Thank Sherlock Holmes for the Phrase ‘Smoking Gun’

From its origins to modern day, the favorite cliché of detectives and journalists everywhere refuses to kick the bucket

Excerpted from: Smithsonian.com, July 12, 2017

The evidence is irrefutable. The headlines declare a "smoking gun" has been found. But how did this dramatic image of a phrase become synonymous in everyday speech with conclusive proof? Fittingly, the origins lie with one of the world’s most famous fictional detectives, and of course, a recently fired pistol.

The 1893 Arthur Conan Doyle short story "The Adventure of the 'Gloria Scott'" depicts a young Sherlock Holmes solving his first professional case. Holmes was asked by a college friend to decipher a mysterious letter that had caused his father to drop dead. It turned out to be blackmail related to a mutiny that the father had organized on a prison ship taking him to Australia long ago. In the story's climactic flashback to the event, the father explains the mutineers were forced to quickly massacre the crew when their stash of guns was discovered by the ship’s doctor. After shooting several guards, they moved to seize control of the ship:

"[W]e rushed on into the captain’s cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay wit’ his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while…"

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Bone-Up for our Study of BERY

A Quiz on “The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet”

By: SOB Charlie Cook (Café Noir)

1. Name the “madman” who consulted Holmes and the institution he represented!

2. How many Beryls were there in the coronet and how many were stolen?

3. Name the second waiting-maid employed by the client!

4. How much money had the client’s son asked his father for as a loan; was it granted?

5. What three things did the client claim he lost in one night?

6. Name the client’s residence!

7. Name the waiting-maid’s sweetheart, and what was his occupation?

8. What special information did Holmes discover about the maid’s sweetheart?

9. What disguise did Holmes use when he left Watson to investigate the theft?

10. What was the amount of the check the client wrote for Holmes?

11. Who was the thief?

12. Who was the thief’s accomplice?

Answers may be found on Page 5
The Seattle Public Library on Queen Anne Hill is at 400 West Garfield. Library opens at 1:00, closes at 5:00. Come early, and catch up with your fellow SOBs!

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.

The 3rd International Sherlockian Summit is November 4!

The Summit is a joint meeting of Sherlockian Clubs—drawing attendees from throughout the Pacific Northwest and beyond—on Saturday, November 4, 2017, Noon to 4 p.m. at the Skagit River Brewery (404 S. 3rd St, [360] 336-2884), Mt Vernon, WA. (http://www.skagitbrew.com).

This is a social event, so plan to meet many old friends and some new folks.

The cost is only the price of what you eat and drink!

All are welcome, no RSVP required!!

Ineffable Twaddle

Back to Our Chronology with Study of BERY

The Regular Monthly Meeting of The Sound of the Baskervilles will begin at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, September 24, 2017. This is a Change—we’ll meet one week later than usual!! We’ll still be at the Seattle Public Library, though, (Queen Anne Branch) at 400 West Garfield, Seattle (driving directions at left).

Says SOB Program Manager SOB Margie Deck: As the dog days of summer edge closer to an end in the Pacific Northwest, please join us in September for a trapse through the snow with Holmes, Watson, and The Adventure of The Beryl Coronet. SOB Melinda Michaelson will lead us through this odd case of jewelry thiev-ery in Alexander Holder’s household—a situation that raises many questions:

- Who is this exalted name that dares to pawn state jewelry?
- How respectable is this banker that agrees to such an arrangement?
- Why bring the coronet home and then so shabbily secure it?
- Will a corner actually break off a crown holding 39 enormous gems?
- Should these cousins really get married? Is that even legal? Ick!

Plausibility issues aside, this story allows Holmes’ abilities to shine and we can enjoy going along as Holmes plays the hero. Unlike poor Mary, who may be punished terribly in the end, our adventure will end pleasantly.

If you have a favourite snack or non-alcoholic beverage you’d like to share, please feel free to bring it along!

Thank Holmes for “Smoking Gun”

...the chaplain stood with a smoking pistol in his hand at his elbow.”

“A good copy editor would have fixed Doyle’s awkward ‘in his hand at his elbow,’ and Sir Arthur chose pistol rather than gun,” wrote the late William Safire in his “On Language” column for the New York Times Magazine in 2003. Nevertheless, those quibbles aside, he identifies Doyle’s use of the phrase as “the start of the cliché that grips us today.”

But ‘smoking gun’ wouldn’t reach cliché status until some 80 years after the short story was published, Safire notes. That’s when the Watergate crisis lodged it firmly into the American lexicon. A New York Times article written during the height of the scandal on July 14, 1974, notes the main question members of Congress were asking as they considered impeaching President Richard Nixon was “Where’s the smoking gun?”

In the 40 years since then, the phrase has found use in investigations of world politics, the tech industry and even reality television. For political column-nist Jonah Goldberg, the phrase has become so endurance that it’s created an unreal-istic standard of the proof required for a scandal.

Cliché or not, it’s clear that for writers everywhere, when it comes to surefire evidence, guns will keep on smoking.

Ed. Note: In Safire’s original words:
“(The phrase) was made famous during the Golden Age of Political Coinage. The Watergate era coined or popularized Saturday night massacre, stonewalling, cover-up, dirty tricks, straight arrow, expletive deleted, third-rate burglary, plumbers, Deep Throat, Big Enchilada, enemies list and my personal favorite, twisting slowly in the wind. That was when Doyle’s smoking pistol, which had changed in occasional usage over 80 years to smoking gun, blazed its way into dictionaries.”

In post 9/11 WMD parlance, Safire added:
“The Security Council, then, will soon be seized with the question made famous by restaurant hostesses: smoking or non?”

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Things to See, Buy, Do & Know

Notes PFL David: In my May minutes I mentioned From Holmes to Sherlock by Mattias Bostrom ($27, Mysterious Press) and Peter Blau’s comment “Well-written and recommended.” For the English translation out on August 1, SOB Bill Seil forwarded a review by Publisher’s Weekly, which says in part: “This exhaustive study of the 130-year Sherlock Holmes phenomenon spans Arthur Conan Doyle’s earliest inspirations up to today’s two successful Holmes-inspired TV shows. Boström begins with Conan Doyle’s pre-Sherlock life, explaining how the fledgling author struggled to place his early fiction in the popular magazines of the day...The keepers of the flame have been the “Sherlockians”, the individuals who analyze Conan Doyle’s works and collect memorabilia...The book occasionally bogs down in their legal skirmishing, but always gets back on track as it explores the world’s continuing fascination with fiction’s leading detective hero.”

From our friends at MX Publishing:
- The Practical Handbook of Bee Culture (by Paul Ashton, $28.95, HC) is the journal kept by Holmes from 1904 to 1912. ’04 was the year he retired from active investigation and moved to a farmhouse in East Dean...The journal is, of course, principally the record of his bee-keeping activities, but Holmes has also included a wealth of astonishing information—some of it highly indiscreet—like: —his marriage to Mrs Hudson and their social life in Sussex; —his meetings with Lenin, Picasso, Edward VII...and other distinguished figures; and —the steady deterioration of his health over the period.
- Now available is Return to Reichenbach by Geri Schear. When a half-naked man is found gibbering on the moor, Sherlock Holmes uncovers a series of bizarre murders. At their heart lies a shadowy figure known only as The Sorcerer. He can talk to the dead, they say. He can bend any will to his own. Even a will as formidable as the detective’s. The investigation leads from Dartmoor to Ireland and, ultimately, back to one of the most terrifying scenes of his career. Can Holmes survive the Reichenbach Falls a second time?
- A Guide to Deduction by Hannah Rogers is the ultimate handbook for any aspiring Sherlock Holmes or Watson. Building on the massively successful auidetodeduction.tumblr.com, the book includes not only advice on deducing aspects of an individual, but a wide range of skills every detective needs.
- From Jean Upton of the London Society’s District Messenger:
  - The Adventure of the Creeping Man has been published by Winchester University Press in partnership with Portsmouth City Council. The original manuscript is part of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection Lancelyn Green bequest. Edited by Professor Neil McCaw, the book features carefully photographed manuscript and a transcribed, annotated version of the story. An introductory essay examines the critical history of the tale and the manuscript, as well as a history of Doyle’s time spent in Portsmouth. The facsimile is available for £35 (including postage and packing) within the UK; £50 outside the UK. For more details and to purchase the book go to: http://www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle/thecreepingman; you can also browse through the collection.
  - We all think that Sherlock Holmes is amazing, but someone has taken the sentiment quite literally. Wistow Maze in Leicestershire, which changes its configuration from year to year, is now in the shape of Sherlock Holmes’ profile. The maze reportedly covers eight acres with three miles of paths to follow. To view it: https://twitter.com/wistowmaze
  - Doylean & Sherlockian Articles Wanted: Luke Kuhns (author of “Welcome to Undershaw”) is working on a project for Undershaw/Stepping Stones School and is looking for other authors to participate. The intention is to publish two articles a month on the school’s website www.steppingstones.org.uk/ on the themes of Doyle and his life and writings, Holmes, Hindhead, and other relevant subjects. Articles should be a minimum of 500—1,000 words; maximum of 3,000—5,000. The project will kick off with items by David Marcum and Luke Kuhns. If you would like to participate or need more information, contact Luke at lukebenjamenkuhns@gmail.com

From our friends at MX Publishing:
- The Norwegian Explorers are planning to hold their next triennial Sherlockian Conference in Minneapolis August 9 to 11, 2019, and you can get on their mailing list by contacting Julie McKu-
Chapter 4: Sarajevo and The Spirits


(B)eginning with 1921’s “The Mazarin Stone”, the 12 Holmes stories written in the last decade of Doyle’s life were darker and more cynical than their famed predecessors. In “The Retired Colourman” for instance, Holmes says, “We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow—misery.”

Doyle, of course, believed there was far more. "There’s no mourning at Windlesham… He might have only gone to Australia.”

—Adrian Doyle on his father’s death

Mark your Calendar now!

Last Call: The Stormy Petrels of BC are turning 30, SOBs helping them celebrate!

- Date: Saturday, September 16, 2017
- Time: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  Registration begins at 9:30.
- Location: The Billy Bishop Pub (Legion), 1407 Laburnum Street, Vancouver; www.billybishoplegion.org; (604) 568-4130; west of Downtown Vancouver, across the Burrard Bridge; west on Cornwall, north on Laburnum.
- Cost: $30 CDN per person—payable at the door—for lunch and swag!
- RSVP: To Fran Martin at: franziskah@shaw.ca for more info and pre-registration by August 1st.

The Geologists are Coming...Again!!!

The Geological Society of America’s annual meeting is in Seattle October 22 to 25, 2017.

The Sherlockian subgroup “The Practical but Limited Geologists” will hold its semi-annual social as well—joined by The SOBs!

- Date: Wednesday, October 25th, 2017
- Time: 7 p.m. no-host cocktails • 8 p.m. no-host dinner
- Location: Elephant & Castle Pub & Restaurant, 1415 Fifth Avenue, Seattle
- Cost: Whatever you wish to spend on food and drink! All are welcome, no RSVP required

The SOBs Host the 3rd International Sherlockian Summit in Mt. Vernon!

- Date: Saturday, November 4, 2017
- Time: 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.
- Location: Skagit River Brewery, 404 S. 3rd St, ([360] 336-2884), Mt Vernon, WA. (http://www.skagitbrew.com)
- Cost: Whatever you wish to spend on food and drink! All are welcome, no RSVP required
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... show how nice it can be to have new and well-written short stories. MX’s websites are at www.mxpublishing.com and www.mxpublishing.co.uk.

⇒ Seen in AARP, the Magazine: British author Anthony Horowitz—who’s written a couple of Holmesian-themed novels (House of Silk, Moriarty)—has a new Victorian-themed novel in Magpie Murders, summarized as, “An enchanting mystery within a mystery. A London book editor receives the partial manuscript of a murder novel. When the odious author turns up dead, the editor turns sleuth. A perfect summer read.”

⇒ Seen in Entertainment Weekly, 7/7/2017: British author Steve Antony’s “The Queen’s Handbag” is a (children’s?) picture book rated “B”. “When a mischievous swan swipes the Queen of England’s purse, the monarch and her trail of frantic policemen embark on an epic chase across the U.K.—from Stonehenge to Edinburgh Castle—to get it back.”

⇒ From SOB Geoff Jeffery:
- Author Laurie R. King has sold the rights to make television programs of her Mary Russell series. She will supervise the scripts when they start.
- Caught this PBS News tidbit, rebroadcast, on August 12: “In long-lost play, the author of ‘Peter Pan’ spoofs ‘Sherlock Holmes’ and the mystery genre.” For the complete story, go to: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/long-lost-play-author-peter-pan-spoofs-sherlock-holmes-mystery-genre/

⇒ From SOB Margaret Nelson: Federal Way’s 320th Library will host “Mysterious England” on September 16 at 2 p.m. Northwest authors Marty Wingate, Candace Robb and Alice K. Boatwright will be on an interactive panel discussing their books, love of the mystery genre and England. English tea is offered afterward.

Answers to Quiz on “BERY” on Page 1
12. Sir George Burnwell
11. The cheat’s niece, Mary
10. £3,000
9. That of a common loafer
8. He had a wooden leg
7. Francis Basset: a green-blooded
6. Friend
5. His honour, his gums and his son
4. Edzo
3. Lucky Parrot
2. £93
1. Oliver Holder of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson

Seattle’s Premier Mystery Bookshop “For Sale”!
If you missed our e-blast on August 3—sourced by SOB VP Kashena Konecki—this could be news to you:
From current owner J.B. Dickey: As of August 1st, the Seattle Mystery Bookshop is for sale. It is our hope that someone who cares deeply about this shop, and who has deep pockets, will want to see it continue as it has for the last 27 years...What this shop needs is someone who can and will invest in it. Should you or someone you know seriously want to become a bookshop owner, please let us know. Founder Bill Farley used to joke that everything in the shop was for sale, even the paint on the walls. Now that is true.

SOB Ann Milam provided an excerpt of an interview she did about the Shop’s founder Bill Farley, which first appeared in The Skyliner, September 2015 (the newsletter of the Seattle community where Ann is a resident and Bill was a resident prior to his passing).

“(In 1990, after hearing that Seattle was considered ‘the best book town in the US’, he packed up and moved west (from Philadelphia) to see for himself. Bill found Seattleites were definitely ready for and in need of a good mystery bookshop, but the city certainly didn’t make it easy for his new business. He wanted to locate his shop in Pioneer Square, the historical heart of the city, where he could reach both visitors and residents; and he wanted to be near downtown so workers could come by and browse during lunch—but WOW was shop space limited and parking expensive! Also, in “old” downtown everything leaked—walls, ceilings, utilities—and the city was so tough on approving signs—especially the neon ones he liked. Nevertheless, in spite of the challenges, Bill found his spot on Cherry Street in the heart of Pioneer Square, and he also found an ideal partner for his venture in J.B. Dickey (who in 1998 purchased Bill’s interest in the Shop upon his retirement).”

SOB Bill Seil directed us to a news story about the closing that appeared in the Seattle Weekly, available at the following link: http://www.seattleweekly.com/arts/anyone-want-to-buy-a-bookstore-seattle-mystery-bookshop-is-up-for-sale/?utm_source=Publishers+Weekly&utm_campaign=15fa2ad214-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_08_09&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0bb2959cbb-15fa2ad214-304560817

SOB Pat McIntosh stopped in to buy, saying “I got into the store today; bought 4 books on discount, though nothing Sherlockian. I mentioned about the store being for sale and the man working there said they had gotten some inquiries, so they’re hopeful.”
Member News & Notes

SOBs attending our August 12 South Sound Meeting at Haugen's house were:
Sheila Holtgrieve  Al Nelson  Terri Haugen
Cameron Brandon  Margie Deck  Cara Cross
Dawn Kravagna  Geoff Jeffery  Sunny Even
Margaret Nelson  Marcia Marcy  PFL David
Melinda Michaelson

PFL David limited himself to announcements. It was too sunny, warm and fun to study!! So we just ate, drank and yacked! See photos and comments at the blog section of our website: www.soundofthebaskervilles.com  ★ Good news: We saw Dawn and Sunny after long absences! Bad news: Marcia is moving to Alabama for hubby's job!!

SOBs attending our August 20, 2017 Regular Monthly Meeting in Seattle, presided over by PFL David Haugen, were:
Sheila Holtgrieve  Terri Haugen  Chis Berwald
Kashena Konecki  Margie Deck  Alex Snow
Vivika Sundqvist  Mel Briganti  Airy Maher
Shannon Wallace  Melinda Michaelson
Lauren Messenger  Ann Milam

The PFL reminded us our September meeting will be September 24, not September 17. VP Kashena will chair and SOB Melinda Michaelson will lead study of BERY. He also noted our Annual Jollification will be held on Saturday, December 2 at SOB Carrol Clemens’ home in Federal Way! ★ Sheila reported our 2017 JHWS Treasure Hunt Team—SOBs Sheila, Margie Deck, Lauren Messenger and Francis Bond, with Charlie Cook—will be wrapping up our team entry promptly by August month-end.

★ Sheila and Margie are doing a program for the Dogs in the Nighttime scion in Anacortes on October 2.

★ Airy reported that the fall issue of The Watsonian—a publication of the JHWS online scion—is due in November. Airy is doing the design work; SOB Elinor Gray is Editor!

Another New Member!!

Joining us in August was Ron Lies of Denver, CO.

Ron sent a query to our Website saying how much he’s been enjoying SOB Charlie Cook’s quizzes in our monthly Twaddles!! Said Ron when we wrote to him, “I live in Denver and belong to my local scion and scions around the country and a few around the world. I so want to join your group...A bound copy of Beaten’s Christmas Annual, Ineffable Twaddle (I love that name) and joining you folks makes a great Christmas present for me. And, I have some papers and items I can offer to your publication if you are interested.”

Of course, we’re interested!

Thanks for joining, Ron!!

Ed Note: Ron is now the first to join using our fully-operational PayPal function!!