



Ineffable Twaddle

"It is my business to know what other people don't know."

The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

A monthly publication of
The Sound of the Baskervilles

A Scion Society of The Baker Street Irregulars • Since March 31, 1980

Serving the Greater Puget Sound Region of Western Washington



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The Exciting World of Carbuncles!!

Marge Nelson thrilled attendees at the December SOB Meeting with the gift of actual blue carbuncles—or facsimiles thereof—and an educational presentation on the carbuncle itself!! (*Not to be outdone, Stephen Adkins had his own personal blue carbuncle along for display as well!!*)

Key points from Marge's internet research:

⇒ Corundum has a chemical composition of aluminum oxide. This group, consisting of rubies and sapphires, are the hardest of all known colored stones outside of diamonds. The most valuable is the ruby. Only the red color is reserved for ruby; all other colors belong to sapphires, including pink and reddish pink. Rubies have also been called **"carbuncle"**, which means a small coal or ember. (gemworld.com)

⇒ Spinel is made of magnesium aluminum oxide and have a Moh's hardness of 8. Many spinels have been mistaken for rubies. They have also been called **carbuncles**. The color can vary from red to pink, violet red to a pale lilac, violet blue, or a **blue** to black. Spinel stones comparable in color to rubies are quite valuable. (gemworld.com)

⇒ A ruby is made of aluminum oxide; a spinel is made of magnesium and aluminum oxides. In deposits where both ruby and red spinel are found, spinel is more common, probably because spinel forms while there are still both magnesium and aluminum available. Only when the magnesium runs out is the spinel through crystallizing and the ruby beginning to form. Both the rubies and red spinels get that color from the chromium ions, if they are present; otherwise, non-red colors form. (collectoroffinejewelry.com)

⇒ Sri Lanka will rarely produce blue spinels colored by cobalt. Such cobalt blue spinels are highly sought after by collectors. The

best pieces are an intense blue unique in the world of gems. (collectoroffinejewelry.com)

Says Marge, "You can buy synthetic, lab grown blue spinels online. A silver ring with a blue synthetic spinel starts at \$35 on the gemworld.com website. Get your own **blue carbuncle** there!

Further discussion naturally ensued during which Al Nelson noted that he'd found—in Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters—a November 1891 letter Doyle wrote to his Mother telling her of five new stories he had in process of publication—including "The Blue Carbuncle"—and that he was already thinking of killing off Holmes!!

Ed Funk, like Doyle a physician of some note, noted that a subsidiary definition of the word "carbuncle" is often "severe abscess or boil in the skin", certainly making the word **"carbuncle"** a commonly-known term in Victorian times.

Remarkably, only four days after this Meeting, PFL David found the following in the local paper: "Karl Marx's writings glorifying communism may well have reflected merely his alienation from society due to a lifelong series of excruciatingly painful boils, according to a recent British Journal of Dermatology article. In an 1867 letter, Marx wrote, "The bourgeoisie will remember my **carbuncles** until their dying day."



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Remember:

Our **Annual Dessert Buffet**

immediately

follows The Master's Dinner on **January 5**. Driving directions to Jean Macdonald's home will be provided that night.

And, please bring a treat to share!!



How to Study the Canon??

We have a suggestion that our next 5-year journey through the Canon should be completely at random...by tossing all the story and novel titles into a hat, pulling them out, and publishing a list of that order?? Does that work for **you**?? Please give it some thought for future discussions.



January 2008 SOB Meeting Cancelled!!

The January 14, 2008 Meeting of The Sound of the Baskervilles will not be held...for several reasons:

- The Master's Dinner will have occurred the week before, and the January Meeting traditionally has the lowest attendance!!
- The dark nights and winter weather of January keep many away as it is!!
- The Seattle Sonics will be playing the LA Lakers in basketball and, although the Sonics are not performing up to expectations, the fans continue to show up in droves at T. S. McHugh's!!
- PFL David would rather have Members enjoy each Meeting than have to compete with the rowdiness and noise of the other patrons.

We will, of course, reconvene at T. S. McHugh's as always the 2nd Monday of February—that's February 11th!! 🍷

Holmes as Fuzz Ball? *Comet Turns Up the Lights*

Compiled from: [The Tacoma News Tribune](#), [Fairbanks Daily News-Miner](#), [San Jose Mercury News](#), [The Knoxville News Sentinel—October 27 to November 5, 2007](#)

Astronomers and backyard stargazers are going gaga this week over the flying fuzz ball known as Comet Holmes (properly "Comet 17P/Holmes").

First discovered in 1892, the comet has played hide-and-seek with star-watchers ever since, often too faint to see with a telescope as it orbits the sun every seven years.

"This is truly a celestial surprise," said Paul Lewis, director of astronomy outreach at the University of Tennessee. "Absolutely amazing."

Until Oct. 23, the comet had been visible to modern astronomers only with a telescope, but that night it suddenly erupted and expanded. A similar burst in 1892 led to the comet's discovery by Edwin Holmes. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime event to witness, along the lines of when Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 smashed into Jupiter back in 1994," Lewis said.

Thanks to a so-called "outburst" of gas and dust as the comet skirts the sun, the normally faint comet has intensified in brightness 1 million-fold since Wednesday night (October 25). The comet, which is about two miles across, is currently cruising through space somewhere between Mars and Jupiter and can be seen near the constellation Perseus, and even in well-lit cities and even to



the naked eye, should be strutting its orange-yellowish asymmetrical stuff.

"Ordinarily you'll see a comet brighten as it gets closer to the sun or the earth," said Ben Burrell, staff astronomer at the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland. "But the rapidness with which this one blossomed caught everyone by surprise. It was like a kernel of popcorn going off." The outburst, Burrell said, "caused a cloud of gas and dust to balloon around it, making it easier to find."

A sky chart from a Web site like the one at skyandtelescope.com will help.

"To recognize it," said Burrell, "you have to be fairly familiar with how the stars normally look, and then find one that doesn't look like it belongs there. Once the sun goes down, it'll be in Perseus in the northeast sky just above the horizon, then it will appear to circle the North Star, ending up in the northwest of the sky by dawn."

Martin Gutoski, with the Fairbanks Astronomical Unit, said the best way to find the comet is to locate the constellation Cassiopeia and then move down about halfway toward the horizon and slightly to the right. The comet is easy to tell apart from the surrounding stars, especially since its mysterious brightening. Gutoski thinks the comet, made of ice and frozen gas, is shooting off gas for unknown reasons. "Whatever it's doing, it's burping big time," he said. "This is probably a lot of gas boiling off."

Holmes will be visible in the sky for the next several months. 🍷

Edwin Holmes (London) was a regular observer of the Andromeda galaxy (M31), so he knew the region very well. On the evening of 1892 November 6, with skies that were not very favorable, he finished making a few observations of Jupiter and some double stars with his 32-cm reflector, then decided to take a quick look at the faint companions of Mu Andromedae and the nearby galaxy M31 before quitting for the night. Turning the reflector toward that region, he saw what he thought was M31 enter the field of the finder, but when he looked through the eyepiece he saw something different. Holmes said he "called out involuntarily, 'What is the matter? There is something strange here.' My wife heard me and thought something had happened to the instrument and came to see." The object in the field of Holmes' telescope was a comet with a coma about 5 arc minutes across and with a bright nucleus. The date was then November 6.98. Holmes was able to determine a rough position on November 7.03, before clouds moved in. He immediately wrote to E. W. Maunder (Royal Observatory, Greenwich), W. H. Maw (England), and Kidd (Bramley). Kidd immediately expressed some skepticism about Holmes' find because of its nearness to M31; however, on November 7.75, Kidd and Bartlett spotted the comet with the naked eye. The comet was independently discovered by T. D. Anderson (Edinburgh) on November 8.9 and by J. E. Davidson (Australia) on November 9.5.

From: <http://cometography.com/pcomets/017p.html>

Giant Rat Found in Sumat...um, Indonesian Jungle

Finding new species of mammals in the 21st century is considered very rare

From: MSNBC, December 17, 2007

JAKARTA, Indonesia—Researchers in a remote jungle in Indonesia have discovered a giant rat and a tiny possum that are apparently new to science, underscoring the stunning biodiversity of the Southeast Asian nation. The discoveries by a team of American and Indonesian scientists are being studied further to confirm their status.

The animals were found in the Foja Mountains rainforest in eastern Papua province during a June expedition, said U.S.-based Conservation International, which organized the trip.

"The giant rat is about five times the size of a typical city rat," said Kristofer Helgen, a scientist with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. "With no fear of humans, it apparently came into the camp several times during the trip."

A 2006 expedition to the same stretch of jungle—dubbed by Conservation International as a "lost world" because until then humans had rarely visited it—unearthed scores of exotic new species of butterflies and palms.

Papua has some of the world's largest tracts of rainforest, but like elsewhere in Indonesia they are being ravaged by illegal logging. Scientists said last year that the Foja area was not under immediate threat, because it was so remote.

"It's comforting to know that there is a place on Earth so isolated that it remains the absolute realm of wild nature," said expedition leader Bruce Beehler. "We were pleased to see that this little piece of Eden remains as pristine and enchanting as it was when we first visited."



Things to See, Buy, Do & Know

• From Peter Wood's "Internet Notes" in *The Petrel Flyer* (Nov./Dec. 2007):

⇒ "The Yale Book of Quotes" (edited by Fred Shapiro, Yale University Press, 2006) is an important and delightful reference work, more up to date than Bartlett's Familiar Quotations and with far more emphasis on American Sources than The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. There are even 39 Sherlockian quotations from Doyle.

⇒ **The Chess Store in Hillsboro, OR** offers two Sherlockian chess sets: a hand-decorated set with board (#163SSJ, \$429) and a brown and ivory antique-finished set without board (#SH163SA, \$199.95). Go to: www.thechessstore.com/product.

⇒ "The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe and the Invention of Murder" (Dutton, 2006, \$25.95) is a well written account of Poe's life and the events that led to "The Mystery of Marie Roget". There are mentions of Holmes and Doyle, and you can read the prologue and view illustrations at: www.stashower.com.

⇒ Dorothy Stix is **selling her extensive library of Sherlock Holmes foreign language editions**—with works in Catalan, Croatian, Galician, Hebrew, Korean, Pig Latin, Serbian, Swahili, Ukrainian and others. Write for her 48-page catalogue via dorothystix@aol.com.

⇒ The Swiss post office will issue a set of **stamps depicting Switzerland as seen by English writers**,

including ACD's description of Reichenbach Falls.

• **Left Coast Crime 2008, "Murder on the Rocks!"** will be in Denver March 6 to 9, 2008 at the Adam's Mark Denver Hotel (877-642-9212 or www.leftcoast-crime.org/2008). Guest of Honor is Stephen White, author of the *New York Times* best-selling Alan Gregory novels.

• A reviewer in the Sunday Tacoma News Tribune offered these opinions:

⇒ **Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes** by Andrew Lycett, \$30. "Lycett struggles to haul Conan Doyle from the sleuth's shadow, dwelling on his attempts to become a liberal unionist member of Parliament and his support for the Boer War. There's also a wry account of his infatuation with Jean Leckie, 14 years his junior, whom he married after his first wife died. This is an arresting, nimbly executed biography."

⇒ **Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters** edited by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower and Charles Foley, \$37.95. "The publication of (this title) isn't the great literary event it might seem, even though it brings together previously unpublished missives spanning more than half a century...most of these letters display scant literary flair and betray few secrets." PFL David's note: "This review is in contrast to Roger Johnson's who thought it was an excellent addition to the knowledge of Conan Doyle."



"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson," said Holmes in a reminiscent voice. "It was a ship which is associated with the **giant rat of Sumatra**, a story for which the world is not yet prepared."

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

Is the world now prepared for it? See item at left!!



Nifty, Nifty Look Who's Fif...er, Sixty?!!

The following congrats were sent in late November to The Norwegian Explorers of Minnesota, who will celebrate their 60th anniversary in 2008:



Salutations & Compliments of the Season!! It is with great pleasure that The Scion of the Baskervilles scion society congratulates The Norwegian Explorers on their 60th anniversary. Our best wishes extend to all members of your organization—both past and present—because the original vision of your founders has had to be carried out over these many decades by many different people—all with a common love for Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

We applaud your active support of the Sherlockian collection at the University of Minnesota and your sponsorship of numerous Sherlockian gatherings. These are an important way to keep their memory green!!

Lastly, we wish you continued success over the next 60 years in whatever direction your Sherlockian interests take you.

Yours in Sherlock,
David Haugen, SOB, PFL, PSC
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By appointment of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria

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The Sound of the Baskervilles is a scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars, serving the greater Puget Sound Region of Western Washington, U.S.A., and has met monthly since March 31, 1980.

\$20 per year brings Members the monthly newsletter "Ineffable Twaddle", a copy of Beaten's Christmas Annual, and the incalculable benefits of association with a group of certifiable Holmes aficionados.

Meetings are held at 6:00 p.m., the 2nd Monday of each month. Location of the meetings may vary. Regularly scheduled additional events throughout the year include: "The Master's Dinner" celebrating Holmes' birthday (January), "The Annual Wreath Throw" commemorating Holmes' loss at Reichenbach Falls (May), "The Dr. John H. Watson Picnic" (July), and "The Will Crakes Memorial Jollification" (December). Other activities—book crawls, teas, plays and gaming events—are as announced.

To join, send your check for dues—\$20 for individuals, \$30 for families (U.S. funds only)—to the address shown at left.



Dates of Interest

- **January 5**
Our 25th Annual Master's Dinner—Barnaby's (Tukwila) at 2:00 p.m.!!
- **January 5**
Our Annual Dessert Buffet immediately follows The Master's Dinner
- **February 11**
Regular Monthly Meeting, T.S. McHugh's
- **March 10**
Regular Monthly Meeting, T.S. McHugh's
- **March 29**
Anniversary Tea & Auction
- **March 31**
Dues are due!!

Member News & Updates

Those attending the December Meeting, presided over by **PFL David Haugen**, were:

Stephen Adkins	Al Nelson	Hank Deck
Nacho Ospina	Margie Deck	Joyce Funk
Margaret Nelson	Ed Funk	John Geis
Becky Geis	Lauran Stevens	Terri Haugen
Peter Chelemedos	Kay Chelemedos	Thom Walls

News & Notes:

- A "get well" card was circulated for all to sign wishing **Carol Lindenmeyer** a speedy recovery from her recent stroke.
- Winners of the quiz on BLUE were **Nacho, Ed, Stephen, Lauran, Al, Margie and Peter!** Whew! Now that's a tie!
- **Stephen** says the photographic work of his students is on display at Vision Gallery (3rd & Washington in Pioneer Square) and opened to good reviews on December 6!! Sadly, funding he was hoping to get from Nikon for his next class has dried up!
- **Don Mathews** sent warm regards in late November: "To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of my death or imprisonment are greatly exaggerated. I am still alive but busy with tutoring and stadium work." He also says he hopes to be able to attend Meetings again in January.
- Good news & bad from the **Geises:** Becky's Mom passed away on December 12, but husband Bob will be back temporarily from his war

work and plans to attend our Master's Dinner!

- **Sam & Louise Fry** sent "warmest holiday Sherlockian regards" and the offer to use their home for dessert following the Wreath Throw in May!!
- **Margie Deck** sent this on December 20: "Hank and I are officially grandparents. Evan Dean Conner was born this morning at 1:09 a.m. He came in at 8 lbs, 9 oz. and 21-3/4"...It's going to drive me crazy being 3,000 miles away until Tuesday night. I'm quite sure the plane will not fly fast enough to suit me!"
- **Jean Macdonald** sent this: "From the December 2007 issue of *Smithsonian*—'December Anniversary 120 Years Ago, Case Study: Arthur Conan Doyle publishes his first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, in 1887's Beeton's Christmas Annual. Holmes, the detective hero of 60 Doyle works, never uttered the phrase 'Elementary, my dear Watson,' and is so popular that after readers protest his death, the author brings him back to literary life. In 2007, an 1887 Beeton's sells at auction for \$156,000.' Stuff we all know, but it's nice to see it in *Smithsonian* magazine."
- A small, jolly group braved the snow on December 1st for our Annual Will Crakes Memorial Jollification at the John Nelsons'! Good food and viewing of a Ronald Howard DVD were included.



Photo by Bill Seil