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

Volume 44 Issue 12 ■ December 2025

Story, Meeting Content & Events for 2025 SOB Gatherings:

★ *We interrupt our regular study with the Annual Return to our Christmas favorite...* ★

December 21 **The Blue Carbuncle**
In-person meeting

★ *In the New Year, we will wrap-up our study on the theme, "Leisure and Entertainment" —with the last two of our four stories…MISS, SUSS* ★

Jan. 18, 2026 **The Missing Three Quarters**
via Zoom

Feb. 15, 2026 **The Sussex Vampire**
In-person meeting

The SOBs' 2025 Holiday Card Exchange!

Our 5th annual Holiday Card Exchange among the Members is **ON**!! Philadelphia **SOB Jamila Robinson** will again take on coordination of the mailing list this year when you send your names and snail-mail addresses to her at: jamilaowilson1@gmail.com, ***with the phrase*** "2025 SOB Holiday Card Exchange mailing list" in the Subject: line. She'll organize the list and send it to participants ***only***!

You choose the sort of "greeting" you want to send: Thanksgiving, Hanukah, Christmas, Kwanza, or New Year's. Cards can be Sherlockian or not, store-bought or home-made!

Jamila will put the mailing list together in a Word "label" set up—3 columns, 10 rows, that uses a 30-label sheet!

Don't go to a lot of trouble! **Just have some fun!**
Her deadline—of December 1—is fast approaching!

Says Program Chair SOB Sunny Even

A Creepy Start to Christmas Cards in England and America

Let's step back a bit earlier than the late Victorian Era/Guilded Age to look at the first Christmas cards. Christmas cards originated in the 1840s, but giving and sending them did not catch on for some time. Initially they were lithographed and hand colored, making them expensive—about a shilling, and on the order of a working-class weekly income at the time. Moreover, prior to the Penny Post, the cost of postage was borne by the recipient, ***not exactly the holiday message one wants to send.***

Advances in mass printing and reduction in postal costs helped, but the biggest influence was the already-successful market in Valentines cards and the growing commercialization of Christmas, on which card manufacturers capitalized. Initially, designs were (to us) distinctly unseasonal and irreligious. They were intended to be humorous, a distinctly English Christmas custom. Think Christmas pantomimes and their modern take, the annual Christmas TV specials. But what's considered amusing has changed over the centuries and these Christmas cards can provide some interesting insight into early Victorian wit. We would find many of them strange and even macabre today.

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Join Us for Our Next In-Person Meeting!

✯ Via Zoom, Sunday, December 21, 2025 ✯

At the Seattle Public Library on Queen Anne Hill, located at 400 West Garfield

Door to the Meeting Room, which is on the lower level, will open at 10 a.m.

The meeting will start at 12:30 p.m. and end by 3 p.m.

We hope you will all contribute to our cookie exchange, the gift exchange and our snacks table (perhaps savories & beverages?)!!

Getting there: From north- or southbound I-5, exit at Mercer Street and head west. Turn right on Queen Anne Avenue and head up the hill. At the 3-way stop sign at the top, turn left onto West Galer Street. At 4th Avenue, turn right. The library is one (1) block north on the northwest corner, at the cross with Garfield Street. ★

Says Program Chair SOB Sunny Even...

Continued from Page 1

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Inspired by cultural holiday touch points, this peculiar holiday greeting form, and it's imagery, gradually gave way to the Dickensian scenes we associate with a Victorian Christmas today. "A Christmas Carol" was published in 1842, the illustration "Christmas Tree at Windsor Castle" (***left***) appeared in the *Illustrated London News* in 1848, and in 1881 *Harpers Weekly* created this familiar version of Santa Claus (***right***) to accompany Clemet Clarke Moore's "The Night Before Christmas."

In 1870's America, Louis Prang, a famous and highly successful lithographer of Civil War imagery, began producing Christmas greeting cards for the commercial market (England and the U.S.). He used advanced forms of chromolithography, with highly detailed flower designs and the words "Merry Christmas," (***left***) though over time his focus shifted to scenes of family, food and gifts. In the 1880s, he awarded four cash prizes annually to his top artists, in the range of $10,000 to $50,000 in today's dollars. This delicate depiction of children and angels won the 1882 prize. Prang was also an active supporter of women artists, both commissioning and collecting artworks by women. Many of his cards featured works by female artists such as the botanical illustrations of Ellen Thayer Fisher. He is still recognized today, in the Louie Awards, presented annually by the Greeting Card Association, and Louis Prang Street that borders the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

(***As I researched this column, I was drawn away from the weirdness of those early cards and into the beauty of Prang's work. Have a look on Google—he was a fascinating and forward-thinking artist.)*** ☆

"I HAD called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. …".

RIP: 5/1936 —5/2025

A Quiz on "The Blue Carbuncle" by: SOB Charlie Cook

1. When did Watson call upon Holmes at 221B Baker Street?
2. Holmes told Watson he received what from commissionaire Peterson?
3. For whom was a discarded Christmas goose intended?
4. Who is the owner of the Blue Carbuncle?
5. What reward was offered for the return of the gem?
6. Who was arrested for the theft of the gem and what was his profession?
7. Where was the gem found originally?
8. Where did the owner of the hat purchase his goose?
9. From where did the proprietor obtain his geese?
10. What did Holmes tell John Robinson his (Holmes') business was?
11. What was john Robinson's real name?
12. What special feature did the goose with the Blue Carbuncle have?

Answers may be found on Page 6

☆

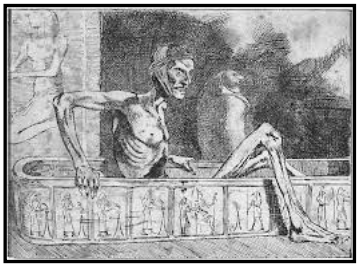
SOB Kris Hambrick's Sherlock on Screen:

The Case of the Christmas Ghost Story

At this dark time of year, at least in this hemisphere, people around the world have gathered for millennia to ward off the chill outside with firelight, a spicy beverage of some variety, and… spooky tales of the supernatural? Today, our Christmas stories *tend* to be more about elves and Santas and, in our case, geese. Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is somehow both the progenitor of Victorian-style Christmas traditions as we know them and somehow feels a bit like an outlier in how creepy it actually is.

But Dickens was actually drawing on a much older oral tradition of telling supernatural tales in the dark of winter. It's not all that counterintuitive when you think about it: the longer evenings mean more time to while away indoors, spooky stories get the blood pumping, and it's not unusual to ward off discomfort and fear of the real world by telling cathartic stories you can then wave off.

But what, you probably asked several sentences ago, has this to do with Sherlock Holmes? Well, I just watched 2023's installment of *"A Ghost Story for Christmas,"* an adaptation of a Conan Doyle story about a mummy called "Lot No 249." It's reportedly the first story in which a mummy is *dangerous*, and thus calls ahead to the Universal monster films of the 1930s. And it's part of a BBC tradition which aired ghost stories at Christmas through the seventies, which BBC *Sherlock* co-creator Mark Gatiss has revived in the past several years. While most of the stories have been adaptations of M.R. James, this ACD tale fits nicely in, and Gatiss has included several other Easter eggs our particular audience will delight in.



Having seen a few of these installments from both the 1970s and current run, I strongly encourage you during this holiday season to mull some wine and sit down with some ghosts one of these long, dark nights. It's a tradition I think we'd do well to continue, and now we've got our own Sherlockian connection with "Lot No 249," available with many library memberships via the Kanopy streaming app.

☆

"Sherlock Throughout the Year"

By: SOB Margaret Nelson

What adventures were Sherlock and Watson involved in during December?

We focus on ***The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*** at our last meeting each year as December dates are part of the story narrative.

♦ **From: "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (1892),** "I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon **the second morning after Christmas**, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe rack within his reach on the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in the manner for the purpose of examination."

Sherlock tells Watson about the hat: "It arrived upon Christmas morning. In company with a good fat goose, which is, I have no doubt, roasting at the moment in front of Peterson's fire.'"

Further along, referring to the Blue Carbuncle: "…on **December 22d**, just five days ago, John Homer, a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady's jewel-case."

Doyle included one of his wonderfully atmospheric descriptions: "...it was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped cravats about our throats. Outside the **stars were shining coldly in a cloudless sky**, and the breath of the passers-by blew into smoke like so many pistol shots…In a quarter of an hour, we were in Bloomsbury at the Alpha Inn."

Sherlock and Watson then go to Covent Garden to interview Mr. Breckinridge to find out where the geese originated. As Watson tells us this,

> "Holmes turned to the page indicated. 'Here you are, Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.'
>
> 'Now then, what's the last entry?'
>
> '**December 22d**. Twenty-four geese at 7s.6d.'"

Though this has December references in it, surely Holmes and Watson were not idle the rest of the month. I propose that a few other stories might have had portions set in December too.

♦ **From**: **"The Adventure of the Gloria Scott" (1893):** "'I have some papers here,' said my friend Sherlock Holmes **as we sat one winter's night on either side of the fire**, 'which I really think, Watson, would be worth your while to glance over. These are the documents in the extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it.'"

♦ **From "The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual" (1893):** "Thus month after month his (Sherlock's) papers accumulated until every corner of the room was stacked with bundles of manuscript which were on no account to be burned, and which could not be put away save by their owner. **One winter's night**, as we sat together by the fire, I ventured to suggest to him that, as he had finished pasting extracts into his commonplace book, he might employ the next two hours in making our rooms a little more habitable. He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he went off to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a large tin box behind him. This he placed in the middle of the floor, and, squatting down upon a stool in front of it, he threw back the lid. I could see that it was already a third full of bundles of paper tied up with red tape into separate packages.

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"Sherlock Throughout the Year"

Continued from Page 4

"There are cases enough here, Watson," said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. 'I think that if you knew all that I had in this box you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in.'"

♦ **In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" (1903),** we can extrapolate a month from this quote: "Only one word of epilogue. The American, Abe Slaney, was condemned to death **at the winter assizes at Norwich**, but his penalty was changed to penal servitude in consideration of mitigating circumstances, and the certainty that Hilton Cubitt had fired the first shot."

Like today, the judges and clerks who had traveled to Norwich to finish the year's work on the court calendar would not want to continue to be working there all winter so would try to conclude their business before Christmas. A December date for this could be reasonable. ☆

Things to See, Buy, Do & Know!

⇨ SOB Margaret Nelson notes this: Al's cousin Ellen pointed out this ballet being presented by Nashville Ballet in Tennessee!

"About the program: Step into the shadows and follow the clues as we close our 2025–26 season with ***Sherlock* – the electrifying centerpiece of our annual *Attitude* series.** Acclaimed choreographer Penny Saunders returns to our main stage with a dazzling Tennessee premiere that reimagines one of literature's most iconic figures in an entirely new light. ♦ In this riveting ballet, **the legendary Sherlock Holmes comes alive through bold choreography**, cinematic flair, and immersive storytelling. But this is more than a mystery – it's a journey into the brilliant, enigmatic mind of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. Complete with original costumes, atmospheric lighting, and evocative set design, *Sherlock* is a thrilling co-production with Grand Rapids Ballet and Ballet Idaho, made even more transporting by the integration of vintage 1940s radio broadcasts from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. This nostalgic audio layer will pull you straight into the noir-inspired world of gaslight intrigue and elegant suspense. ♦ Whether you're drawn to the cerebral thrill of Sherlock Holmes or the fearless beauty of contemporary choreography, this year's *Attitude* promises an unforgettable finale to the season – mysterious, mesmerizing, and masterfully performed."

Adds Margaret: Here's the link to (and a photo from) another interesting write up about where they are getting ideas for this Sherlockian ballet: [In Sherlock, Penny Saunders Gives Life to an Iconic Character - Pointe Magazine]

⇨ A Faux Pas on Your Editor: Rather than transcribing into this newsletter the Speaker's Notes from SOB Shannon Wallace's August 2025 PowerPoint presentation "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot: Shannon Explains It All"—as was intended, **here is the URL for viewing her entire program**, as originally presented: https://tinyurl.com/SOBdevilsfoot (*Once you open the link you should see in the lower right corner a place to click "Notes" which covers what she said during the presentation.*)

⇨ SOB James Romnes shares this photo of his booth exhibit at the Washington Arms Collectors event in October:

☆

The Sound of the Baskervilles

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.

$25 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 the 3rd Sunday of each month. Location of the meetings may vary. Traditional events scheduled through the year may include: "The Master's Dinner" celebrating Holmes' birthday, "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—films, teas, plays and gaming events—are as announced.

To join, send your check for dues—$25 for individuals, $35 for families (U.S. funds only)—to the address shown at left.

December 21 In-Person Event!!

- ***Our December 21 In-Person Meeting will be an informal Holiday Gathering!***
- ***It will feature a video showing of BLUE (version TBD) & discussion, along with our annual cookie exchange and a mystery gift exchange!***
- ***We hope you will all contribute to our cookie exchange, the gift exchange and our snacks table (perhaps savories & beverages?)!!***

A Mystery Gift Exchange?!...

If you choose to participate, please arrive with a wrapped "gift"—something that is old or new, used or not, big or small, silly or not, Sherlockian or not, but nothing that is costly!

Perhaps something from your own collection...something you think you can part with and another SOB might enjoy!!

The real mystery is in how the gifts will be distributed!!

Answers To Cook's Quiz on Page 3: "The Blue Carbuncle"

1. On the second morning after Christmas.
2. A very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat.
3. Mrs. Henry Baker.
4. The Countess of Morcar.
5. £1000.
6. John Horner, a plumber.
7. In the banks of the Amoy River in southern China.
8. The Alpha Inn Public House.
9. Breckinridge's in Covent Garden.
10. To know what other people don't know.
11. James Ryder.
12. A barred tail.