

Meeting Notes

September 5, 2020



Reported by Carla Kaessinger Coupe

The Red Circle casts its net wide, and from our speaker to the many attendees, our September online meeting had quite an international flavor. It was also our most well-attended meeting so far, with 138 Sherlockians (or Holmesians, if you prefer) from the world over logging in to hear Nick Utechin. We had visitors from Argentina, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Sweden, and the UK, as well as from all over the US.

Again, Alan Rettig ably produced the meeting to kudos and acclaim. His slide of online meeting best practices is so popular that other societies have asked to use it for their meetings. A tip of the hat and a heartfelt attaboy to Alan for all his hard work.

Still sporting his natty quarantine beard, Peter Blau gave a quick shout-out for Alfio's La Trattoria, our usual meeting place. They are open for takeout, and Peter highly recommends the



spumoni. Then he introduced our speaker Nick Utechin: Sherlockian scholar and author, former editor of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, and a retired BBC radio producer and presenter.

Nick treated the attendees to "British Beginnings," a fascinating history of scholarly British interest in Sherlock Holmes. This began as early as 1902 with "Dear Dr. Watson," Frank Sidgwick's tongue-in-cheek review of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the start of The Grand Game.

He discussed Ronald Knox's 1911 faux-scholarly talks at Oxford and how they inspired other papers and presentations in the same vein. This was encouraged by S.C. Roberts, who played the Grand Game to great effect with his 1928 publication *A Note on the Watson Problem*.

The first Sherlock Holmes Society meeting took place in 1934 and included Dorothy L. Sayers, H.W. Bell, T.S. Blakeney, A.G. MacDonnell, and Frank Morley, among others. These meetings lasted until 1938, when the following note was sent to the regulars: “The Sherlock Holmes Society, like the Red Headed League, is dissolved.

After a decade-long pause for the war and its aftermath, the Sherlock Holmes Society was resurrected in 1951, and will be celebrating its 70th birthday next year. In the same year, the Festival of Britain hosted a detailed reconstruction of the 221B sitting room, viewed by thousands. This reconstruction was eventually housed at the renamed Sherlock Holmes pub.



As Nick showed, the Grand Game began with intimate talks, limited-run publications, and ephemeral societies, growing into a world-wide network of scholarly journals, local and international societies, and most valuable of all, friendships.

After a round of virtual applause and praise, Nick answered questions, including the critical “are you a Holmesian or Sherlockian?” His pithy response was that there are other Holmeses, but no other Sherlocks. And there the matter rests.

Alan then treated us to a 1943 British cinema PSA on ways to save fireplace fuel, starring Holmes and Watson. He then turned the mic back to Peter.

Peter plugged Nick’s book *The Controversy*, which addresses the question: Was Sherlock Holmes at Oxford or Cambridge? If you’re interested in purchasing a copy, [contact Nick](#) for more information. Don’t delay, however. Copies are selling fast!

Red Circle pins are available from [Tom Fahres](#). The pins are \$14.95 (including domestic shipping) for the first one, and \$10 for each additional pin. Contact Tom for international shipping rates.

If you've helped bring the Canon to young people this past year, nominations for the Beacon Society's Susan Z. Diamond Award are open through November 15th. For more information visit the [Beacon Society's webpage](#).

On September 23rd, Netflix will premiere [Enola Holmes](#), a movie based on the novels by Nancy Springer.

Saturday with Sherlock Holmes at the Pratt Library has been going strong for 41 years. This year's virtual event will take place on November 14, starting at 10 am EST. For more information and to register for this free event, [visit the Pratt's website](#).

The January Birthday festivities traditionally held in New York City will be virtual in 2021. You can find out [more information here](#).

Ross Davies reminded us that the BSI's 2021 conference "Sherlock Holmes and the British Empire" will be held on June 25-27, 2021. The conference will be at the Bear Mountain Inn, near West Point, NY. [Check the BSI website](#) for more information.

Wearing both his Six Napoleons and Sherlockians of Baltimore hats, Greg Ruby reported that the next meeting of the Six Napoleons of Baltimore will be on Monday, September 14 at 7 pm. Postulant Carla Coupe will give a talk on the history of Ordnance Survey maps and their use in Canon. [You can register here](#). The next [Sherlockians of Baltimore](#) meeting will be on Saturday, November 21, at 1 pm. Charles Prepolec will talk about Doyle's early works in horror.

Peter returned to urge people to [contact him](#) to share their suggestions for future speakers or to join the Red Circle mailing list.

The diabolical Dana Richards quiz was presented by Dan Stashower in his flawless slow and monotonal quiz-master voice. Despite the quiz's mind-bending questions, both Rob Nunn and Roger Johnson achieved perfect 10s! James O'Leary came next with a 9, and then there was a host of 8s: Catherine Cooke, Susan Dahlinger, Sean Duncan, Paul Leach, Randall Stock, and Lynn Walker. Congratulations to all.

Peter thanked Nick for his wonderful presentation and Alan for his sterling production work. An announcement for the December meeting will be sent out later and depending on the current situation, the meeting may still be virtual.

In the meantime, stay safe and study Sherlock.