

Meeting Notes

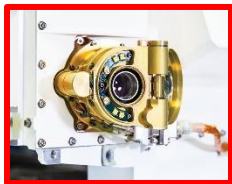
March 13, 2021



Reported by Carla Kaessinger Coupe

Despite the rising incidence of Zoom fatigue, 145 attendees joined The Red Circle's spring 2021 virtual meeting to listen to Catherine Cooke's presentation entitled "Nervous and Terse: Mr. Bradshaw and His Railway Guide."

At the conclusion of our popular half-hour pre-meeting social chat, producer and emcee Alan Rettig opened the meeting with the usual best practices run-down. These useful tips on virtual meeting etiquette are helpful to both newbies and seasoned viewers.



Alan handed the virtual gavel to Peter Blau, who led us in celebrating the history-making arrival of SHERLOC and WATSON on Mars aboard the rover *Perseverance*. These instruments are joined by the 221B Baker Street calibration target, which includes a geocaching message in the "Dancing Men" cipher (spelling out Cache Me If You Can). Peter also provided a heads up for the new Netflix series *The Irregulars*, which begins airing on March 26th, and alerted everyone to the possibility of a Sherlockian reference in the second season of *Lupin*, also on Netflix.



For those of us who have trouble keeping track of virtual and in-person meetings of Sherlockian societies happening around the globe, Peter recommends checking out [Ron Fish's Sherlockian Calendar](#). Thank you, Ron, for your sterling work in collecting all this information!



Sherlockian groups exist all over the world and at this meeting, the Red Circle high-lighted the activities of the Czech Sherlock Holmes Society: Česká společnost Sherlocka Holmese. Society members Aleš Kolodrubec and Markéta Kočí provided a brief history of the society, which began in 2000, as well as information on and photos of their many current and past meetings. You can find out more about their events [at their website](#).

After announcements for the [Sherlockians of Baltimore](#), [the Beacon Society](#), and the BSI's July 29-31, 2022 conference: [Sherlock Holmes and the British Empire](#), Peter presented our speaker, Catherine Cooke.

Catherine is well known to Sherlockians on both sides of the Atlantic (and around the globe) as the manager of the Sherlock Holmes Collection in Marylebone Library. She is a long-time member and officer of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, a Baker Street Irregular (“The Book of Life”), and an Adventuress of Sherlock Holmes (“An Idler of the Empire”). In 2005, Catherine won the Morley-Montgomery Award for her article “Mrs. Hudson: A Legend in Her Own Lodging House.”



Catherine began with a brief biography of George Bradshaw, who became known throughout Great Britain and the Continent in the 19th and early 20th centuries for his ubiquitous railway guide. In 1839, Bradshaw’s first guide was all of eight pages long. With the rapid expansion of the railways throughout the country and the complexity of navigating the various lines, by 1848 the guide was a whopping 946 pages.

In addition to reducing travel times for goods and passengers, the development of Britain’s railway system necessitated the standardization of time across the country. No longer was the rather haphazard method of determining local time sufficient, and by 1848, Greenwich Mean Time was adopted by most railways, although it was not an easy transition.

Bradshaw himself was a socially conscious Quaker and traveled extensively. In 1853, he was visiting Oslo, Norway, when he contracted cholera and died at the comparatively young age of 53. His legacy lived on, however, and Bradshaw’s Guide became indispensable in Great Britain and on the Continent. There were even guides published for India and the Ottoman Empire (present-day Turkey).

In addition to railway timetables, these guides would contain useful information, such as steamboat timetables, taxi fares, local market days, as well as advertisements. Because of the way their data was organized, however, the guides were synonymous with incomprehensibility.

This fact led to the guides being used as generally humorous plot devices in several books and stories written at the time. In Charles Dickens’ “A Narrative of Extraordinary Suffering,” the entire plot hinges on this premise. If you’d like to read this less-familiar work by Dickens, [you can find it here](#).

This was an altogether delightful and informative talk and generated many questions and comments. You can find [the video of the meeting here](#). Alan ran our meeting poll, and we discovered that attendees hailed from all over the US, including Hawaii, as well as from Canada, Sweden, the UK, the Czech Republic, and France.



Dana Richards then challenged all to his fiendish railway quiz. This quiz was not for the faint of heart! The winners were: Susan Dahlinger, with 19 points (out of 20); Roger Johnson, with 18 points; and Marketa Koči and Karen Murdock, tied with 17 points each.

Congratulations to the winners! The Committee on Prizes may, if properly motivated, actually mail out prizes at some point in the near future.

Finally, Peter announced that our next meeting will be on Saturday, June 19th. Peggy Perdue will speak on Sherlock Holmes in Advertising.

After screen waves and chat good-byes, the meeting was adjourned.