Meeting Notes

November 15, 2025

75th Anniversary Edition

Reported by Carla Coupe

The Red Circle's 75th anniversary celebration began at the American Film Institute's AFI Silver Theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland, which hosted three newly restored silent movie shorts starring the magnificent Eille Norwood. Attendees were first greeted by Victoria Wood, appropriately kitted out with deerstalker, who distributed The Red Circle swag, including bookmarks, postcards, and a brochure listing the presentations recorded and available at our YouTube channel.

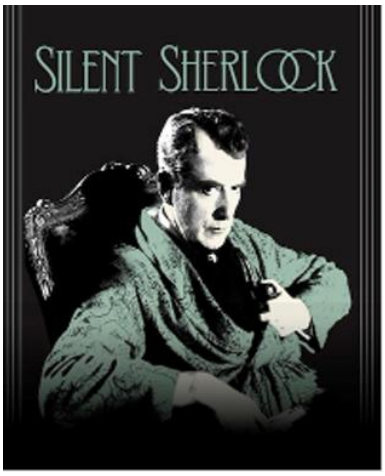
The theatre's setting was period-perfect as approximately 180 people, many of them The Red Circle members (including some from Chicago and New York), gathered in the AFI's beautiful Art Deco main theatre. Todd Hitchcock, the director of the AFI Silver Theatre, welcomed the crowd and explained that these three shorts were part of a series of 45 Sherlock Holmes shorts and two feature films, all starring Eille Norwood. Once more of these are restored, he is looking forward to showing them at the AFI—definitely something to look forward to! He also introduced Ben Model, who, as traditional with silent movies, would play an organ accompaniment throughout.

Then Peter E. Blau took the podium and welcomed everyone to our 75th anniversary celebration and informed the crowd that everyone attending was now a member of The Red Circle!

The lights dimmed and attendees were treated to the British Film Institute's beautifully restored films. First we saw "A Scandal in Bohemia," from 1921, which followed, more-or-less (rather less than more), the canonical story. For some reason Irene Adler was renamed Irene Adair (shades of "The Empty House!") and trod the boards as an actress rather than an opera singer. The scandalous photograph with the King was actually a casual outdoor selfie of the two of them—how modern! Holmes takes a more active part in trying to recover the photograph, including disguising himself as an actor and chloroforming Irene on stage, which seems rather dodgy behavior for our hero. He also disguises himself as the clergyman who was attacked outside 'Brion Lodge' (why the missing y, one asks?) and as a cabman, in which disguise he witnesses Irene's marriage to a fellow actor. Fortunately, Irene still manages to outfox Holmes in the end.

In all of the films, the time-period has been updated to the then-present, and motor cars replace horse-drawn carriages. Fashions are au courant for the early 1920s, as well as is the interior décor.

The second film was "The Golden Pince-Nez," produced in 1922. In this short the original story is followed more closely, save that Holmes spills an ashtray over the floor in front of the bookcase, instead of puffing away like a chimney and sprinkling his ashes around. When Anna appears from the recess behind the bookcase, there's a lovely little flash-back that shows her arriving at Yoxley Old Place, searching for the papers, and defending herself when Willoughby Smith grabs her. Inexplicably, there is no mention of Professor Coram's Russian connection, and Anna simply says that he committed a crime and blamed her and an innocent man. So instead of the Russian Embassy, Holmes and Watson are to deliver the papers to the police. Perhaps the new and short-lived Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic would not have appreciated being compared to the recently defunct Tsarist government. One can only speculate.

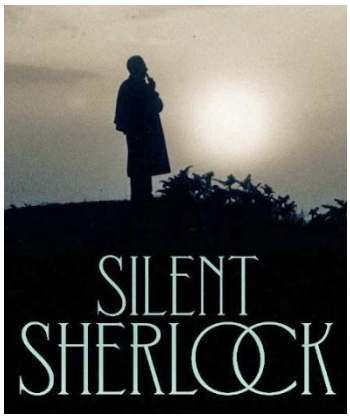


The third and final short was the one that strayed farthest from canon: "The Final Problem," also released in 1922. In this version, an exhausted and shaken Holmes takes refuge with Watson and tells him about being attacked several times that day. The door opens unexpectedly and who should appear but a well-rounded Professor Moriarty, suitably menacing, who confronts and threatens Holmes. Once he leaves, Holmes decides to flee to Cheddar, where there is a convenient gorge, but no waterfall. Perhaps the budget wouldn't stretch to Switzerland, or even Scotland or Wales, where there are several suitable waterfalls.

Unfortunately, when Watson takes a cab to the station in order to join Holmes on the train, there is no taking the third cab, no dashing down the arcade, no Mycroft. There is only a young tough waiting outside Watson's door who obviously follows him in another cab and overhears his destination at the station. Watson is, of course, oblivious, and boards the train, only to find… a mustachioed French military officer, i.e., Holmes in disguise.

Meanwhile, at Moriarty's lair, the young tough arrives and tells Moriarty where Watson is going. Outside, the police have lookouts and a roomy Black Maria waiting. They raid the lair and Moriarty disappears, somehow avoiding all the lookouts, only to reappear in Cheddar. While Watson chats with Inspector Gregory, Holmes climbs the hills to the top of the gorge, followed by Moriarty and eventually, Watson. Once at the top, Holmes and Moriarty lunge at each other and end up rolling around in the grass for a while, waiting for Watson to arrive, I assume. Once Watson is there to witness everything, Moriarty rolls over the edge while Holmes valiantly clings to the rocks before he, too, disappears over the side. Watson obligingly registers grief and dismay before the final credits.

And then we saw the heartening message: **Sherlock Holmes will return!**



The movies were great fun to watch, and Ben Model's accompaniment added much to the experience. He received a round of applause for his playing before we made our way out of the theatre and across the street to J. Hollinger's Waterman's Chophouse, where around 60 members enjoyed a delicious and convivial dinner. Thanks go to Tom Fahres, who gifted attendees with The Red Circle 75th anniversary pins, which we can all wear with pride, as well as to Peter Blau and Alan Rettig, who worked their usual behind-the-scenes magic to make the evening a success.

The 15th also marked the 15th anniversary of The Red Circle's web presence! Thanks are also due to Alan Rettig for all his hard work at keeping our website updated. If you are interested in reading the history of The Red Circle, you can find Francine Morris Swift's history of the early years, Jon Lellenberg's essay on notable early members, and Carla Coupe's history of The Red Circle in the 21st century at our website.