



# Baker Street in Baltimore

*Official Newsletter of the Six Napoleons of Baltimore*

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## **NAPOLEONS DEBBIE CLARK & CARLA COUPE RECEIVE BSI SHILLINGS**

*As does Postulant Steve Mason*



The Baker Street Irregulars held their annual dinner meeting virtually on Friday, January 6 and Six Napoleons were involved throughout the program.

Daniel Thomas did the traditional reading of the BSI Constitution & Buy-Laws. Denny Dobry was supposed to toast Mrs. Hudson but was apparently replaced at the last minute by somebody calling themselves Helga Hudson, which had tongues wagging for a few days afterwards. Robert Katz made a brief appearance to present the BSI Eddie Awards to the editors of recent BSI Press publications. Steven Rothman presented on 75 years of the *Baker Street Journal* and Michael F. Whelan was honored with a presentation copy of the book "*A Quiet Air of Mastery*": *An Appreciation of Michael Francis Whelan* in recognition of his many years of service as Wiggins of the BSI.

It was then time to announce the members of the 2021 class of new BSI members. The second name announced was Debbie Clark, who was presented with the investiture of Mrs. Cecil Forrester. The next name called was Carla Coupe and she was given the investiture of The London Bridge. The streak continued, as Steve Mason, who became a postulant with our group in December, was then announced with the investiture of The Fortescue Scholarship. Congratulations to these three and the rest of the 2021 class!

Many of the traditional aspects of a BSI Weekend also took place, albeit in a virtual fashion. The BSI Distinguished Lecturer Series took place on Thursday. Saturday was a busy day with the annual meeting of the Beacon Society, the William Gillette Memorial Luncheon, Lost in New York with a Bunch of Sherlockians and the Gaslight Gala all taking place. A new group, The Literary Agents, held their first meeting ever on Sunday to discuss Arthur Conan Doyle's role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and then the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes closed the weekend out with their traditional Sunday brunch.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March 6** – *Red Circle of Washington, DC* meeting - Online
- March 8** - *Six Napoleons of Baltimore* meeting – Online
- March 20** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Online
- March 29** – *Watson's Tin Box* meeting - Online
- April 17** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Online
- April 23** – *Sons of the Copper Beeches* meeting - Online
- April 26** – *Watson's Tin Box* meeting - Online
- May 15** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Online
- May 22** – *White Rose Irregulars* meeting - Online
- May 24** – *Watson's Tin Box* meeting - Online
- June 12** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Sabatino's
- June 14** - *Six Napoleons of Baltimore* meeting – Squire's
- June 19** – *Red Circle of Washington* meeting - Online
- July 9-11** – *Holmes in the Heartland Conference* – St. Louis
- July 31** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Sabatino's
- August 6-7** – *A Scintillation of Scions XIV* conference - Online
- September 11** - *Six Napoleons of Baltimore* 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner – Squire's
- October 9** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Sabatino's
- December 11** - *Sherlockians of Baltimore* luncheon – Sabatino's
- December 13** - *Six Napoleons of Baltimore* meeting – Squire's

As things progress with the COVID vaccinations, there be will likely be some modifications as events stay virtual longer than anticipated. Please double-check before making definite plans.



## In Memoriam

**Allan D. DeGray, Jr.**

**April 11, 1932 – February 3, 2021**

We are saddened to learn of the passing of Napoleon CLXXXII on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. Allan served as Commissionaire XXVII and then as Gasogene XXVII.

This is a woefully incomplete tribute to a man who has been a Napoleon for approximately 40 years. If you have any memories to share, please feel free to respond via email and we will publish those in the March edition.

## Two BSI Members present at March 8 Six Napoleons meeting

That's right – two BSI members will be presenting at our upcoming March 8<sup>th</sup> meeting. First is Thomas Cynkin, who will be presenting on "The Rise of Mycroft Holmes." The second presentation will be "What Would You Keep from the Canon?" by Stephen Mason.

*The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place* (SHOS) will be the topic for the story discussion. You can register to attend this virtual meeting at

[https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZcrd-GsrzotHtP\\_LB4YoL0Jle7jqaykq9Oo](https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZcrd-GsrzotHtP_LB4YoL0Jle7jqaykq9Oo)

Volunteers are needed to deliver the five canonical toasts at this meeting, and we need 3 members to serve as inquisitors before the meeting starts. Please contact the Gasogene at [SixNapoleonsOfBaltimore@gmail.com](mailto:SixNapoleonsOfBaltimore@gmail.com) to offer your services.

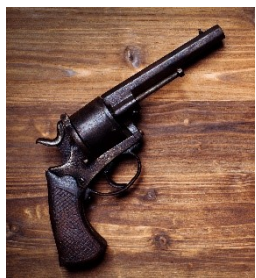


## A Shot in the Dark

by Liese Sherwood-Fabre, PhD

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Number 74 of a continuing series



Firearms figured prominently in three of the cases in the Canon: the very special airgun of Colonel Sebastian Moran in “The Adventure of the Empty House,” the apparent death of Hilton Cubitt and his wife’s suicide in “The Adventure of the Dancing Men,” and the apparent murder of Maria Gibson by one of a pair of her husband’s revolvers from his

“arsenal” in “The Adventure of Thor Bridge.” In all three deaths, Holmes’ knowledge of weapons and ballistics provided the true nature and sequence of events.

Holmes was known to use several different firearms, including a .45-caliber Webley Metropolitan Police RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) revolver, a .45-caliber British Bull Dog (a pocket revolver), and a Webley RIC chambered in .442 (his pistol of choice). Watson’s trusty service revolver was most likely a .45-caliber Adams, purchased with his own funds, with the ammunition supplied by the government during his service years. While it could be assumed Holmes was no slouch with his aim (he couldn’t have “decorated” his flat with the initials “VR” in bullet holes without a great deal of precision), Baring-Gould concluded Watson was the better shot. The doctor needed only a single bullet to take down a mastiff in “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches,” while Holmes needed five to do the same with the hound of the Baskervilles.

When first developed, guns were basically hand-held canons where the shooter loaded gunpowder and a steel ball into the barrel and lit a fuse. A trigger and a percussion cap later replaced the fuse. Adding a revolving chamber that held several shots, reducing the need to reload and created the revolver. By the 1870s, instead of filling each chamber with gunpowder, these weapons used a bullet cartridge containing the projectile, gunpowder, and an explosive cap. Today, as then, when the shooter pulls the trigger, a hammer draws back and then springs forward to hit the cartridge and its cap. The gunpowder explodes and forces the bullet down the barrel of the gun.

A gun’s caliber refers to the internal diameter of the gun’s barrel and is important in identifying the make of handgun. As noted above, most of Holmes’ and Watson’s firearms were .45 caliber, meaning the interior diameter of Watson’s trusty service revolver was .45 inches. Colonel Sebastian Moran, on the other hand, deceived law enforcement by using a soft revolver bullet in his airgun.

In addition to the type of gun and bullet used in a crime, another part of forensics—referred to “firearm examination”—involves gunshot evidence on either the victim or suspect. As noted above, when a bullet is fired, the gunpowder explodes. The gases and other particles created by this explosion follow the bullet as well as escaping through spaces in the weapon itself. Revolvers are

particularly “holey” and leave more of this residue on the shooter. In the case of the victim, gunshot residue (GSR) can be used to determine how far the victim was from the weapon. The closer the two, the more GSR will be found. Holmes used this knowledge of GSR to conclude that William Kirwan in “The Adventure of the Reigate Squire” was not shot during a struggle over a gun as reported, because his clothes carried no black marks from being shot at close range.

He also used his knowledge of GSR and ballistics in the “The Adventure of the Dancing Men” to determine the presence of a third shooter in the murder of Hilton Cubitt. Ballistics is the study of how bullets (and other projectiles) travel. He noted the lack of powder marks on the victim, but some on Mrs. Cubitt’s hands, and a third bullet hole through a window sash, indicating a third shot and shooter. Taken together, the evidence indicated Cubitt and the third person exchanged gunshots—one with deadly aim and the second missing its intended victim. Upon finding her husband dead, Mrs. Cubitt unsuccessfully attempted to take her own life and would have been tried for murder without Holmes’ keen observations and discovery of the third shot.

Holmes’ knowledge of firearm investigations took a more mathematical bent in “The Adventure of Thor Bridge.” One of a pair of revolvers was found in the suspect’s wardrobe. The other was missing. Given that two minus one leaves one, the second revolver was the murder weapon—especially when a new chip appeared on the bridge railing where the victim died. Several criminologists and Sherlockian have noted this case resembled an 1893 suicide described by Hans Gross. In this actual event, a grain merchant staged his suicide to appear as a homicide by tying a stone to his pistol and letting it be dragged over a bridge and into the water.

While firearms appeared in several of the Canon’s cases, including one where a mysterious widow fired “barrel after barrel,” instead of “chamber after chamber” to end the life of Charles Augustus Milverton, Holmes’ observations and the use of his knowledge of ballistics and related firearm traits were of particular importance in a smaller number. All the same, his conclusions were never proved to be a shot in the dark.



Dr. Liese Sherwood-Fabre’s latest collection of essays on “The Life and Times of Sherlock Holmes: Essays on Victorian England” (Volume 3) is now available. Volumes 1 and 2 are now together in an eBook boxset for a special price.