

Nov 17 #1

Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press

Sherlock Holmes' 164th birthday will be celebrated on Friday, Jan. 12, with the traditional festivities in New York. The (very) long weekend runs from Wednesday through Sunday, and information about registering for events and making hotel reservations is available on-line at the Baker Street Irregulars' web-site <www.bakerstreetjournal.com/bsiweekend.html>; space is limited at some events, so don't delay registering. There's more information at Scott Monty's excellent web-site <www.bsiweekend.com>; Scott also has a "Here Are Your #BSIWeekend Tips" at <www.ihose.co/bsi2017tips>.

The Dr. John H. Watson Fund offers financial assistance to all Sherlockians (membership in the BSI is not required) who might otherwise not be able to participate in the weekend's festivities. A carefully pseudonymous John H. Watson presides over the fund and welcomes contributions, which can be made by check payable to John H. Watson and sent (without return address on the envelope) to Dr. Watson, care of The Baker Street Irregulars, at 7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278; your letters are forwarded unopened, and Dr. Watson will acknowledge your generosity. Requests for assistance should also be mailed (quickly) to Dr. Watson at the same address.

The Watson Fund benefits from the auction at the Saturday reception during the birthday festivities; if you would like to see what a truly spectacular auction looks like, watch the video at <www.tinyurl.com/ybh7xtlz>.

"The Sherlock Holmes Collection of Daniel Posnansky" will be at auction at Profiles in History on Dec. 19 <www.tinyurl.com/y9gtlru3>, and the catalog offers a splendid look at what a truly dedicated collector can achieve; the web-site offers Glen Miranker's delightful tribute to Dan, and you can (and should) download the Catalog PDF, which is fully illustrated.

Another addition to the list of members of The Baker Street Irregulars who have acted in films (Sep 17 #6 and Oct 17 #5): Michael W. McClure.. And his children (Michael W. McClure II, Jennifer McClure, Christine McClure, and Elizabeth McClure) as extras.

Fans of the musical "Baker Street" (1964) will enjoy Stephen Bowie's story in Broadway World, Oct. 31 <www.tinyurl.com/y9bntawt> about the N.Y. Public Library's acquisition of the scripts of Jerome Coopersmith; there's a long interview with Coopersmith about the musical in the story, with some interesting background on how the musical was created and staged.

Some of Conan Doyle's correspondence was written and signed by secretaries, and the secretaries put their initials after the signature; an example of this went to auction at Bubb Kuyper in the Netherlands on Nov. 22, estimated at €150-€250 <www.tinyurl.com/y7rm9d8h>. It sold for €200.

Mary Cameron Shore's collection of Sherlockiana was donated to the University of North Carolina in 1978, and items from the collection were exhibited there in 1980 (Jan 80 #1). Its existence is not well-known, but the collection is interesting indeed, and Mattias Boström has reported Christy Edina Richards' comprehensive assessment of the collection, submitted for her M.S. degree in Library Science in 2003 <www.tinyurl.com/yae7ovhw>.

Nov 17 #2 Willmer A. Hoerr's "The Case of the Archetypical Agent" (published in The Baker Street Journal in Mar. 1968) discussed Ignatius Paul Pollaky, widely known as "Paddington Pollaky" (and mentioned in Gilbert and Sullivan's "Patience"). Pollaky was a private detective active in London well before Sherlock Holmes, and Hoerr concluded that "because he was very close-mouthed and lacked a literary friend, we shall probably never know just what his exploits were." Bryan Kesselman's 'PADDINGTON' POLLAKY: PRIVATE DETECTIVE (Stroud: History Press, 2015; 239 pp., \$19.95) corrects that oversight; sub-titled "the mysterious life and times of the real Sherlock Holmes," the book is a full-scale biography of Pollaky, who was no Holmes, but nevertheless a colorful character indeed.

More kidvid: Lenny Picker's daughter has reported a (brief) appearance of a wax figure of Sherlock Holmes in the "Headhunters" episode of the Disney Channel's animated series "Gravity Falls" <www.tinyurl.com/ycd2r8kl>.

Nancy Friday died on Nov. 5. Famous as the author of MY SECRET GARDEN (a survey of women's sexual fantasies that was published in 1973 and sold more than two million copies), she went on to write FORBIDDEN FLOWERS: MORE WOMEN'S SEXUAL FANTASIES (1975) in which she said that "Another fantasy is one where I seduce Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes at 22B [sic] Baker Street. In it, I am his twenty-year-old niece. Dr. Watson (Nigel Bruce) is amazed his aloof pal Holmes finally fell for someone."

There's a Sherlock Holmes Walking Tour of Edinburgh, led by Toby Virgo (in Sherlockian costume); you can also book a private tour, and there's a colorful web-site at <www.realsherlockholmes.com>.

John Hillerman died on Nov. 9. He had a long career as an actor on stage and screen and television, and is best known for his role as Higgins in the long-running television series "Magnum, P.I."; he also played Dr. Watson in the television film "Hands of a Murderer" on CBS-TV in 1990.

Howard Ostrom has discovered a spectacular one-of-a-kind portrait doll that the Russian artist Natalia Zatova created of Borislav Brondokov as Inspector Lestrade in the Russian television series that starred Vasiliy Livanov as Sherlock Holmes. You can see the doll in full color at her web-site at <www.natalydolls.com/lestrade.php#>, and more of her dolls are on display at her web-site. Inspector Lestrade is in a private collection and not for sale, but she accepts commissions (costing 200,000 rubles and up, depending on the complexity of the costume).

There's now an official trailer for "Sherlock Gnomes" (the animated movie featuring the world's greatest ornamental detective), scheduled for release on Mar. 23 <www.tinyurl.com/ybnvawee>.

Further to the report (Sep 03 #2) on Britain's endangered bitterns (it was in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" that Stapleton suggested that "I should not be surprised to learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns"), a story in The Guardian (Nov. 8) <www.tinyurl.com/ymdalksx> (kindly noted by Phil Attwell) reports that there now is a record high of bitterns in Britain: the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds recently counted 164 bitterns at 71 wetlands sites in Britain.

Nov 17 #3 Who knew? The Langham Hotel, site of the fateful dinner where Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde were commissioned to write stories for Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, is haunted, according to a report in the South China Morning Post <www.tinyurl.com/y8lyfyj6>, and one of them is the Langham (which of course also is mentioned in three of the Canonical stories). A Google search for [langham hotel room 333] yields some interesting reports (and videos).

Brian Pugh spotted an interesting painting at auction at Bonhams in London on Nov. 21, estimated at £1,000-£1,500: the painting, by Edward George Handel Lucas, shows Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's writing shed and grave at Crowborough in August 1930 <www.tinyurl.com/y7oq5okt>; it sold for £1,750.

Dudley Simpson died on Nov. 4. He learned to play the piano in his childhood in Australia and went on to become an accomplished conductor in Australia and Britain; he then moved into composing for television, including "Doctor Who" and is credited for the incidental music in that series' Victorian (and almost Sherlockian) episode "The Talons of Weng-Chiang" (1977).

Sherlock Holmes has been wrapped. Again. Charity Hands On London wrapped the statue of Sherlock Holmes outside the Baker Street underground station in a bright red coat on Nov. 5, as part of a campaign asking people to donate their old coats, which go to those in need <www.wrapuplondon.org.uk>; there's a brief glimpse of the Sherlock Holmes statue in a "Wrap Up London" video at <www.tinyurl.com/y7wrnfww>

Vicki Delany's BODY ON BAKER STREET (New York: Crooked Lane, 2017; 297 pp., \$26.99) is the second in her pleasantly-cozy "Sherlock Holmes bookshop mystery" series that stars Gemma Doyle (the proprietor of the Sherlock Holmes Bookshop) and her friend Jayne Wilson (the proprietor of the next-door Mrs. Hudson's Tea Room) investigating the murder (in the bookshop) of an author of Sherlockian pastiches. The next title in the series will be THE CAT OF THE BASKERVILLES.

The oldest surviving Sherlockian television broadcast is "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (broadcast by NBC-TV in 1949); Holmes); you can watch it at YouTube <www.tinyurl.com/ydabnb3w> and see Alan Napier as Holmes, years before he became famous as Alfred the butler in the long-running "Batman" series in the 1960s. "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" was broadcast by NBC on its experimental station in New York in 1937; with Louis Hector as Holmes, and it would be nice indeed if someone discovers a recording of the show.

Sherlock Holmes needs to move. Again. The Edinburgh City Council is considering remodelling Picardy Place, and is asking for suggestions from the public about a new site for the statue of Sherlock Holmes erected in 1991 as a memorial to Arthur Conan Doyle <www.tinyurl.com/y865v36c>.

Massimo Polidaro's "Notes on a Strange World" column in November/December issue of the Skeptical Inquirer is devoted to "The Conspiracy of Fairies" and the possibility, suggested by Fiona Maher in the August issue of Fortean Times, that the Cottingley photographs actually were faked by Elsie Wright's father Arthur.

Nov 17 #4 Michael Ross, who some years ago reported the PLAYMOBIL figurine of Sherlock Holmes (May 94 #2) has now reported Richard Unglik's SHERLOCK HOLMES ET LE CHIEN DES BASKERVILLES (Bruxelles: Casterman, 2013; 96 pp., €18.50 at the publisher's web-site) <tinyurl.com/y9jnluhg>; une interprétation playmobilesque du roman de Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The book's also available in Spanish as EL PERRO DE LOS BASKERVILLE (2015) and in English as THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, 2016).

The second title in Elizabeth Fulberg's "Shelby Holmes" series is THE GREAT SHELBY HOLMES MEETS HER MATCH (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017; 230 pp., \$16.99) and it is an excellent sequel to THE GREAT SHELBY HOLMES (Jun 17 #2). The series is written for young readers and is nicely Sherlockian, and the new story's told well. The author's web-site is at <www.elizabetheulberg.com>.

THE LOST PRINCESS OF OZ was the eleventh of Frank L. Baum's books about Oz, and the autumn issue of The Baum Bugle (the quarterly journal of the International Wizard of Oz Club) has Scott Cummings' discussion of some of the early reviews of the book, offering a nice example or two of how one hears of Sherlock everywhere: the Chicago Post (Dec. 7, 1913) noted that "There are few characters in fiction that one could wish to go on forever--Sherlock Holmes is one," adding that "certainly the inhabitants of Oz are among that few elect," and the Louisville Courier Journal (Dec. 13, 1917) reviewer said that, "it is the wonderful wizard, who like Sherlock Holmes, never made a mistake, who finds Ozma in a most surprising situation." The Club's colorful web-site is at <www.ozclub.org>.

Keith Barron died on Nov. 15. A British actor, he appeared in many television series, and he was best known for his role as David Pearce in "Duty Free" in the 1980s. Barron also played Rob Ferguson in Granada's "The Last Vampyre" (1993).

It's often said, by people who believe that "The Blue Carbuncle" could not have involved a garnet, that there are no blue garnets. That certainly was true when Sherlock Holmes solved that mystery, but no longer: in 1998 there was a discovery of a blue garnet in the Bekily mines in Madagascar. But it is only sometimes blue: it's a color-change garnet, a mixture of pyrope and spessartine that's grayish or greenish blue in daylight, changing to purple in incandescent light, and brilliant blue in LED light.

"Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Early LSD Guru" was the headline on a story on Oct. 27 <www.tinyurl.com/ybk2p3vb> at the Reason Foundation's Hit & Run blog about the late Gerald Heard, described as a mystic whose syncretic spiritual path eventually led him to mescaline and LSD." You can read more about at a web-site <www.geraldheard.com>, including the books that he wrote (as H. F. Heard) about Mr. Mycroft. The "Hit & Run" blog includes a link to Boris Karloff's "The Sting of Death" (1955), which was adapted from Heard's A TASTE FOR HONEY.

Laurie R. King's web-site <www.laurierking.com> now has a new and helpful chronology of her books and stories about Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes; click on [Books] and then on [Russell and Holmes] to read what she has to say about what her fans call the Kanon, and scroll down to find the "Internal chronology" for the series.

Nov 17 #5 Sherlock Holmes said (in "The Speckled Band") that "Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession." Stephen Bates' *THE POISONER: LIFE AND CRIMES OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND'S MOST NOTORIOUS DOCTOR* (New York: Overlook Press, 2014; 342 pp., \$17.95) is a detailed biography of William Palmer; Bates notes that Holmes was flattering to Palmer, "since he lost his nerve and was never at the head of his profession, even as a poisoner."

Rosemary Herbert's interview with Jeremy Brett, published in *The Armchair Detective* (fall 1985) has been excerpted as "Jeremy Brett: The Real Sherlock Holmes" in the "Murder & Mayhem" blog, and it's a nice reminder of the Granada series <www.tinyurl.com/y8dz8vbe>.

Martin Arbagi reports that registration is now open for the "Holmes, Doyle, & Friends" gathering on Mar. 9-10 in Dayton, Ohio; details at the web-site of The Agra Treasurers <www.agratreasurers.net/holmes-doyle-friends.html>.

THE USUAL SANTAS, edited by Peter Lovesey (New York: Soho Crime, 2017; 400 pp., \$19.95) is subtitled "a Collection of Soho Crime Christmas Capers" and is a nicely seasonal anthology of stories by interesting authors, including Cara Black's "Cabaret aux Assassins" about Irene Adler's daughter Neige and Irene's exploits in Paris).

David Small died on July 21. He had a long career in England and Australia as an actor, director, and radio presenter, and played Conan Doyle in Australia in Cenarth Fox's "The Real Sherlock Holmes" in 2004 and 2005.

"Fake News" is the title of an exhibition at the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford, W. Yorks. <www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk>, running through Jan. 28; the Bradford Telegraph & Argus noted (Nov. 16) that "Fake News" is nothing new, and that the exhibits range from the existence of bat creatures living on the Moon in 1835 to modern-day politics (both British and American), and the historic material on display includes the Cottingley Fairies hoax <www.tinyurl.com/ybgktdew>.

Plan well ahead: the Wessex Press' "From Gillette to Brett V" conference is scheduled for Oct. 5-7 in Bloomington, Ind. <www.wessexpress.com>.

Ross K. Foad (who maintains the web-site "No Place Like Holmes") has begun a new web-series "The History of Spirituality" (adapted from Conan Doyle's *THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM*); the first episode ("The Story of Swedenborg") is available at YouTube <www.tinyurl.com/ybfo8xtg>, with more episodes to follow.

Aaron Cowan was in the news in Britain in October: he was jailed for five years after admitting six charges of fraud, five of them while posing as a police officer. He used the persona of Insp. Greg Lestrade at mobile phone shops and bookmakers across Kent, purporting to investigate stolen iPhones and fake bank notes, and was reported to the police when a business manager became suspicious of the name. At his trial he claimed he was the victim of a vicious gang who made him pose as an Inspector Lestrade, but was the judge declared him the most "unconvincing witness he had ever heard, with crocodile tears, a self-pitying confidence trickster."

Nov 17 #6 Theatrical news: Ken Ludwig's "Baskerville: A Sherlock Holmes Mystery" will be performed at the Waco Civic Theatre in Waco, Tex., Dec. 1-10 <www.wacocivictheatre.org>; and at the Theatre Baton Rouge in Baton Rouge, La., Jan. 19-Feb. 4 <www.theatrebr.org>; and at the Clear Space Theatre in Rehobeth Beach, Del., Jan. 26-Feb. 11; their web-site's at <www.clearspacetheatre.org>. The play's also due at the Springhouse Theatre in Smyrna, Tenn., Apr. 13-29 <www.springhousetheater.com>; at Greensburg Civic Theatre in Greensburg, Pa., May 4-6 <gctheatre.org>; at Shea's 710 Theatre in Buffalo, N.Y. May 10-13 <www.sheas.org>.

Jeffrey Hatcher's "Holmes and Watson" is running at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater in Milwaukee, Wis., through Dec. 17 <www.milwaukeeep.com>.

Ken Ludwig's "The Game's Afoot, or Holmes for the Holidays" is running at the Ross Valley Players in Ross, Calif., through Dec. 10; their web-site's at <www.rossvalleyplayers.com>. It's also due at the Love Street Playhouse in Woodland, Wash., Dec. 1-17 <www.lovestreetplayhouse.com>. Also at the Glendale Center Theatre in Glendale, Calif., Oct. 11-Nov. 17, 2018 <www.glendalecentertheatre.com>.

Steven Canny and John Nicholson's comedy "The Hound of the Baskervilles" is to be performed at the Jermyn Street Theatre in London, Dec. 6 through Jan. 13 <www.jermynstreettheatre.co.uk>.

Admirers of Charles Dickens know that his last novel THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD was left unfinished when Dickens died in 1870, and that a minor industry sprang up as people offered their solutions to the mystery. One of those people was T. P. James of Brattleboro, Vt., author of PART SECOND OF THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD BY THE SPIRIT-PEN OF CHARLES DICKENS THROUGH A MEDIUM, published in 1873. The Rutland Herald had a long story about James on Nov. 26 <www.tinyurl.com/yalfya95>, noting that Conan Doyle, in the December 1927 issue of The Bookman, discussed the book and concluded that it read like "Dickens gone flat." But there's bit more to the story, not reported in the Rutland Herald: when Conan Doyle reprinted the article in THE EDGE OF THE UNKNOWN in 1930, he added an account of his later conversation with Dickens about the book. Conan Doyle asked Dickens, "was that American who finished EDWIN DROOD inspired?" And Dickens answered, "Not by me."

The conversation, needless to say, was through a medium, at a sitting with Florizel von Reuter and his mother; Dickens had more to say about the book, of course, and THE EDGE OF THE UNKNOWN is well worth pursuing (Conan Doyle also discusses Harry Houdini, and ghosts, and much more); the full text is not available on-line, but reprints are available at reasonable prices at eBay and Amazon and elsewhere.

You can see Nils Nordberg and the late Ted Bergman as they were fifty years ago, in a television quiz show that had Norwegian and Swedish experts competing for 10,000 kroner (rather than \$64,000); the program is available at the Norwegian NRK web-site <www.tinyurl.com/y743cqyz>. A tip of the hat to Howard Ostrom, who spotted the video.

The Spermaceti Press: Peter E. Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD
20817-4401 (301-229-5669) <blau7103@comcast.net>