

Issue Five
March 2018

HOLMES ON THE HUDSON



A publication of the Hudson Valley Scientists,
a section society of the Baker Street Irregulars.

The Editor offers profound thanks to those contributors who responded to her cry for help – or at least for newsletter articles. May their ranks increase! (The deadline for Issue Six of this publication is September 15, 2018.)

The May Dinner is June 3, this year and we will be doing the story of “His Last Bow”. Again at Alumni House at 6 PM for cocktails and 6:30 for dinner. Price \$42/person. Respond to Candy and Lou Lewis at llewis@lewisgreer.com or clewis1880@AOL.com

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The Hudson Valley Scientists met to dine and discuss "The Blue Carbuncle"

at Vassar College Alumnae House Sunday, October 29, 2017

MASTER OF CEREMONIES: Lou Lewis, President

TOASTS: Candace Lewis: *To Her Imperial Majesty, Queen Victoria.*
Irwin Irby: *To Dr. John H. Watson*

SPEAKERS: *The Stolen Goose*, a short play by Lou and Candace Lewis performed by Lou Lewis, Albert Rosenblatt, and James Pelzer.
Harrison Hunt: *The Blue Enigma: What was the Blue Carbuncle?*
Ira B. Matetsky: *Crimes, Compounding, and Carbuncles.*

CONCLUSION: Molly Jones: Toast to Sherlock Holmes
(poem: "A Long Evening with Holmes" by Wm. B. Schweickert)



Terry Hunt

Well, it finally came to pass. It was a dark and stormy night at the end of October, 2017, when the Hudson Valley Scientists gathered to consider "The Blue Carbuncle." The wind was whistling through the trees; branches were down on the streets; rain was whipping across automobile windshields. Although sixty people had signed up for our dinner and program, fifteen were unable to brave the fierce winds--the first and only time this has happened in our forty-five year history.



**Al Rosenblatt,
Lou Lewis**

Snug in the 1920 Arts and Crafts Vassar College Alumnae House, surrounded by dark oak paneling, we plunged on with toasts, a short play, and talks. The play, enacted by Pastor Tyler Jones as narrator, Lou Lewis as detective, and Al Rosenblatt as The Judge, was especially well received. The talks were fine and no one complained that the holiday nearest in date was Halloween, not Christmas (the subject of "The Blue Carbuncle" with its holiday goose).



Ira Matetsky

Submitted by Candace Lewis

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

By John Linsenmeyer, B.S.I., etc

In February 2002, then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld famously told a roomful of journalists:

“There are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- there are things we do not know we don’t know.”

Although derided by media ‘talking heads’ far less intelligent than either Rumsfeld or Sherlock Holmes, this sets forth an important truth applicable equally in science and in the art of detection. Science normally investigates known unknowns; a hypothesis is developed, then tested with experiments and evidence.

For a fairly recent, if somewhat obscure example, botanists were investigating the mitochondrial import machinery of plants. Mitochondria are the ‘organelles’ found in most living cells which function as the cell’s ‘power plant’ through producing the coenzyme that transfers chemical energy within the cell for life-giving metabolism. Recent experiments into the mitochondrial import mechanisms in plants looked for a known unknown: the nucleus-encoded proteins, but opened up a whole area of previously unknown unknowns in mutation and protein interactions. [David C Logan, “Known Knowns, Known Unknowns and Unknown Unknowns and the Propagation of Scientific Enquiry, *Oxford Journal of Experimental Botany* 2009:60, pp. 712-719]

This same rubric must apply to the art and science of detection. In a homicide investigation, for example, the detective is usually faced with:

- ❖ Known Knowns: The decedent was Mr. Jones, a jewelry wholesaler, killed in his flat on Hoople Street by a .45 caliber revolver bullet between 9 and 11:30 pm.
- ❖ Known Unknowns: Who killed him? Why? Where is the murder weapon? Where did the trace evidence (cigar ashes – Jones was not a smoker –plus cloth fragments and mud on the carpet) come from?

But then: in this case clouding the investigation there are-

- ❖ Unknown Unknowns: The presumed ‘knowns’ were in reality false: Mr. Jones was actually Boris Badanov, a spy for the King of Bohemia posing as a jeweler; the murder weapon was a walking-stick-gun, not a revolver; the presumed trace evidence was not unintentionally left by the killer but was deliberately planted to mislead the investigators; and even should the Unknown Unknowns somehow be solved, a wild card exists: Jones/Badanov was killed by the **00**-Section of Her Majesty’s Government.

So too with our hero Holmes: Unknown Unknowns abound, *sometimes because* Holmes’s Known Knowns are wrong. There are simple mistakes: for example, cheating at whist is an impossible murder motive for one partner to kill another in FINA, since cheating at whist (or bridge) is a matter of improper collusion or signals between partners and Holmes simply didn’t understand the card

games. Again, closer to a true Unknown Unknown, the mysterious poison *Radix Pedis Diaboli* in DEVI is a canard — no such material exists, it being as mythical as the non-existent “Ubanghi” tribe of legend. Again, in SIGN, the dwarf Tonga [the name means a two-wheeled donkey-cart in Hindi] cannot be an Andaman Islander — the indigenous inhabitants were noted for their graceful appearance and the blow-gun was unknown to them as a weapon.

And thereby hangs an insight into the true brilliance of our hero. While Holmes’s vanity led him on occasion to swallow arcane canards of mysterious poisons and strange dwarves (not to mention the patent canard that Small would have tossed the Andaman Treasure into the River instead of stashing it somewhere safe), there probably has never been, and might never be, an investigator as capable of penetrating the fog of Unknown Unknowns and bringing spies and criminals to justice.

Sadly, we are unlikely soon to learn his unique tactics for such penetration. In ABBE Holmes said: “I propose to devote my declining years to the composition of a textbook which shall focus the whole art of detection in one volume.” Despite diligent search, I have been unable to locate a genuine copy. Mr. John Bennett Shaw, however, wrote a 58-page book under that *nom de guerre* and title in 1958, and Amazon once listed a book under that precise title, a 30-page paperback published in 1993 for a whopping \$345.81. Alas, neither survives even a superficial test for authenticity (everything Holmes knows in 30, or even 58 pages?) so we must alas leave this supremely desirable treatise at best in the realm of Known Unknowns.



SAVE THE DATE

*for
A Running of “The Silver Blaze”
at Saratoga Racetrack, Saratoga Springs, NY
Saturday, August 11, 2018*

Every three years The Baker Street Irregulars host a Running of “The Silver Blaze” Please plan to join us. Details as to hotel location, Sunday brunch, program, and prices to follow.

[More information about this event can be found on [page 9](#)]

~~FOGGY~~ SMOGGY OLD LONDON

By Liese Sherwood Fabre

The Canon contains 54 references to fog: a third of them in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans” and almost another third in a reference to the fog covering Grimpen Mire in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The other references are distributed among ten stories. While Dickens romanticized it, and Doyle used it to cloak the city in greater mystery, in reality, London’s fog was a deadly brew of smoke and chemical pollution.

Smoke pollution began in medieval England when coal was burned for domestic use—primarily for cooking and heating. [1] Beginning in the late 1700s when England experienced its Industrial Revolution, the rise of steam engines powered by burning coal multiplied the particulate matter in the air, and factories spewed other chemicals and pollutants into the mix. [2] The result was a thick smog (a term coined by Dr. H.A. des Voeux in 1905 to describe the fusion of smoke and fog observed in London) [3] that killed 2,400 alone during the winter of 1879-1880.

While the health effects of London’s air pollution were well-known and recognized, both national and local governments struggled to control it. In the 1840s, some industrial cities passed legislation to limit smoke production, and London passed similar laws in 1853 and 1891. These restrictions, however, had little effect on pollution. In 1906, Parliament passed the Alkali, etc. Works Regulation Act to consolidate earlier efforts to reduce industrial pollution related to the production of soda ash. [4] Domestic smoke, responsible for about 95% of the fumes, were not covered by the ordinances, as were other major industries. In addition, the definition of “smoke” was not clear, making prosecution difficult. [5]

Despite such efforts, air pollution continued unabated and in December 1952, a fog containing sulfuric acid (created from sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, by-products of coal burning) blanketed the capital for several days, darkening the sky, reducing visibility to only three feet, and killing 4,000 people and thousands of animals. [6]

In response, Parliament passed the Clean Air Act in 1956. This legislation created areas where only smokeless fuels were allowed and reduced permitted levels of sulfur dioxide and other pollutants. In 1968, the Clean Air Act: Tall Chimneys further reduced pollution by requiring smoke and other particulate matter be dispersed higher into the atmosphere through taller chimneys. [7]

Britain also encouraged the use of diesel vehicles because of their lower carbon footprint. By 2013, more than 35% of the vehicles were diesel, and in an unexpected twist, are now linked to about 9,500 deaths each year in London. Diesel engines produce more nitrogen oxide than gasoline cars, creating high levels of nitrogen dioxide that contribute to respiratory problems and worsen asthma attacks. [8]

Britain’s success story in fighting air pollution has come full circle. The legendary fog from Sherlock’s time has once again risen to threaten its citizens. Not only can it hide killers who use the mist to cloak themselves and their crimes, it makes its own contribution to the deaths of thousands each year.

[1] John Ranlett, “Environmental Pollution” *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988) 269.

[2] <https://webs.bcp.org/sites/vcleary/ModernWorldHistoryTextbook/IndustrialRevolution/IRbegins.html>

[3] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=smog>

[4] Susan Slocum, et al., *Scientific Tourism: Researchers as Travellers* (London: Routledge, 2015) 25.

[5] Ranlett, *op. cit.*, 269.

[6] <http://today.tamu.edu/2016/11/14/researchers-solve-mystery-of-historic-1952-london-fog-and-current-chinese-haze/>

[7] <https://www.pollutionsolutions-online.com/news/air-clean-up/16/breaking-news/the-history-of-uk-air-pollution-looking-back-through-smog-tinted-glasses/32595>

[8] <http://time.com/4316873/london-mayor-election-air-pollution/?iid=sr-link1>

INTERPRETING ANOTHER PURPOSE

by William Walsh

Why “The Greek Interpreter?” Why in the world did Watson include this story in the first 26 cases that he decided to publish?

Let us be frank, this story is devoid of a mystery. Sherlock does nothing to resolve the matter and, at the immediate time of the story, the guilty escape without consequence. The case involves an identified acquaintance of Mycroft’s rather than a client of Sherlock’s. That individual, in turn, nearly dies due to a lack of protection.

The story contains other unbelievable or highly questionable elements. If we believe the account in the story, Mycroft committed an inexcusable rookie error that cost a man his life. Despite the express warning to Mr. Melas to avoid discussing with anyone the events of the evening and the known detention of one individual, Mycroft publicizes it in every daily in London. It would have been easier for Mycroft to put up a billboard in Piccadilly directing those holding Paul Kratides to take action. As several avenues of inquiry, including further inquiries in Athens, remained available, Mycroft’s published actions are unfathomable. Indeed, Mycroft’s comment that “Sherlock has all the energy in the family,” when asked about cabling the Athens police, seems to be an attempt to redirect the conversation, rather than answering the question. Mycroft then compounds his error by delaying the pick-up of Melas and in proposing that the group travel to Lower Brixton and speak with Davenport, rather than travel to Beckenham.

Melas’s own tale contains an unbelievable element. The two kidnappers bring in Melas due to their inability to speak Greek. Melas begins a “dangerous game” and starts adding little sentences of his own in the questioning that the kidnappers are directing. During these questions, Kratides uses the words London, Kratides and Athens as three of the 47 words he communicates.^[1] As bad as Kemp and Latimer may be in understanding Greek, surely they would have distinguished the use of “London” in the response to “You can do no good by this obstinacy,” and known something was incorrect. They, likewise, would have recognized the use of “Athens” and the name of their captive in response to questions. In short, a close scrutiny of Melas’s tale raises further questions about the legitimacy of the story.

“The Greek Interpreter” also offers the odd thing that Watson did during the walk. The Canon contains a significant number of instances

where Holmes asks Watson to give an explanation for the clues, Watson constructs a line of reasoning that seems rational and consistent with the available information, and Holmes then congratulates Watson on constructing a well-



reasoned chain that is wrong as to every detail. Watson's examination of the walking stick at the start of Hound provides one of the finest illustrations of this point. Yet, in "The Greek Interpreter," Watson offers a possible explanation of the facts, that the torture of a man arises from a woman's fortune, and Holmes simply responds: "Excellent Watson! I really fancy that you are not far from the truth." Holmes' instant concurrence with Watson's idea that the potential British groom is torturing his future brother-in-law in order to secure family money, essentially guarantees that Watson is wrong and the underlying tale is a fiction.

The absence of a mystery, the absurdity of Mycroft's actions and the basic holes in the story present the question again – why did Watson forward this tale to the Literary Agent for publication?

The answer to this question rests in Mycroft's role in leading Britain's intelligence service, Mr. Melas's work for that service, and the conclusion of the tale. Mycroft directed that Watson forward this story to *The Strand* for his own purposes, or, more specifically, for national purposes.

Briefly put, Mycroft's role is a fixed point, particularly as he "is very well known in his own circle."

Mr. Melas appears to serve as one of Mycroft's agents. Beyond his time in the law courts, Melas acts as a "guide to any wealthy Orientals who may visit the Northumberland Avenue hotels." This role would place Melas in a front-line position to gather intelligence for foreign visitors to London and, accordingly, in an outstanding position to gain intelligence. Further, Melas would have little reason to bring his story to the attention of Mycroft, a man of "no ambition and no energy" absent an underlying connection within the intelligence world.

Finally, the disclosure that someone killed Kemp and Latimer overseas, suggests that Mycroft, through Watson, intended the publication of the story to convey a message to foreign intelligence operations. The story's conclusion parallels the death of John Douglas in "The Valley of Fear", which occurred in the same year.

Prof. Moriarty used that distant death to protect his empire's reputation and reaffirm that he always succeeds. Similarly, for Mycroft, the attack on one agent and, most assuredly, the death of another required him to take all possible steps to protect his agents and demonstrate to all in his circle that Great Britain will defend her own anywhere in the world. The stabbing deaths of Kemp and Latimer in distant Buda-Pesth confirmed British resolve to track down and retaliate in kind to any attack against British agents. Further, as Watson published the tale in 1893, during the Great Hiatus (1891-94), we should assume that Mycroft encouraged (or directed) the publication of this tale to inform those foreign intelligence agencies that the loss of Holmes had not diminished, in any way, British ability to respond to any attack.

Conclusion: "The Greek Interpreter" is a direct communication to other intelligence operations that "the Game" has rules and that Great Britain will respond to the breach of these rules, specifically the attack on a nation's agents, in order to insure the safety of its agents.

[1] From the narrative, it is also unclear which of these words were spoken and which Kratides wrote on the slate.

Silver Blaze - the event

By Lou and Candace Lewis

Here is some additional information about this weekend gathering that we arrange every three years.

The BSI sponsors a two-day event at the Saratoga Race Track in Saratoga, New York. The Saratoga Racetrack is one of the oldest and prettiest in the United States, a Victorian period, wooden construction with turrets, tents, and out buildings. It gleams in the summer light, a picture in white and red with masses of flowers. Our Silver Blaze weekend was started in the year 2000, the idea of Michael Whelan, and we have run it every three years ever since.

On a Saturday morning in August, approximately forty Sherlockians gather in an air-conditioned pavilion to socialize, eat at the buffet, and bet on the horses. Do bring a little money for betting. Also we have a tradition of the ladies wearing the colors red and black, the colors of the jockey for Silver Blaze. The dress at the track is definitely festive; it could be described as fancy, not formal. The gathering lasts for the entire day after which guests retire to the Desmond Hotel about 25 minutes to the south, closer to Albany (this is to avoid the extremely high prices in Saratoga during race season). Please note that some people traveling from a distance may prefer to arrive at the hotel on Friday evening so that they will be fresh on Saturday morning.

Saturday evening is free. People can eat in the hotel restaurant or at an establishment in Albany---perhaps Jack's Oyster House. The following morning, Sunday, is dedicated to a brunch and seminar presentation of papers on subjects related to "Silver Blaze" and a second story. After noon, participants begin to leave for home.

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

JOHN LINSEMEYER is a long-standing Baker Street Irregular investitured as "Inspector Tobias Gregson" in 1972, and a member of The Five Orange Pips, the Bootmakers of Toronto and other Holmesian societies. He is a retired commercial barrister and lives in Riverside, Connecticut.

CANDY LEWIS ["The Woman," BSI"] has been a member of the Hudson Valley Sciontists since 1977. She is an art historian with a Ph.D. in the field of early Chinese Art and a secondary area of specialty in Nineteenth-Century Art in Europe and America.

LIESE SHERWOOD-FABRE of Dallas, Texas, is a writer whose works include a YA novel about young Holmes. Information about her publications and a link to sign up for her newsletter can be found at www.liesesherwoodfabre.com.

WILL WALSH, ASH [John Hebron] and BSI [Godfrey Norton] works as an environmental attorney, when he is not discussing Sherlock Holmes, baseball, Richard III, politics, Abraham Lincoln, Liverpool, F.C. or early space flight.