemia*), we are told almost nothing about her.

According to *A Study in Scarlet*, she had a "stately tread." She is described as "worthy" in *The Sign of Four*. In *The Naval Treaty*, Holmes says that she has "as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotchwoman," which only shows she *isn't* Scottish (Holmes, with his precision of language, would have said, "as *any* Scotchwoman" had she been of Scottish extraction). In *The Sign of Four*, her speech patterns show that she is not well-educated. And in *The Dying Detective*, Mrs. Hudson shows genuine concern for Holmes. And that's really all the Canon has to say about her. We do not even know her first name. (There *are* people who argue:

- Mrs. Hudson is an old woman associated with Sherlock Holmes
- Martha is an old woman associated with Sherlock Holmes
- Therefore Mrs. Hudson and Martha are the same person

but I am not one of them.)

Even her title does not tell us anything conclusive: "Mrs." is the standard honorific for a landlady. She could have been an only child, inheriting 221 Baker Street from her parents, rather than from a husband.

Because the Canon tells us so little about her, film and television adaptations have had to create a persona. And they have depicted her as middle-aged or older, and presumably widowed. But she could equally well be a slightly overweight single woman, of the same age as her two male lodgers. In that case, no wonder that Mrs. Hudson is not described in detail. Watson may have decided that it is a story for which, as Holmes himself would say, the world is not yet prepared.

To Mrs. Hudson!

26. Ooops!

Roger Burrows commented on the attempted murder of Sherlock Holmes by Sebastian Moran. Roger observed that it would have been impossible to shoot as accurately as described, since the shadow of the bust on the screen would not have given the shooter a precise-enough location of the target.

There was some discussion about this. We assume that SACD had passed through his elementary studies in optics, particularly the sub-chapter on parallax, and he would have taken into account such a phenomenon.

Or the intelligent Colonel Moran (Colonel = army = weapons training?) may have shifted his aim to account for all such aberrations.

Actually, we weren't there, so we don't know. We thrive on conjecture.

We are a canny lot, och-aye.

27. Fifth Toast - To the Society

by Maureen Anderson

Our Society not only unravels the writings of Arthur Conan Doyle and other great authors; it also delves into the minds of the members and guests and uncovers who **we** are. Our Society shows us how each and every one of us is an important part, as each has something to contribute.

In the larger frame of things, we interact with one another, complementing the Society, bringing new ideas; ways of understanding and doing things. I consider my membership to be a gift, as I have had the pleasure of being part of a Society which not only challenged my mind, but has led me into infinite possibilities, piqued my imagination, and touched my heart.

In the words of Helen Keller:

Special People

There are red-letter days in our lives
when we meet people who thrill us like a fine poem,
people whose handshake is brimful of unspoken sympathy
and whose sweet, rich natures impart
to our eager, impatient spirits
a wonderful restfulness which is in its essence divine ...
Perhaps we never saw them before
and they may never cross our life's path again;
but the influence of their calm, mellow natures
is a libation poured upon our discontent,
and we feel its healing touch
as the ocean feels the mountain stream freshening its brine...

I would like to take this opportunity to toast the red-letter Society, who are all special to me, thanking both past and present members. A special thank you goes to Patrick Campbell & Jack Anderson for introducing me to the society. Thank you all.

You will therefore permit me to raise my glass to you, The Bimetallic Question.

To the Society.

28. Next Meeting's Toast Presenters

To the Master - Ron Zilman
To Dr. Watson - Susan Fitch
To the Woman - Rachel Alkallay
To Mrs. Hudson - Jack Anderson
To the Society - David Dowse

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, February 3rd, 2011, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to:

http://www.bimetallicquestion.org