

THE BAKER STREET JOURNAL

An Irregular Quarterly
of Sherlockiana

STEVEN ROTHMAN ~ EDITOR



75TH ANNIVERSARY
THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS
1934-2009

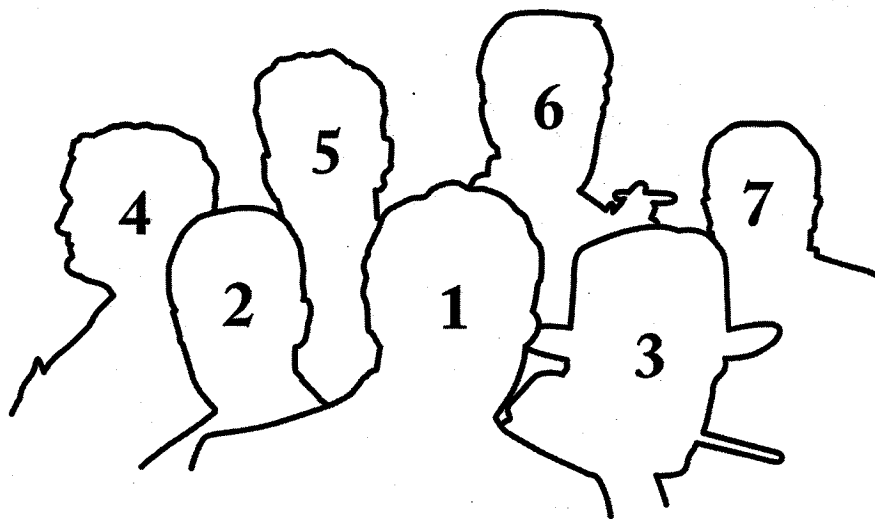
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Cover Illustration Key



In honor of the 75th Anniversary of The Baker Street Irregulars our cover illustration features a montage of personalities who attended the very first dinner in 1934.

- 1. Christopher Morley; 2. H.W. Bell;**
- 3. Vincent Starrett; 4. Basil Davenport;**
- 5. Gene Tunney; 6. William Gillette;**
- 7. Alexander Woollcott**

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THE
BAKER STREET
JOURNAL

An Irregular Quarterly of Sherlockiana

Founded by EDGAR W. SMITH

Continued by JULIAN WOLFF, M.D.

"Si monumentum quaeris, circumspice"

Editor: STEVEN ROTHMAN



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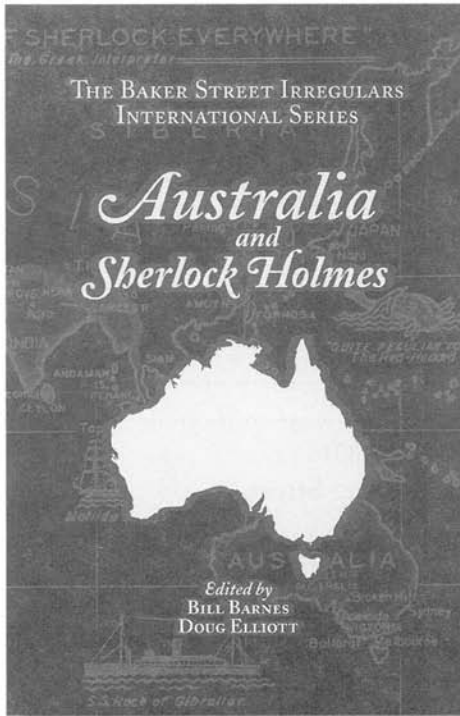


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THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS INTERNATIONAL SERIES

Edited by
DOUG ELLIOTT
BILL BARNES



Australia and Sherlock Holmes is the third title of the multi-volume International Series being published by The Baker Street Irregulars. This series takes the best non-fiction Holmesian writing from around the world and brings it to a far larger audience. *Australia and Sherlock Holmes* is no different, allowing readers to enjoy the distinctive Sherlockian voice from the land down under. This anthology spans a period from 1959 to 2007 and was edited by Bill Barnes and Doug Elliott.

Australia and Sherlock Holmes contains many incisively-written scholarly essays including two about the larger-than-life Richard Hughes, an Australian journalist who had one of the scoops of the century by obtaining the first interview of the Cambridge spies, Burgess and Maclean, and a real-life inspiration for novelists John le Carre and an Ian Fleming. Popular culture is well represented by a piece covering Sherlock Holmes films conceived, but never filmed, and accom-

panied by delightful, apocryphal movie posters. There are well-reasoned papers about the linkage of Watson's childhood and the Speckled Band to Australia and a fine, and perhaps definitive, essay about "The Gloria Scott." Also included is an article which provides context for, and an introduction to, Sherlock Holmes in Australia.

There is much more in this volume attesting to the continuing remarkable popularity of the great detective around the globe, and particularly in Australia, and the creative whimsy in which Holmesian scholars play "The Game."

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IT'S DISMAL AND DREARY TO AIR OUR DESPAIRS

As we were saying last issue, this year marks the 75th anniversary of The Baker Street Irregulars. That's a long time—long enough that none of the current Shilling-holders were present at the birth or even the adolescence. As the BSI History Series makes painfully clear, many markers in our collective genome come from unknown—and quite possibly unknowable—parentage. The dispiriting economic news of recent months coupled with the even more foully dispiriting forecasts for the near and even longer term future makes us think of the times in which the Irregulars first came about: bad times, the worst of times, times of saber-rattling, and times of depression both fiscally and psychically. Yet those bad times were instrumental in the birthing of the Irregulars. In part it was the very inhospitality of the economics of the 1930s that caused the BSI.

Sometimes, and particularly in tough times, no matter how long and hard one works, nothing will come of it. In such times it is important to keep a sanguine nature, and one of the best ways to do that is to spend time with good friends—not commiserating, but enjoying good fellowship. It is also important to have things to do to fill the day. So when the Three Hours for Lunch Club morphed into the Grillparzer Sittenpolizei Verein, devoted not at all to Grillparzer or morals, and the Grillparzer Club became enmeshed in Sherlockian studies, they were all really involved in ways to spend time. And the thirties were replete with time, a chronocornucopia.

So if you find yourself with more time on your hands in the upcoming months, why not pick up the Canon once more. Regroup while reconsidering Holmes, Watson, and the many unfortunates who called on them in their time of need. Let Baker Street be your one fixed point in a too-changing world. Pull up a chair and open a book. What could be simpler? Fie to them who call such behavior regressive. It will stimulate your imagination, and perhaps you will then think of a way to stimulate the economy.

THE 2009 BIRTHDAY WEEKEND—BSI 75TH ANNIVERSARY

by NICHOLAS UTECHIN

Somewhere in the vaults of the restaurant of Destino, 891 First Avenue, there is a travel-worn and battered blue-covered diary—that diary which carried early notes and erudite thoughts on this, my virgin Irregular weekend 34 years after I was invested by Julian Wolff as “The Ancient British Barrow.” I cannot blame any of our American hosts for this sad state of affairs, since it was on the last (Saturday) evening that a gathering of 16 European Irregulars and suitable adjuncts dined there to celebrate a wonderful three days. I checked my diary in with my coat and at the end of the evening walked off with but the latter.

All it means is that I must recall as quickly as possible—this being started on January 13th—as many relevant experiences as memory and addled brain permit. I was intrigued, fascinated by, and grateful for one or two private invitations over the weekend, but I gather that most attendees will have spent time at such. Steve Rothman admitted to me on Sunday morning that he had effectively not slept for three days.

First and foremost: the Algonquin. *Of course* I had heard of it; *of course* its modern guise had been described to me; but I was not quite prepared for the sheer specialness of the lobby. Comfortable, well laid out (which, as far as I am concerned, means I liked the random way nice bits of sitting-furniture are scattered) and with staff ever-present but not over-attentive—anyway, let’s face it, for normal humans facing a credit crunch, the prices of breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, or drinks blank us out. Rooms good, comfort factor excellent, and plumbing so far as water extraction after a shower is concerned delightfully old-fashioned. For central Manhattan, with all the historical baggage it carries and the advantageous Irregular rate, I guess it would be hard to beat.

THE MORLEY–MONTGOMERY MEMORIAL AWARD FOR 2008

It was a privilege to be invited to the **BSJ** Cocktail Party at the Williams Club on East 39th Street, having been lucky enough to be one of the people published in 2008. It got underway at Thursday, 8 January at 4:45, barely 12 hours after I had departed Heathrow Airport. While enticed by a couple of excellent gins-and-tonic from the lady behind the bar, the highlight was the presentation of the Morley–Montgomery Memorial Award for the best paper published in the *JOURNAL*. The most worthy recipient was Mattias Boström for his excellent and original paper “The Humble Dr. Mortimer: On the Real Swedish Pathological Society.”

THE BSI DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER LECTURE

This was followed just an hour later by the first public event of the evening, the Distinguished Speaker Lecture, held at the same venue. This year the speaker was mystery writer John Lescroart, best known in Sherlockian circles for his Auguste Lupa novels: *Son of Holmes* (1986) and *Rasputin's Revenge* (1987). He read a Sherlockian pastiche, his short story "The Adventure of the Giant Rat of Sumatra by John H. Watson, M.D." Lescroart preceded his reading with remarks putting the story and his love of Holmes in the context of his writing career. The story was followed by a Q and A session. [Lescroart can be heard reading his story at <www.kqed.org/arts/programs/writers_block/episode.jsp?essid=10424>.]

What was, of course, for me a complete delight was to put during this first evening faces to names with whom I have dealt—or at least *known* of—over several decades. Thus Andy Peck ("Inspector Baynes, Surrey Constabulary"), Costa Rossakis ("St. Bartholomew's Hospital"), Scott Bond ("The Copper Beeches") and Sherry Rose-Bond ("Grace Dunbar"), Don Pollock, Les Klinger ("The Abbey Grange"), Al ("Inspector Bradstreet") and Julie Rosenblatt ("Mrs. Turner")—the list goes on. Dinner later with some of them—together with my umbilically attached helpers and advisors Steve Rothman ("*The Valley of Fear*") and Janice Fisher—was a pasta/salad delight—and for this tourist (I hadn't been to New York since 1979, apart from being delivered to planes), the sight of nearby Times Square at night was quite staggering.

The day began with a rather wonderful appointment for breakfast just down the road from the Algonquin, followed by a dangerous trip to Otto Penzler's ("The King of Bohemia") Mysterious Bookshop ("dangerous" has nothing to do with the taxi). Time spent in viewing treasures—and watching others spend interesting sums of money—is always time well spent. OK, I succumbed as well, but not to such an extent as . . . Sorry, my lips must forever be sealed.

THE BSI DINNER

Time moved rapidly on (thank goodness for all concerned), as preparation was required for dinner at the Union League Club. A group of us sauntered from the Algonquin to the Club where initially drinks were taken in the library and announcement made of this year's *The Woman*, Sharon Klinger, married to the annotative Les Klinger, and of last year's weather-delayed *The Woman*, Priscilla Juvelis, wife of Dan Posnansky ("Colonel Hayter"). Andy Peck toasted Sharon, and Terry Belanger ("Cartwright") toasted Priscilla, both insisting that their subjects were complicit in the Sherlockian activities of their spouses. As a first-time visitor, it cannot be too brutal for me to suggest that the staff at this Club need to be reminded each year that Irregulars and their partners have

been known to partake of a drink or two over the past 75 years and thus plans could have been laid not to run out of red wine just before we proceeded in to dinner.



Preprandial drinks in hand, the assembled toast *The Women* 2008 and 2009.
(Photo by Peter Calamai)

I am likely the only Irregular who had not previously attended a BSI Dinner, so my observations are necessarily unnecessary. Preparation was immaculate: table-settings, menus, goody bags of splendid, and occasionally curious, mementoes for the evening. It's a big and featureless room, with an unsubtle light-blue aura, but so what?! First off, of course, was the family portrait: Version 1 may well have been brilliantly posed, but the lights and the pressing of the archaic camera button chose to take place a second apart. Version 2 took place when I was scanning my menu (fantastic cover by Scott Bond)! The event and the company transcended all. It was so delightful to meet more and more Sherlockian names: Sue Dahlinger, Susan Rice ("Beeswing"), Glen Miranker ("*The Origin of Tree Worship*"), Dan Posnansky. I have read of the Dinner format often

but was amazed at the fortitude of “Wiggins”—Mike Whelan (“Vincent Spaulding”)—who clearly has no time to eat between introductions, investitures, introductions, and the like, but seemed impressively in control throughout.

Guy Marriott (“The Hôtel du Louvre”) and I had some fun kicking off the entertainment with a barely-scripted fifteen-minute debate on the Oxford–Cambridge Controversy. We were followed by Andrew Solberg (“Professor Coram”) who repeatedly, and splendidly, insisted that he *was* Professor Coram going through his paces, and a frankly manic David Stuart Davies (“Sir Ralph Musgrave”) in the *tour de force* of the night—presenting “The Red-Headed League” in thirteen minutes all by himself (well, with all the voices involved as well!). Impressively, Jens Byskov Jensen and Henry Boote (“Meyers, Toronto”) (violin and piano respectively) gave us that “Tra-la-la-lira-lira-lay” piece plus a lovely version of Harvey Officer’s *Baker Street Suite for Violin and Piano*.

Actually, truth be told, the Dinner is just as much of an orgy of chat and signature-hunting as all the other events of the Weekend. Here is the obvious great difference between the Sherlock Holmes Society of London (from which I sprang in 1966) and the BSI (for me 1975). We meet in one form or another seven or eight times a year; the Irregulars ram it all into one hectic weekend of frenzied schmoozing at a most literate level.

I had heard of the goody bags, but never believed the thought and care that so many take for so few. It was a great pleasure to have been the author of one of the contents. And I have to say that the food was excellent: so often, servings on such a scale can disappoint, but a good salad was followed with really tasty beef medallions and trimmings.

More talk, more autograph hunting—Bob Coghill (“John Hopley Neligan”), Peter Blau (“Black Peter”), an original sketchette from Scott Bond and, especially delightfully, the great James Montgomery’s (“The Red Circle”) two daughters Connie and Liz. A nice recording of their brother Bruce (“The Red Circle”)—recently deceased—was played out to us on a giant screen, and Irving Kamil (“M. Oscar Meunier of Grenoble”) gave moving tribute to the (too many) other Irregulars who died over the past year.

Then to *the* event of the evening. Wiggins announced that all the new investitures would be one of the 60 canonical titles. They went to:

Bill Barnes	“The Gloria Scott”
Jeff Bradway	“A Case of Identity”
Susan Dahlinger	“The Bruce-Partington Plans”
Greg Darak	“The Engineer’s Thumb”
Allan Devitt	“The Dancing Men”
Robert Ellis	“The Illustrious Client”

Walter Jaffee
Jens Byskov Jensen
Sébastien Le Page
Michael Pollock
Barbara Rusch
Joel Schwartz

“The Resident Patient”
“The Blanched Soldier”
“The Six Napoleons”
“The Blue Carbuncle”
“The Mazarin Stone”
“The Three Students”

The Two-Shilling Award went to Dan Posnansky for his work for the Irregulars' Archives at the Houghton Library. In addition, Wiggins presented the Editor's Medal to Yuichi Hirayama, Doug Elliott, Bill Barnes, John Bergquist, Susan Rice, and me, in recognition of our services as editors of books and Christmas Annuals published by the BSI. The evening ended with a masterly reading of Starrett's "221B" by George McCormack ("Hosmer Angel"). And so down to the bottom of Manhattan for a private gathering.



A baker's dozen of 2009 Shillings (L to R): (rear) Jens Byskov Jensen, Sébastien Le Page, Walter Jaffee, Michael Pollock; (2nd row) Jeff Bradway, Allan Devitt, Greg Darak, Bill Barnes, Bob Ellis; (seated) Barbara Rusch, Susan Dahlinger, Dan Posnansky (photo by Ben Vizoskie)