



The Solar Pons Gazette

W W W . S O L A R P O N S . C O M



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WHY SOLAR PONS?

BY BOB BYRNE

Why Solar Pons? What is it that attracts us to the 70-plus stories that August Derleth wrote featuring 'The Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street?' Aren't the Pons stories just imitations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous creation? Why read a copy when the original 56 short stories and 4 novels are readily available? And if one tires of the Sherlockian Canon, there are Holmes tales unnumbered written by other authors. Stories featuring Holmes and Watson are plentiful, so why bother with Solar Pons and Doctor Parker?

When deciding upon the style of the Solar Pons stories, Derleth immediately rejected parody, "that ridiculing imitation designed for laughter" and chose instead the less widely practiced form of the pastiche, which he decreed "fond and admiring." This approach laid the foundation for Solar Pons' success.

Thus, Pons is August Derleth's own literary portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes is retired and London has changed when we meet Pons. An example that shows how adeptly

Derleth managed these changes relates to automobiles. Pons uses them, but they are unobtrusive in the stories. The reader does not stop and consciously make the distinction that Pons is riding in a car, rather than in the classic horse-drawn carriage of Holmes' prime. The atmosphere is the same: Similar to Holmes, but different. Variations on a theme.

Holmes was critical of the police: especially Scotland Yard. His general feeling was that they were tenacious, but plodding and
(cont. on page 2)



"Without exception, the Solar Pons stories have been written around titles. None of the stories was ever conceived without the prior challenge of the title." - August Derleth

August Derleth, circa 1933

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Why Solar Pons?

(cont. from page 1)

unimaginative. He uses the term 'imbecile' more than once, and he tells Watson that (official) local assistance is either biased or worthless.

Pons is also frustrated with the official force, but he is usually less harsh than Holmes and generally speaks better of Inspector Jamison than Holmes does of Inspector Lestrade. The razor-sharp personality is blunted a bit. Variations on a theme.

Holmes has no use for the supernatural in his investigations. "This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply," he says. Though all of Pons' recorded cases have conventional solutions (excluding the Derleth collaborations with Mack Reynolds), he is much more open to the possible existence of the supernatural.

Pons says, "Ought we not to say, rather, we believe there are certain phenomena which science as yet has not correctly inter-

preted or explained?" Referring to clairaudience, he tells Parker, "Let us just say it goes against what we know of science at this point of development of man." Pons and Holmes use similar methods of detection, but the former is willing to consider non-scientific possibilities. Variations on a theme.

Of course, some elements of the Pons stories do feature less individuality. In both sets of tales, the doctor (whether Parker or Watson) is an able, dedicated companion, trustworthy in any situation. He is always ready to abandon his practice (and sometimes desert his wife) to assist in an investigation. He attempts to emulate the detective's methods, with poor results. And he is often slighted, if not outright insulted, by his more intelligent flat mate. Derleth gives us Dr. Lyndon Parker, a narrator and assistant we easily identify with Doyle's Dr. John Watson.

The lodgings at 7B Praed Street include the comforts of 221B Baker Street. There is the mantle above the fireplace, the window overlooking the street, the detec-

tive's chemical table, the violin; the reader summons up memories of Baker Street and transposes them onto Praed Street. Landladies Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Hudson are nearly indistinguishable and Pons' army of street urchins, the Praed Street Irregulars, are the contemporary equivalent of Holmes' own Baker Street Irregulars. Derleth gives us a different version of Holmes, but with familiar elements sprinkled throughout. It is the Hollywood approach to movies: the same, only different.

A reading of the Solar Pons tales shows that he is clearly more than a carbon copy of Sherlock Holmes. There is much that we recognize in the Pons stories, but there is also much that is new. Derleth is a wonderful writer who masterfully blends these similarities and differences to create a vibrant character. Solar Pons sates our appetite for Sherlock Holmes by giving us a similar, but different flavor. Variations on a theme.

We *think* we want more Holmes. Why Solar Pons? Because August Derleth gives us what we *really* want: more than Holmes.

GREETINGS FROM PRAED STREET

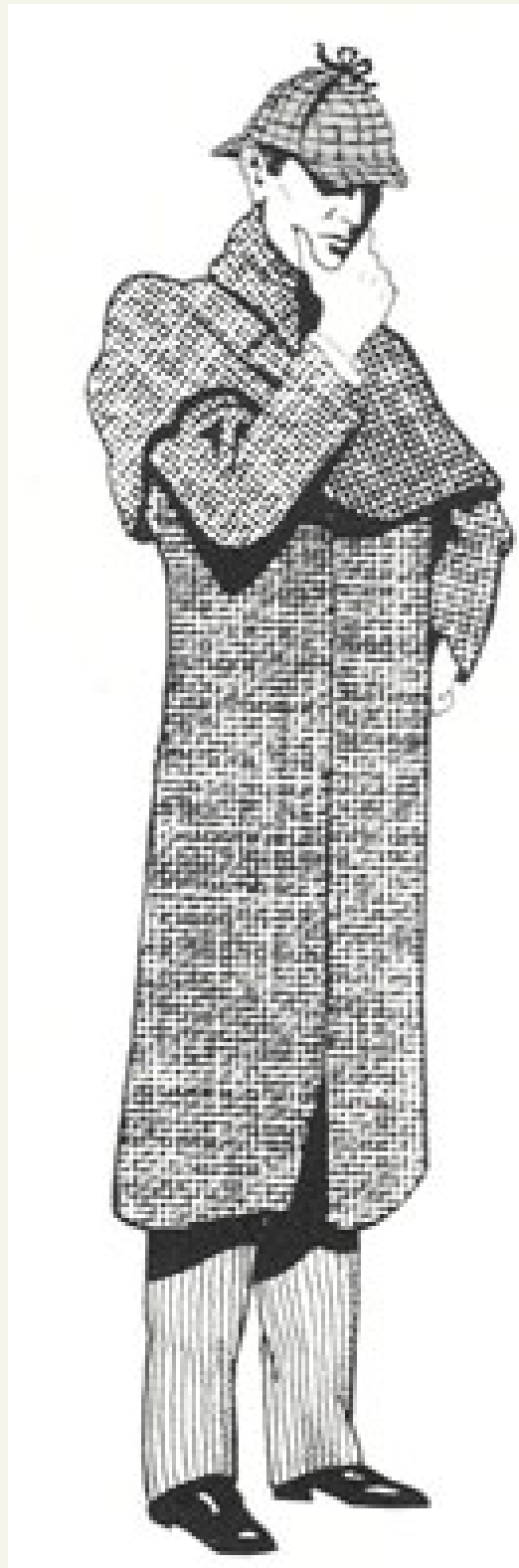
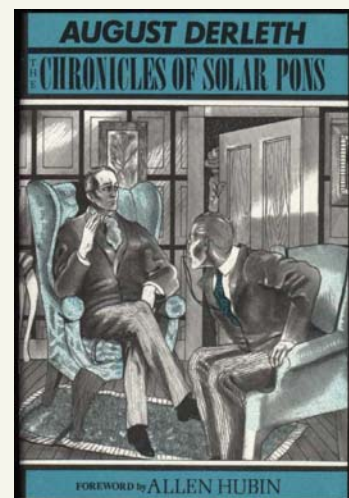
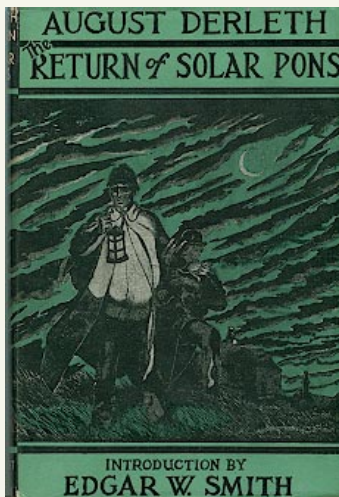
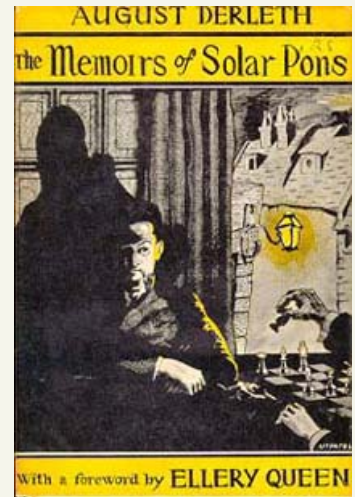
The Pontine Dossier is the official newsletter of the Praed Street Irregulars, the Solar Pons Society founded by Luther Norris in the nineteen sixties. Unfortunately, the last edition of the *Dossier* was published in 1977. *The Solar Pons Gazette*, in conjunction with www.SolarPons.com, has been es-

tablished to pay tribute to the 'Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street.'

Created to fill the vacuum left when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stopped authoring Sherlock Holmes tales, Solar Pons is largely forgotten today but deserves a better fate. *The Solar Pons Gazette* will be published

each summer, with an additional supplement as practicable. Essays, pastiches, illustrations and other contributions related to Solar Pons are welcome.

As Lady Gresham said, "If we can't have the best (Holmes), we'll have to do with second-best (Pons)"

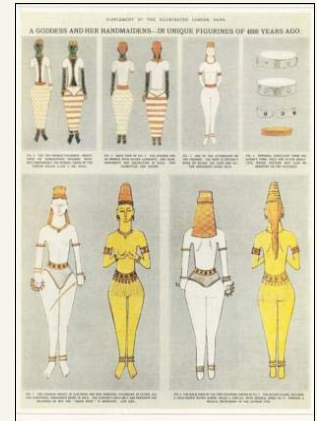


Frank Utpatel

THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE ADVENTURE OF THE GOLDEN BRACELET

BY BOB BYRNE

The Adventure of the Golden Bracelet appears in *The Chronicles of Solar Pons*. The story centers around “a preposterous tale” told by archaeologist Simon Sabata. This story was inspired by real life events referred to as the ‘Dorak Affair.’ Though August Derleth created an original ending and the motive for the case, he drew heavily upon the Dorak Affair, as shown below. **WARNING: SPOILERS FOLLOW**



Golden Bracelet

Simon Sabata is an archaeologist excavating in Turkey

He meets Sara Sirtis on a train

She is wearing a gold bracelet of ancient design

He convinces her to let him go home with her and see the other pieces in the collection

He spends several days there making rubbings and drawings of the entire collection

The items had been illegally dug up from Yortan tombs

He has to wait until three months pass before he is allowed to publish his findings

The Turkish government is upset and says the items were never made public before being stolen

His permit to dig in Turkey is revoked

There is no corroborating evidence at the house where he viewed the treasure

The woman and the treasure are never located again

Many discredit Sabata, believing he stole the artifacts in the first place

Dorak Affair

James Mellaart is an archaeologist excavating in Turkey

He meets Anna Papastrati on a train

She is wearing a gold bracelet of ancient design

He convinces her to let him go home with her and see the other pieces in the collection

He spends several days there making rubbings of the entire collection

The items had been illegally dug up from Yortan tombs

He has to wait until he receives a letter from Anna before he is allowed to publish his findings

The Turkish government is upset and says the items must have been illegally removed from the country

His permit to dig in Turkey is revoked

He cannot find the house where he viewed the treasure

The woman and the treasure are never located again

Many discredit Mellaart, believing he made up the whole affair

Derleth subtly paid tribute to the inspiration for his story. The reader can deduce that the woman who pretended to be Sara Sirtis was actually a rival archaeologist's servant. Her name: Ana.

The Slough Observer

March 17, 1925

AHAB JEPSON FOUND DEAD IN HOME!! BODY WAS HUNG IN ENTRY HALL



Ahab Jepson

By Daniel Kearny, Reporter

Ahab Jepson, son of the late actor, Sir Hesketh Jepson, was found dead at Irving Hall, the estate built by his father in Stoke Poges.

The body was discovered, suspended by a chain wrapped around its neck, by another house guest late last night.

The Observer has confirmed that Detective-Sergeant Peter Cobbett

of the Stoke Poges constabulary is looking into the matter. Constable Cobbett had very little to say to this reporter about matters, leading the *Observer* to suspect that there may be more than meets the eye. It is believed that Jepson may have had more than one house guest, though this cannot yet be confirmed.

Jepson, also an actor, did not quite achieve the same level of fame as Sir Hesketh. Nonetheless, Jepson had made a splash, of sorts, within the theater community. Jepson had filed dozens of suits against other actors who he accused of using gestures and methods of delivery he claimed were copied from his late father. Though Jepson himself was apparently not capable of emulating his father, he believed he held proprietary rights to the man's acting abilities. This engendered a great deal of acrimony from his fellow thespians.

Even though Jepson has so far lost every suit filed related

to his late father's acting characteristics, might not one of the defendants been so bothered by this 'dog in the manger' that he resolved to put an end to Jepson's annoyance, once and for all?

Jepson, who took possession of the family estate upon his father's death, kept largely to himself when he was not in London related to his craft. It is common knowledge that he has had various disputes with local tradesmen; primarily due to his reluctance to pay for goods and services, which he frequently decreed not of high enough quality to merit renu-

meration.

Jepson's most recent enterprise was a production of *Jane Annie*. The original script by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and J.M. Barrie was extensively rewritten by Jepson. It fared no better than the original.

UPDATE: This reporter has confirmed that Solar Pons, the famous London private detective arrived at Irving Hall a short time ago. While this indicates deep waters around Jepson's death, the matter can certainly be sorted out by the local constabulary and there is no need for amateur detectives from London to come here to practice their skills. Perhaps Scotland Yard could not be troubled to bother with a provincial case and sent down a substitute. Regardless, *The Observer* is confident that Constable Cobbett will get to the bottom of things quickly.



Irving, where corpse was found

The following excellent essay first appeared in *The Lost Club Journal* and is available on-line at <http://freepages.pavilion.net/users/tartarus/lost.html>.

Roger Johnson founded the Solar Pons Society of London in 1970.

A STUDY IN SOLAR: THE SHERLOCK HOLMES OF PRAED STREET

BY ROGER JOHNSON

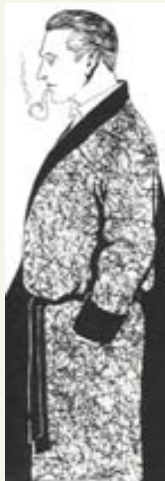
The affair of the Three Red Dwarfs, as it is chronicled in my notebooks, stands among those cases most typical of Solar Pons's method, and ranks, in the brevity of its problem and the almost pedestrian acuteness of Pons's observation, with the adventure of the Black Narcissus, which it followed. It was one of those cases marked by unusual features which Inspector Jamison of Scotland Yard habitually brought to the attention of 'the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street', as the papers were even then beginning to call Pons.

- August Derleth: 'The Adventure of the Three Red Dwarfs'

Most fictional sleuths owe something to Sherlock Holmes; Solar Pons owes everything to Sherlock Holmes. August Derleth deliberately modelled his stories on the writings of Arthur Conan Doyle, and Solar Pons deliberately modelled his career on that of Sherlock Holmes. What's more, they continued together through seventy-five stories and two short novels.

A witty commentator observed that Sherlock Holmes was a man of the 19th century looking forward to the 20th, while Solar Pons is a man of the 20th century looking back to the 19th. Pons does not scorn the latest developments in forensic science, but essentially his livelihood depends on his own imagination and experience, his knowledge, his powers of observation and deduction. Fortunately he has them all, in spades. And titles such as 'The Adventure of the Haunted Library', 'The Adventure of the Missing Huntsman' and 'The Adventure of the Spurious *Tamerlane*' testify to his success.

In 1928, while he was a first-year student at the University of Wisconsin, August Derleth wrote to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle saying that if there were to be no more Holmes stories he, Derleth, intended to try his hand at something similar. He would not write about Sherlock Holmes, of course, as he had no right to do so. 'Who was I,' he later observed, 'to put upon paper new adventures of the illustrious Sherlock Holmes, of whom my maternal grandmother had always spoken as "the greatest detective who ever lived", since she, like so many other readers of the canon, was firmly convinced that Sherlock Holmes lived, not in that sense of the continuing life given him by the Baker Street Irregulars, but as an actual man of flesh and blood, who might be appealed to in cases of dire necessity.'



Frank Utpatel

Derleth continued: 'The form the stories must take was patent. Not that ridiculing imitation designed for laughter, the parody, but that fond and admiring one less widely-known as the pastiche. I needed first a name, syllabically similar to that of Sherlock Holmes. So Solar Pons was born because I thought of Solar in its suggestion of light, and Pons as the bridge – "bridge of light" seemed to the adolescent mind singularly brilliant, which, of course, it was not.'

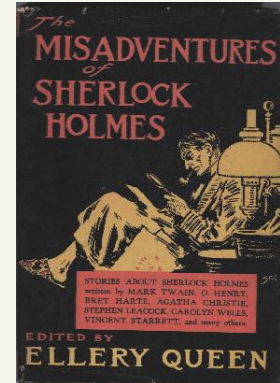
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A Study in Solar

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The only conceivable setting for Pons and his amanuensis Dr Parker was London, England, though it was a city that the young author knew only from books; and John Rhode's novel *The Murders in Praed Street* suggested an address just a stone's throw from Baker Street. The first story, 'The Adventure of the Black Narcissus', captured the essence of its original well enough to be snapped up by *Dragnet* magazine, and others followed in quick succession – 'The Adventure of the Missing Tenants', 'The Adventure of the Broken Chessman', 'The Adventure of the Late Mr Faversham'. But the Great Depression killed off many of the so-called pulp magazines, and it nearly killed Solar Pons.

Then in 1944 the inclusion of 'The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle' in Ellery Queen's legendary anthology *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes* revived the detective's fortunes. His creator, who had experience in publishing with the well-respected Arkham House, established another small company, Mycroft & Moran, to issue limited editions of quality crime and detective fiction. The first book under the new imprint, in an edition of three thousand, was *In Re: Sherlock Holmes – The Adventures of Solar Pons*. It featured an enthusiastic introduction by the great Sherlockian scholar Vincent Starrett, and it was dedicated to the Baker Street Irregulars. The game once more was afoot.



When I look over my notes concerning the various adventures of my companion, Solar Pons, in the closing years of the 1920s, I am hard put to it to make a choice from a roster which includes the diabolical affair of the Devil's Footprints, the curious puzzle of the hats of M. Henri Dulac, the French consul, and the singular affair of the Little Hangman, but I doubt that there was another in those years which began as dramatically as the strange adventure of John Paul Renfield, clerk of Counsellors Extraordinary, Ltd.

- August Derleth: 'The Adventure of the Lost Dutchman'

Before his death some thirty-five years later, August Derleth found time among his other work to write and publish four more volumes of Pons stories: the *Memoirs* (introduced by Ellery Queen), *Return* (Edgar W. Smith), *Reminiscences* (Anthony Boucher) and *Casebook* (Vincent Starrett again). All the titles faithfully echo the Holmesian originals. There were also a short novel, *Mr Fairlie's Final Journey*, and two novellas, 'The Adventure of the Orient Express' and 'The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians'. And there was *A Praed Street Dossier*, which contains a good deal of interesting background information and some shorter exploits of the redoubtable Pons. *The Chronicles of Solar Pons* appeared posthumously in 1973, with a nostalgic introduction by Allen Hubin. And that was that. There was no falling-off in quality; the later stories are, if anything, better than the early ones, because Derleth's writing matured and improved as he aged, and because he cared about Pons and Parker. Even though his regional novels were and are regarded as his finest contribution to letters, you would not have heard him complaining, as Conan Doyle did of Holmes, that Solar Pons 'took his mind from better things'.

Pons himself, of course, is based wholeheartedly upon Sherlock Holmes, but, as Vincent Starrett pointedly remarked, 'Solar Pons is not a caricature of Sherlock Holmes. He is, rather, a clever impersonator, with a twinkle in his eye, which tells us that he knows he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that we know it, but that he

(cont. on page 8)

A Study in Solar

(cont from page 7)

hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolizes.' It is apparent that he began his career under the tutelage of Holmes (it has been suggested that he was Billy the page-boy at 221B Baker Street, which is a nice thought), but his style and tastes, though they may imitate his mentor's – the tobacco in the Persian slipper, the correspondence fixed by a dagger to the mantelshelf – are really his own. Pons keeps a violin, but his playing is painfully bad; his delight in disguise reaches the rarefied heights of the purely theatrical; his interests extend much further into the occult than Holmes's.

My friend, Solar Pons, the private enquiry agent, has a tendency to be highly dubious of all coincidence – but was it only coincidence that he should refer to the singular adventure of the late Abraham Weddigan on the very day that I had determined to set down the facts about this horrible affair which shocked a continent and, on its successful termination, brought Pons the profound gratitude of millions of people as well as the personal felicitations of His Majesty?

- August Derleth and Mack Reynolds: 'The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus'

Several writers (but not Conan Doyle) have pitted Sherlock Holmes against the supernatural, despite Holmes's very definite dismissal of such things: 'The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply.' But Solar Pons actually does encounter ghosts, clairvoyants, vampires – even extra-terrestrials: phenomena that would not be out of place in *The X-Files*. And his 'trifling monographs' include *An Examination of the Cthulhu Cult and Others*. His methods, however, remain frankly imitative of his master's – and so do his exploits. How could it be otherwise?

There are other parallels with Sherlock Holmes, of course. Cases of espionage and international diplomacy are plentiful in Pons's career, and several of them involve the participation of his elder brother, the portly, dignified and shrewd Bancroft Pons, a senior official at the Foreign Office.

'That unbelievable conspiracy,' Solar Pons was accustomed to call the affair of the Black Cardinal, which began for me early in January of a year which must remain nameless.

- August Derleth: 'The Adventure of the Black Cardinal'

Some of the stories actually derive from single adventures in the Holmes canon: 'The Adventure of the Crouching Dog' necessarily recalls *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and 'The Adventure of the China Cottage' has something of 'The Devil's Foot' about it. Several offer most satisfactory parallels to those untold adventures about which Dr Watson dropped such tantalizing hints: 'The Adventure of the Red Leech', 'The Adventure of the Remarkable Worm', 'The Adventure of the Trained Cormorant' and my own favourite, 'The Adventure of Ricoletti of the Club Foot', which weaves a tale of heroism and tragedy around the club-footed man and his truly abominable wife. 'The Adventure of the Lost Locomotive' effectively re-stages that tantalizing almost-Holmes story 'The Lost Special'.

'Now and then, too,' said August Derleth, 'real life has afforded me an adventure for the series. Any reader interested enough to look into *Bernard Spilsbury: His Life and Cases* by Douglas G. Browne and E. V. Tullett will discover the source of "The Adventure of the Cloverdale Kennels" . . . and the source of "The Adventure of the

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A Study in Solar (cont from page 8)

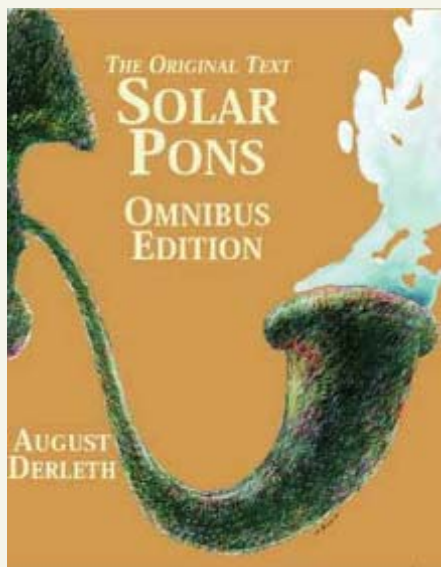
Triple Kent." (Sir Bernard Spilsbury was perhaps the greatest criminal pathologist in British history. Derleth added:

'It is not a coincidence that the name Spilsbury occurs now and then in the pastiches.')

After August Derleth's death the published stories were edited by Basil Copper, who rather controversially corrected many errors and adjusted many Americanisms, into a handsome two-volume omnibus edition. After some debate, the two fantastic collaborations with Mack Reynolds, 'The Adventure of the Snitch in Time' and 'The Adventure of the Ball of Nostradamus', were included. Copper was also authorized to create more exploits for Pons, in a rare and possibly unique case of an imitation imitated. His preferred length is notably longer than that of the originals, but the style, flavour and atmosphere are exactly right, while the protagonists are unmistakably the authentic Solar Pons and Dr Parker.

Then a few years ago a number of Derleth's unpublished manuscripts were discovered in a sort of Pontine equivalent of Dr Watson's famous tin dispatch box, and were deposited with the August Derleth Society. In 1995, with the permission of the author's estate, George Vanderburgh published them, incomplete as they were, as *The Unpublished Solar Pons*. And that, we thought, really was that.

However – the following year, April Derleth handed Peter Ruber two large boxes of her father's papers, suggesting that he might edit them for publication. Among much other material the boxes contained the original, complete manuscripts of the stories that had recently come to light, plus one more short story and a short novel. All these are early work, lacking the sophistication of Derleth's mature writing, but clever, vigorous and fast-moving. Ruber notes that the novel, which he entitled *The Terror over London*, 'shows the definite influence of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu mysteries, in terms of excitement and intrigue'. (The shadow of the Devil Doctor was to be observable throughout the career of Solar Pons, noticeably in the adventures of the Camberwell Beauty, the Praed Street Irregulars and the Seven Sisters.) Finally, there were two more 'off-trail' collaborations with Mack Reynolds.



George Vanderburgh arranged with Arkham House to revive Mycroft & Moran, and under that imprint he published *The Final Adventures of Solar Pons*. And even that isn't the last, since he and Peter Ruber have recently published *The Original Text Solar Pons Omnibus*, a large, handsome and very expensive limited edition that discards Basil Copper's editorial adjustments. And meanwhile, Copper himself is still writing new tales of 'the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street'.

Solar Pons is a product of the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction, a contemporary of Hercule Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion, Gideon Fell and the Saint. He is worthy of their company.

FEATURED CASE

(W W W . S O L A R P O N S . C O M)

The Adventure of the Black Narcissus- BlkN*The Dragnet*, February, 1929*In Re: Sherlock Holmes, The Adventures of Solar Pons*Date - Early May, 1928Quotes

- Pons: *I put it to you, Jamison, that the significance of the black narcissus cannot any longer be avoided. I earnestly suggest that you concern yourself with discovering the meaning of the flower.*
- *I had little business, for my practice had not at that time taken on much significance.*
(Parker's narration)
- Pons: *Ah, well, a difference of opinion adds zest, eh, Jamison?*

The Case

James T. Rudderford bursts into 7B Praed Street, wanted by the police for murder. He has been financially ruined by the failure of the Claybar Mine. He tells Pons that his investment was a result of speculation prompted by Jackson Deming and he had rushed to Deming's office, intent on revenge. However, he found the man dead, a knife in his back and a rare black narcissus by his head. Rudderford was seen by the charwoman as he fled the scene and Inspector Jamison believes that it is an open and shut case.

Comments

The Adventure of the Black Narcissus holds the pre-eminent spot in the Pontine Canon, for it gave birth to Solar Pons. Having been told by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that there would be no more Holmes tales, and also denied permission to write more himself, Derleth made a note on a random day in his calendar; "In re: Sherlock Holmes." When that day arrived, he sat down and in one after-

*Frank Utpatel*

noon and evening, wrote *The Black Narcissus*. Derleth sold the story to *The Dragnet* magazine for \$40, and it was published in February of 1929.

James T. Rudderford rushes into Pons' room, lamenting that he is wanted for murder, though he insists that he is innocent. Readers of the Sherlockian Canon certainly must have recognized the similarities to John Hector McFarlane's visit to Baker Street in the opening of *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*.

Pons is wearing a smoking jacket at the story's beginning and then trades it for a light coat and a waterproof when he goes out. Dr. Parker specifically points out that Pons dons an Inverness when leaving Praed St. in nearly all subsequent cases mentioning his outer wear.

The first comment Pons makes regarding the official constabulary is "Jamison is thorough." This sets a tone for the Pontine Canon in which Solar Pons generally has a positive attitude towards the police.

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Featured Case

(cont from page 10)

Contrast that with the first two sentences Sherlock Holmes makes about the police: "Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders. He and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot." Pons has a much less adversarial relationship with the police while on a case.

It is interesting to note that the police frequently seem to comply with Pons' requests as if they were orders. He tells Jamison "Furthermore, you can oblige me by coming around when your notice is answered." The Inspector says that he will. The Pontine Canon is replete with unquestioning obedience by the police, indicating that Pons engenders much less resentment than Holmes did.

Expanding upon the previous point, Pons established his private practice in 1907. Sir Edward Henry and Sir William Horwood were Commissioners at Scotland Yard for the first 21 years of Pons' practice (discounting his World War I service as a code breaker). Bancroft Pons was 34 years old and presumably a man of at least modest import within the government when his younger brother started his detecting career. Did Bancroft use his position to somehow influence upper-level Scotland Yarders to be receptive to Pons' investigations and order cooperation where possible?

Pons explains to Jamison that the lack of specific footprints in Deming's inner office establishes Rudderford's innocence. Footprints would play a key role in several of Pons' cases.



"I sat down in one afternoon and evening and wrote 'The Adventure of the Black Narcissus'...which is precisely the kind of tale an amateur of nineteen would be likely to conjure up."

- August Derleth



MORE FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - I



3 January, 1921

Mother Nature had laid siege to London, her icy gales and driving snow forcing all but the most hardy indoors. I returned from an abysmal afternoon of making my rounds to find Pons comfortably ensconced on the floor in front of a roaring fire, his scrapbooks of crime spread all around him.

"Ah, Parker, welcome back to the warmth of our hearth. It is certainly a particularly unpleasant day outside. Mrs. Bartlett has not yet recovered from her bout of pneumonia, I see."

"I'm sure that you deduced that from the way I carried my medical bag or some such, Pons," I said, shrugging out of my voluminous overcoat and hanging my thick scarf up to dry. But I am cold, hungry and tired. I have no interest in parlor tricks."

Pons made some minor reply, which did not register. Finally, some fifteen minutes later, I was seated near the fire, a hot toddy in my hand and dry clothes upon my body. Feeling rather more companionable, I asked what entry had so absorbed Pons.

"Your temperament improves with your surroundings, Parker."

I snorted in response. "What strange crime from the past are you reading about now?"

"The affair of a Miss Emily Dimmock holds my attention this blustery evening."

"Dimmock." I racked my brain. "I don't recall that name."

"Not yet fourteen years gone by and the victim is already forgotten." He smiled wryly. "Would it help if I added that The Great Defender's representation of the accused gave a much needed boost to his career?"

"Sir Edward Marshall!" I exclaimed. "The Camden Town Murder. Were you involved in the case?"

"I had only just started my practice a short time before Miss Dimmock met her unhappy end. But as an aspiring private enquiry agent, I followed the case closely and was present most days at the trial. Sir Edward, who had suffered a series of unfortunate reverses, was desperate to improve his fortunes. He brought a fire and passion to the defense of the dubious Mr. Robert Wood."

"Robert Wood was certainly less dubious than Miss Dimmock, a known prostitute!" I replied, somewhat warmed under the collar.

"Staunch moralist to the last, Parker." Pons was smiling slightly. "Do prostitutes not provide a valuable service? Would not many men who buy their wares, treating them poorly in the doing, act out against their wives or girlfriends if they had no other outlet?"

"Really, Pons, you go too far. You are intentionally goading me now."

"Always acknowledge the possibility, right or wrong, of a differing viewpoint, doctor. I have found that premise to be of inestimable value. Scotland Yard would do well to adhere to it even occasionally."

"Are you saying..." I was forestalled by Pons holding up both hands as if in supplication.

"Enough Parker, enough. We shall agree that Miss Dimmock was a young lady found with her throat slashed and Robert Wood was charged with her murder. Acceptable?"

(cont. on page 13)



**MORE FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - I**
(CONT.)



(cont. from page 12)

Still somewhat ruffled, I could not deny the truth of his statement. "Very well, Pons. Did the case present any of those elements that intrigue you so?"

"The investigation focused on postcards. The murdered woman had a book of them, which was found in the room, several cards apparently ripped out carelessly and missing. The police believed that the killer took them, along with a few other items, such as a gold watch and a silver lighter. There was found another postcard that implied Miss Dimmock was to meet someone named 'Alice' at a local bar at 8:15 the evening she was murdered."

"The police believed that a woman killed her? I find that difficult to imagine."

Pons looked thoughtfully at his pipe on the table at his side but did not reach for it. "Do not underestimate the capability of a woman, Parker. And as a medical man, you know that it takes no great strength to slit a throat."

"But the official investigation was not limited to female suspects. Regardless, a client of Miss Dimmock's, Robert Wood, was arrested, tried and found not guilty. The police never came any closer to solving the matter."

I knew Pons too well to leave the unsaid question hanging between us. "You had a suspect?"

"I believe that the emphasis on the postcards was misplaced. Miss Dimmock lived with a man named Bert Shaw. The authorities were sanguine concerning his alibi. To this day, I remain unconvinced. Further investigation of his travels on the day in question may well have yielded important evidence."

"Surely you informed the police, Pons."

Pons laughed at this. "You think of me with my current stature, Parker. Then I was an unknown beginner with no accomplishments to my name. My opinions were neither solicited nor welcomed. The 'Camden Town Murder' is just one of many unsolved killings taking place in the seedier environs of London."

22 January, 1921

A Vicar Wellston stopped in this afternoon. He was quite discomfited and most disappointed when I informed him that Pons was engaged on a case and would not be available for at least another day. I was unable to put him at ease and he left quickly, mumbling that he would return when "Mister Pons could be consulted." I wonder what could be the matter.

23 January, 1921

I returned from my rounds to find that Solar Pons had returned to Praed St. He informed me that matters had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion regarding the Birmingham candle factory.

"The affair was not without elements of interest, but the night manager was a rather unimaginative fellow. When I found wax drippings on the underside of a crate, it was plain that he was the guilty party."

I mentioned that Vicar Wellston had visited, but Pons was uninterested. "Likely someone dipping into the offerings or some such. We shall see if he returns. It may well have been a momentary panic and he has rethought the idea of bringing someone with my modest fame into the matter."

24 January, 1921

Lying on the table next to Pons' chair I noticed a discarded telegram from an Inspector Bradley of the New York City Police Department. "A case in America that requires your attention, Pons?" I asked, nodding towards the telegram,

(cont. on page 14)



**MORE FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF
DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - I**
(CONT.)



(cont. from page 13)

Pons sighed quietly and did not even spare a glance for the telegram. "A recurring request. Joseph Elwell, a man about town in New York City, was found dead in his house one morning last year. The case remains unsolved. I have corresponded with young Inspector Bradley more than once in the past and he frequently asks for my assistance."

"And yet you rebuff his efforts. Is the case lacking in those singular characteristics you seek?"

"The affair is not without interesting elements. The killer was certainly a male, and likely someone either unknown to him or someone he knew as well as a brother."

"Really Pons," I snorted. "Those are completely opposed categories. I could make such an outlandish guess myself."

My friend bristled at the last. "I never guess, Parker." His tone softened, the momentary annoyance passing. "I have learned much from Bradley, as well as from some newspaper accounts which he was kind enough to send me."

"And what has allowed you to determine that the killer was not a woman?"

"Elwell, an expert at bridge by the way, was quite the ladies' man. He was commonly sighted in public, well groomed and dressed, always escorting an attractive female. He kept up appearances by wearing an impeccably polished set of false teeth and a wig. In fact, Bradley informed me that Elwell had over forty wigs in his house."

Pons leaned forward conspiratorially. "And yet, when he was found by his housekeeper, shot at close range in the forehead, he was wearing neither wig nor false teeth. I submit that Elwell would never ap-

pear in such a state before a female, nor any but the closest male acquaintance."

I could not deny the logic. "You have shared this with Bradley?"

"Of course. I have suggested several avenues of inquiry."

"Then why do you not travel to New York and solve the case, Pons?"

He stood, moved over to his chemical table and began rearranging his retorts and implements. "I have no interest in abandoning London for an American trip to solve the murder of a philandering toff. The fates of nations do not hang on finding Elwell's killer. I am not a member of the force and required to investigate all infractions which fall before me. Inspector Bradley will continue to look into the matter and I shall assist him as events warrant."

Pons' response was sensible, but I wondered if there was more behind the matter. I also wondered if Inspector Bradley would ever solve the case, the trail of which certainly grew colder each day.

27 January, 1921

Vicar Wellston visited our lodgings again today and talked with Solar Pons. I returned home just as the good man was leaving, looking a bit more relieved than when I had seen him a few days previously.

"What is ailing the vicar?"

"It appears to be a most simple matter, Parker," replied Pons. "Someone has been taking the vicar's vestments and returning them, albeit in a different place. The poor man is at his wit's end and he says his nervous state is beginning to impair his duties."

(cont. on page 15)



MORE FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF DOCTOR LYNDON PARKER - I (CONT.)



(cont. from page 14)

"Sounds like some child's prank to me"

"The waters run deeper than that, doctor. However, I do not expect that I shall need to impose upon your routine. Affairs should be resolved within a fortnight. But what say you to dining out this evening? I fancy the taste of fish."

2 February, 1921

"You may be interested to know that I have disposed of Vicar Wellston's little problem."

"Really? Was it the shenanigans of youth?"

"What? No. The vicar's housekeeper, a woman named Laidlaw, has been with him for years. Since she had ample opportunity, I searched for a motive. It was obvious to everyone but the vicar himself that she is in love with the man. Miss Laidlaw had been removing his clothes, then 'finding' them in some plausible location somewhere else in the house. When I confronted her, she admitted that she was doing this to increase his reliance upon her."

"What did he say when you told him?"

A sparkle lit Pons' eyes. "I didn't. I have her word that she will not resort to such methods again. Surely you yourself noticed that the vicar is a bit absent-minded. I fear his daily routine would be much disrupted without Miss Laidlaw there to keep order. The silly woman let her insecurities overwhelm her com-

"I have never failed to read a Solar Pons adventure with satisfaction and pleasure."

- Vincent Starrett

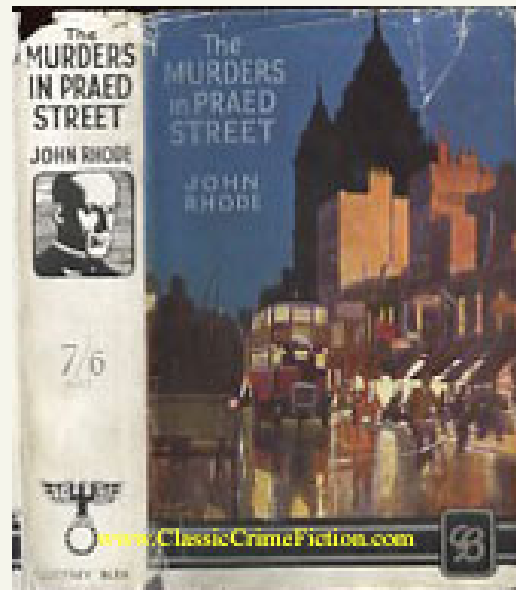
mon sense, but I don't imagine it shall happen again."

"That's awfully decent of you, Pons," I responded. Apparently there was a trace of amusement in my tone of voice, which caused Pons to bristle.

"Don't be ridiculous, Parker. This case is an example of the importance of looking for a connection between motive and opportunity during an investigation. Any number of people could have been taking the vicar's vestments. But with no apparent financial gain from such an act, the list of possible suspects can be narrowed. Many with opportunity, but few with motive."

"I recall you telling me once that money and love are the two most common motives for murder."

Pons clapped his hands together and smiled. "Capital, Parker. You remember correctly. Those two factors are often at the root of the cases we investigate."



John Rhode's book provided the inspiration for August Derleth's selection of Praed Street as the home for Solar Pons & Dr. Parker.

FROM THE PONTINE DOSSIER

OFT HAVE I TRAVELED

by Philip Jose Farmer

There are many worlds in which I have roamed for a long time. Other worlds have opened their doors to admit me only briefly. Some I have put behind me forever. Some I re-enter now and then to breathe an almost forgotten air and see a sun with a unique light. The world of Solar Pons and of Parker is a world in which I dwelt briefly but passionately.

'The game is afoot!' cries Pons, and into the London fogs plunge the two divers after pearls of mystery and murder. And I plunge with them, the unseen and shadowy third. I watch them; I listen to them; I rejoice when they find the pearl of light and the seas around are momentarily illuminated.

As we know, these two are derivative and perhaps are pale shadows of the two great originals. But they burn with a flame of their own, tiny but bright enough and intense enough so that I wish August Derleth could find the desire and time to present more.



Philip Jose Farmer is a Hugo and Nebula award-winning science fiction author.

Many more. I believe that others-many others-share this wish to read of the further adventures of the peregrine of Praed Street.

Indeed, Mr. Derleth may, in presenting these pastiches of Sherlock Holmes, have unwittingly become a pastiche of A. Conan Doyle. Doyle came to regret having visited Baker Street, because he had written much better books, more literarily worthy novels, such as *The White Company*, for instance. Yet his noncanonical works are far less appreciated, and, to the public, Doyle means Holmes, not Sir Nigel Loring or even Professor Challenger.

In the same way, Mr. Derleth may be remembered for his association with Praed Street despite having written many other novels. And he has written superb poetry which should, rightfully, survive and be much more widely known than it is.

The result of the love for the creations of another man is an ironic quirk, indeed. But enough of these speculations about literary values and literary longevity. The fog closes in like a grey fist, and the clip clop of hooves resounds in the murky swirlings. The only light in the fog is Solar; 'may its brightness be august, and may it long bridge the gap between the reality of Praed Street and the fantasy of this our mundane world.'

This article appeared in the April, 1969 issue (Volume 2, Number 2) of *The Pontine Dossier*.

DISCOVERY AT PRAED STREET

By Bob Byrne

Praed Street may be well known to fans of Solar Pons, but it also is the site of one of the most important events in medical history. It was there in 1928, at St. Mary's Hospital, that Alexander Fleming isolated what he named 'penicillin.'

Though much research and experimentation was required before a stable version was produced, Fleming can be regarded as the father of anti-biotics. Fleming was knighted in 1944 and was one of three winners of the Nobel Prize in 1945. When he died in 1955 he was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral and recognized for helping to save millions of lives through his discovery.

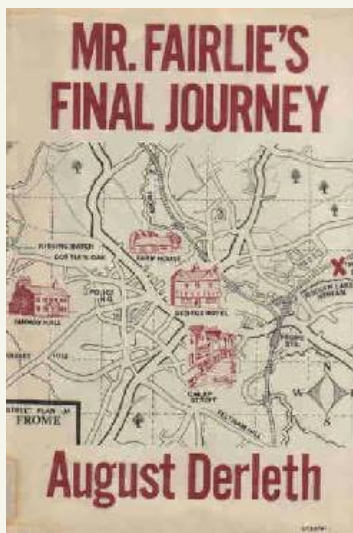


NOT A NOVEL CHARACTER BY BOB BYRNE

In 1968, *Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey*, the first full length Solar Pons novel, was published. Well, not exactly: this was August Derleth's second novel featuring Pons.

In 1930, Derleth had written a full-length adventure, but chose never to release it. Peter Ruber discovered it amongst some of Derleth's papers after the author's death and it was issued in 1998 as *The Terror Over London*.

Basil Copper included one novel among his Pons pastiches, *Solar Pons and the Devil's Claw* (written in the early nineteen seventies but not published until 2004). With only three novels but over ninety short stories featuring the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street, the full length tale was not the form of choice for Derleth or Copper.



Solar Pons by Mia Byrne

WHAT WAS BANCROFT DOING IN FRANCE? BY BOB BYRNE

Parker relates a dinner table conversation during *The Adventure of the Missing Huntsman*. General Hugh Pomfroy had known "some fellow named Pons...somewhere in France" during World War I. Solar Pons eventually convinces the man that he is referring to his brother, Bancroft, though the General can't believe it was a Foreign Office man.

Here are three possibilities for Bancroft Pons' French sojourn:

- 1) He was not in the Foreign Office at the time. But if not, then what was his job? Did he leave the Foreign Office when he enlisted, then return to his old job after the war?
- 2) Bancroft was in the Foreign Office at the time and Pomfroy's memory on the matter is faulty.
- 3) Bancroft was in the Foreign Office but did not reveal the fact. Was he working under cover?

The matter is only identified here. Could not some erudite Ponsian scholar research this matter and contribute to a future newsletter?

**FOREWORD:
IN RE: SHERLOCK HOLMES
VINCENT STARRETT (1945)**

AS A BOY, August Derleth couldn't get enough Sherlock Holmes stories; there were not enough of them in the world to satisfy his craving for the society of the fascinating disentangler of Upper Baker Street. When he had read them all, many times over, and being then nineteen years of age, he wrote to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle setting forth his reasonable complaint. Are you, or are you not, he courteously asked the great storyteller, going to write any more stories about Sherlock Holmes?



Sir Arthur made no promises in his good-humored reply; so there and then young Mr. Derleth determined to carry on the tradition himself. A desk calendar stood at his elbow; he stabbed a finger into its pages at random and scribbled a note to himself: "In re-Sherlock Holmes." On that day, when it should have arrived, he told himself, he would write a story in imitation of the Master.

The precise date of this impatient episode is lost to literary chronicle with the memorandum; but Derleth was attending the University of Wisconsin at the time, and when the day came he did actually sit down and write *The Adventure of the Black Narcissus*, which you find in this book. I don't know how he hit on the name Solar Pons – probably he considered a lot of names before he found one that pleased him. The story was sold immediately, however, to Harold Hersey, and published in *The Dragnet* magazine, a development that inspired the youthful author to new feats of imitation. There followed in rapid succession the

adventures of *The Missing Tenants*, *The Broken Chessman*, *The Late Mr. Faversham*, *The Limping Man* and *The Black Cardinal*. On one red-letter day, a day of guilt and glory, the young man dashed off three Solar Pons adventures at a sitting and two of them survive in this collection, *The Norcross Riddle* and *The Three Red Dwarfs*.

That is the true story of the birth of Solar Pons; he was – as it were – an ectoplasmic emanation of his great prototype, and his adventures are pure pastiche. As such we acknowledge them gratefully. By we, I mean those frantic and incurable Sherlockians who, with August Derleth, deplore the paucity of Canonical entertainments and view without alarm the mounting uproar of our hero's triumph, which already had called forth so garrulous a stream of apocryphal recollections. It is impossible not to wonder about those many untold tales half-promised by the exasperating Watson; and it is the obvious duty of writers with information concerning them, or with other adventures to relate, to give them to the world. No doubt we should rather have more of the great originals, but we accept the imitations, *faute de mieux*, to satisfy a normal appetite. And we accept them with enthusiasm. They are the work of affectionate minds and hands. There is no intention to deceive. These stories, and others in their field, are intended only to please. They are nostalgic reminders of vanished days and nights in Baker Street.

The scheme of Derleth's "sequels" is more than just a little reminiscent; it is frankly borrowed. Dr. Lyndon Parker returns to London just in time for this book to become possible. Solar Pons, the

(cont on page 19)



Foreword: In Re: Sherlock Holmes

(cont from page 18)

"Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street," is even then looking about him for some amiable fellow to act as his Watson; he loses no time in persuading the doctor to share the Pontine lodgings. Their meting is right out of *A Study in Scarlet*:

"Fine color," says Pons crisply, coming to a stand beside the doctor's restaurant table. "Not long back from Africa, I see."

"Two days."

"Your scarab pin suggests Egypt, and, if I am not mistaken, the envelope on which you have been writing is one of Shepherd's."

He is not mistaken, you may be sure; and almost immediately the game is afoot. One comes upon the rest of the cast, from time to time, without surprise. Mrs. Johnson is their estimable and "long-suffering" landlady, and Baron Ennesfred Kroll, that "arch-criminal" whose hand Pons does not fail to recognize in several adventures, makes an admirable Professor Moriarty. The "Baker Street Irregulars" too, are in at least one of the tales (not the Morleian conversation club, but the original gamins), and so is the collection of scrapbooks, whose indexing still goes forward. One is happily moved by some of the reminiscent story-openings; for example, this one:

"When I look over my notes on the cases that engaged Solar Pons' attention during the decade begun in 1919, I find many amazing adventures whose details ought to be placed before the public."

And there is some of Watson's effective and annoying trick of mentioning "other cases" unrecorded in the volume at hand. These include "the perplexing affair of the Mumbles, known to the public for many months as the Swansea Mystery," and "that unbelievable conspiracy which threatened to undermine the Papacy and overthrow half the governments of Europe."

Perhaps Derleth intends to tell us more about these



little matters some other time – although that "unbelievable conspiracy" sounds a bit like what the war correspondents have been telling us for a number of months.

One likes the author's trick of using the exact words and phrases of the original saga, when it suits his purpose, and

greeted with a smile of pleasure such familiar lines as:

"Dark waters, Parker, dark waters!"

"Come Parker! The game is afoot."

"'Elementary,' I said." (A nice touch, that, to hand the familiar word to Parker.)

As to the stories Derleth has imagined, some are better than others, which was true also, I seem to recall, of the stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. My own favorite is *The Adventure of The Late Mr. Faversham*, largely, I think, because it is a satisfying telling of one of the tales Watson once promised to tell and never told. I had often wondered profoundly about the incredible mystery of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never seen in this world," one of Watson's most provocative hints. Ellery Queen had a go at this problem too, as readers of *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes* are aware; so now we have two versions of the incident, and I hope everybody is happy. The "deduction" involved in this episode in the career of Mr. Solar Pons seems to me in best tradition; but, indeed, there is a lot of quite plausible deduction in all these tales.

Note particularly that in the first part of *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle*.

Although these stories by August Derleth are frankly and seriously intentioned pastiches, I wonder if I am

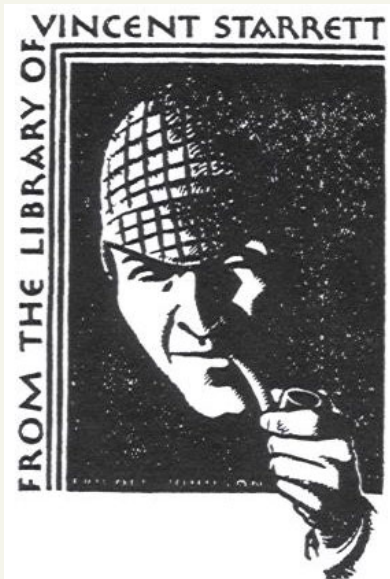
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Foreword: In Re: Sherlock Holmes

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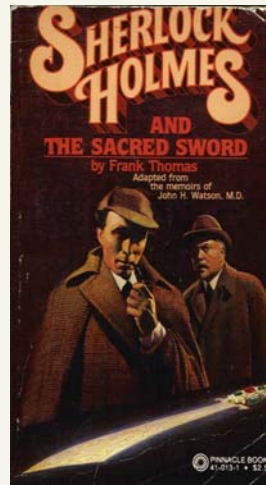
right in thinking I find in them a hint – just a mild flavor – of burlesque. Or is something of the sort inevitable in any imitation? Just the faintest suggestion of a tongue in the auctorial cheek is all I am supposing, and perhaps I am imagining it. But I hope not, and I don't think so, for it seems to me the best pastiches must have just that remote savor of affectionate spoofing.

Solar Pons is not a caricature of Sherlock Holmes. He is, rather, a clever impersonator, with a twinkle in his eye, which tells us that he knows he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that we know it, but that he hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolizes.



Vincent Starrett's foreword originally appeared in the Mycroft & Moran edition in 1945 and the was reprinted in the Pinnacle edition of 1973.

**REMEMBERING
FRANK THOMAS
1921 - 2006**

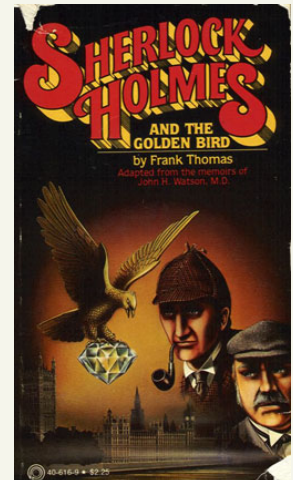


Frank Thomas passed away on May 11, 2006. Thomas was best known as the star of the popular fifties television series, *Tom Corbett, Space Cadet*. He was also billed two spots below Ronald Reagan in *The Angels Wash Their Faces*, sequel to a similarly-named Humphrey Bogart/James Cagney film.

Thomas published the successful *Sherlock Holmes, Bridge Detective* and *Sherlock Holmes Bridge Detective Returns*. One of the first pastiches I ever read was *Sherlock Holmes and the Sacred Sword*, followed shortly thereafter by *Sherlock Holmes and the Golden Bird*. They plunged Holmes into exotic locales and pitted him against fiendish villains. Thomas wrote several other Holmes pastiches, but those two are the ones that I remember best.

Like many Sherlockians, Thomas was a fan of Solar Pons. The last published issue of *The Pontine Dossier* contained a Pons parody written by none other than Frank Thomas. *The Adventure of the Swedenborg Strangler* starred Molar Vons and his faithful companion, Doctor Lydecker Parker, formerly of the Royal Dental Corps.

As a tribute to Frank Thomas, this inaugural issue of *The Solar Pons Annual* is reprinting that parody from Volume 3, Number 2, (1977) Edition of *The Pontine Dossier*, along with the original illustration by Jay Piersanti.



THE ADVENTURE OF THE SWEDENBORG STRANGLER

BY FRANK THOMAS

It was a dark and stormy night in late autumn. Low hanging scud clouds drove across the London night sky resembling celestial dreadnaughts and leaving intermittent rain in their wake like spume from massive bows. The wet and frosting streets were deserted as a chilling wind searched in every nook and cranny. But the stout walls of the chambers which I shared with that most singular private enquiry agent, Mr. Molar Vons, withstood the frigid blasts. The hearth fire at 7B Prong Street glowed cheerily and caused my eyelids to droop with the weight of lassitude. But not so with Vons who tended to be more restless on nights of storm or inclement weather. Invariably he revealed these moments of stress by unconsciously fingering a right bicuspid. Finally, his nervous pacing of our quarters was interrupted by a tap on the door which he flung open to reveal Mrs. Johanson.

"There's a young lady below, Sir. She says she's come on the advice of Commissioner Sirron and hopes you can grant her an audience."

"Do show her up by all means, Mrs. Johanson," responded Vons with alacrity.

As our good landlady retraced her steps, Vons looked at me with a cheery expression. "To venture forth on a night such as this must indicate a serious problem, my dear Larker." Then a faint frown insinuated itself on his aquiline features.

"She must have come by auto. Strange I did not hear it."

"With the wind wailing like the banshees, a cavalry detachment could be on parade outside and we'd be none the wiser," I answered promptly.

Vons nodded. "An overstatement, which you are prone to on occasion, but the point is well made."

It was my turn to brighten since that unique man whose rooms I shared did not make it a practice of agreeing with my reasoning.

By now Mrs. Johanson had returned. "Miss Jedda Grabler," she announced as a young lady with brown hair entered our sitting room. While Vons assisted her out of her rain-spattered coat and exchanged customary greetings, I made a chair available by the fire. Miss Grabler was small boned and her face had an aristocratic air. Her color was high, no doubt due to the raw weather without. To my trained eye she seemed high strung as though in recent contact with a perilous situation. Her teeth were well formed and a dazzling white. Lots of calcium in her diet, I thought with approval. She made no attempt to remove a scarf around her neck as she seated herself.

"You are very kind to see me at this late hour, Mr. Vons." Her voice was low and well modulated.

"I am always at the service of those in need, Miss Grabler." Vons seated himself and gestured in my direction. "This is my associate, Doctor Lydecker Larker."

The lady favored me with a sweet smile. "Formerly of the Royal Dental Corps."

A light dawned in Molar Vons perceptive eyes. "Ahhh. . . now I have it. Colonel Grabler of the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers."

"My father," was Miss Grabler's automatic reply. She was regarding me quizzically. "Yours must be a small family, Doctor, for I don't believe I know anyone else by that name."

Vons chortled. "Small wonder. Do tell her, Larker, old fellow."

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Shifting uncomfortably in my chair, I shot Vons a reproachful glance. "Actually my name is Parker, but that American dentist called Painless Parker has gained such fame that people were continually assuming that I was related to him. So I had my name changed."

"I see," said the girl politely. Vons face assumed a business-like expression but I was thirsting for revenge.

"Do you not feel that Vons is an unusual name, Miss Grabler?" As the girl nodded in surprise, I continued snidely: "Do tell her, old chap."

The twitching of my companion's bushy eyebrows bespoke his irritation, but he complied in a resigned voice. "Actually my name is Vonschlagle. However, my family owned a mortuary business and my grandfather felt the name unwieldy for signs and advertising. He had it shortened to Vonce. But then little boys would knock on the mortuary doors and shout out 'Vonce is enough' and disappear with gales of laughter. It made a lasting impression on me in my youth and as soon as I was of age, I had the name shortened further still to Vons."

As Miss Grabler suppressed a yawn, Vons changed the subject. "Do tell us what prompts your call and how is Commissioner Sirron involved?"

"It is related to last night, Mr. Vons." I noted that she shuddered momentarily and then steeled herself to continue. "It was close on to midnight. I had retired early, as is my custom, and was sleeping soundly when something awakened me. I was immediately conscious of another presence in my bedroom and my mouth opened to scream when my throat was caught by a hand like a vise. My outcry was stifled and I could sense my consciousness fading away."

As though reliving this horrid moment was too much, Jedda Grabler's words dwindled away. Replacing speech with action, she removed the scarf around

her neck. I could not suppress a gasp for imprinted on her white throat were five livid marks. One, on the left side, had to be from a thumb. On her right side, her fair skin bore four additional mementos of what must have been a most chilling experience.

Vons shot me a significant look and his eyes swiveled towards the decanter on the sideboard. I was on my feet in a trite but the lady forestalled me.

"Thank you, Doctor, but I am all right." She faced Vons with determination. "I could see nothing in the darkness and struck at the hand which held me but it was like a bar of iron. Then my flailing arm collided with the lamp on the bed stand which fell to the floor with a crash. By beneficial providence, Gresham, the butler, was making rounds and heard the sound. Being in the hall outside, he immediately knocked on the door. Suddenly that horrible hand was gone. There was the sound of the window being raised and then that feeling of another's presence disappeared. By now Gresham was pounding on my door and shouting. I succeeded in making my way out of the bed and managed to unlock the door." Jedda Grabler paused in her gripping narrative for a moment. Her head shook slightly as though from chagrin. "Then, gentlemen, I fear that I fainted, something my dear departed father would not have approved of at all. In any case, the authorities were summoned which is how I met Commissioner Sirron."

Vons was nodding slowly. "You acted with great fortitude, Miss Grabler. Allow me to indulge in a little speculation which may spare you reliving more of this most unfortunate experience. Obviously the unwanted visitor escaped via your bedroom window, leaving no clear fingerprints. I submit that had he done so the police might well have a line on him by now. May I assume that nothing was missing from your house? It is on Swedborg Square, is it not?"

Miss Grabler, who was regarding him with some wonderment, simply nodded.

(cont. on page 23)

(cont. from page 22)

Vons lips held that faint smile so evident when he was busy taking errant threads of facts and weaving them into a garment of truth. "At this point, I submit that the authorities are busy searching for an experienced cat burglar who is left handed."

Since Miss Grabler was simply registering that amazement so often evident in visitors to 7B Prong Street, I voiced the question plaguing me.

"How can you assume that he is left handed?"

Molar Vons' eyes twinkled as they regarded me. "I don't. But surely, Larker, you note that what is obviously a thumb mark is on Miss Grabler's left side whereas the other four fingers grasped her throat on her right side."

By this time I was nodding with understanding. "The strangler grasped her with his left hand."

"We don't know that he was a strangler," commented Vons, "though the journals are certain to label him as such once they get wind of the story."

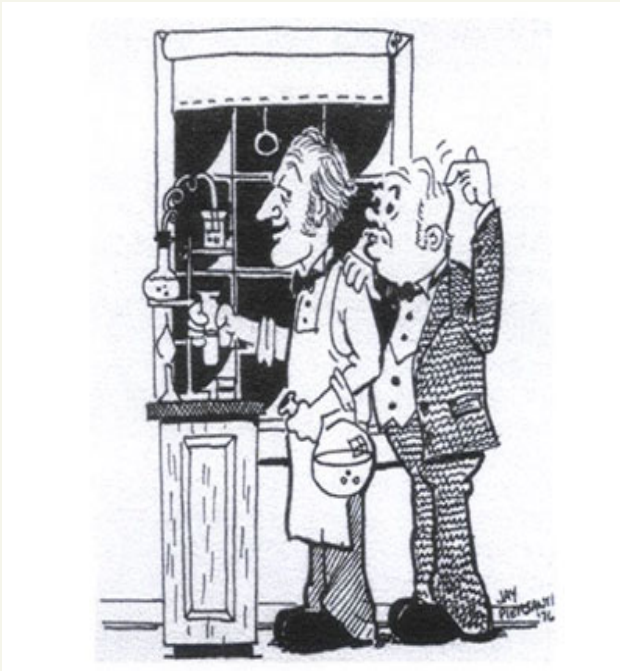


Illustration by Jay Piersanti

"Exactly what Commissioner Sirron said." Miss Grabler seemed to have recovered from the memory of her harrowing experience. "But, Mr. Vons, how could you know that nothing was stolen?"

"The able policeman you just mentioned suggested that you contact me," replied Vons. "Noel Sirron is forced by standard procedure to follow the obvious lines of investigation but there's something about the case that bothers him."

As he spoke, Vons, slouched in his favorite lounging chair, had been gazing thoughtfully into the fire. Now his eyes returned to the girl. "Miss Grabler, did Sirron mention anything about a possible compulsive assassin or perhaps a sex criminal?"

Alarm returned to her eyes. "He never suggested the possibility."

"And wise he was," stated Vons with an approving tone. "The happening does not fit such a criminal."

Suddenly he trapped the girl's eyes with his penetrating gaze. "Assuming that theft was the intent of this nocturnal visitor, can you tell me what he might have been after?"

As she hesitated, Pons prodded her verbally. "Surely not a difficult question, Miss Grabler. The valuables one would keep in a bedroom are limited."

"But the question is still puzzling, Mr. Vons, for I have nothing whatsoever that would interest a robber. My father left me a very modest inheritance indeed. The house on Swedborg Square is free and clear and of some value. But there is never a sizeable sum of money on hand and the jewelry I possess would not excite even a sneak thief."

(cont. on page 24)

(cont. from page 23)

"No wartime trophy or family possession which might be of specialized value?" persisted the great enquiry agent. A negative shake of the head was his answer.

"But one more question," he continued. "Do the authorities know how the intruder gained entry?"

"No windows broken or doors forced," replied Miss Grabler. "I should have mentioned that earlier since it puzzled Commissioner Sirron no end."

"I would imagine so," was Vons' dry response. "Look to the unusual and seemingly incomprehensible for the prime clue," he added almost to himself.

Vons sat quietly for a moment rather as though the answers he had secured confirmed whatever picture he was sketching in his intricate and complex mind. His silence seemed to unnerve Miss Grabler.

"I realize that I have given you very little to work with, Mr. Vons."

"On the contrary," was the surprising reply. "I believe you have pointed a revealing finger towards the solution of this matter."

"Good heavens, how?" I exclaimed without meaning to.

"Well," said Vons, "we know the intruder seized Miss Grabler with his left hand and that he found no difficulty in entering a locked house. Also, this brave young lady assured us that she had no possession of sufficient value to interest a professional thief."

"But that is inconsistent, Vons," I hastened to say. "You contend that the nocturnal visitor was a left handed swagman of consummate skill. Why would he take the risk without the prize?"

Vons was shaking his head. "The man was not left handed."

"But you said. . ." I began, only to be interrupted.

"I said he seized Miss Grabler's throat with his left hand. He need not have been a professional burglar either, though there certainly was a prize for the taking."

"But Mr. Vons, I told you.. ."

"You told me that you possessed nothing of sufficient value, Miss Grabler, and I believe you. But that doesn't mean that it does not exist. Let me reconstruct this bizarre happening for you both.

"It is close on to midnight. Miss Grabler, here, is asleep but a sound or movement, perhaps the subconscious realization of another presence awakens her. Frightened, her mouth opens in preparation for a scream and suddenly she is seized before she can utter a sound. I submit that the intruder was right beside her to act with such rapidity. He grasped her throat with his left hand because his right hand was otherwise occupied."

"Doing what?" I mouthed.

"Searching in her bed stand," was the prompt reply. "I imagine he had pulled out a drawer and was reaching for a concealed compartment within, an action which would be performed with but one arm only. He heard the gasp of indrawn breath and instinctively seized Miss Grabler with his free hand. When the bed lamp fell alarming the butler, the thief beat a hasty retreat."

"But what was he after?" I persisted.

"Here I have the advantage of specialized knowledge. The house purchased by Colonel Grabler was previously the residence of one Ricky Bonhomme, a former darling of society and a dashing man about town."

The wonderment in Miss Grabler's eyes faded. "Oh dear, Mr. Vons," she said somewhat timidly,

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"I fear I must stick a needle in that balloon. I well remember that father purchased our home from a lawyer on behalf of his client named John Paul Jones."

This revelation disturbed Vons in no way, "John Paul Jones was the name Ricky Bonhomme was born with. Obviously he wearied of denying a family relationship with the great Scotch born sea captain and had his name changed."

Vons visibly preened at the effect his dazzling riposte had on Miss Grabler and myself and then continued.

"My theory is complete but let me hazard two guesses, for additional confirmation. When your father purchased the house on Swedborg Square he did not take the precaution of having the locks changed and the sale was effected on a partially furnished basis."

Accepting Miss Grabler's nod with a not too modest smile, Vons drove to his conclusion.

"Ricky Bonhomme was believed to have been behind a series of daring jewel robberies that took place in Mayfair and on the Riviera. Somehow he got wind of the fact that the authorities were closing in on him and disappeared completely."

"Until now," I stated with sudden realization.

"Exactly," said Vons. "Ricky departed in such haste that he could not take his ill gotten gains with him. Now, after five years, he has returned to try and retrieve the jewels secreted in his former residence. He did not have to force an entrance still having the keys to the establishment in his possession."

Vons' eyes centered on the girl. "Miss Grabler, as is apparent you were but an unfortunate bystander in this grim charade and have handled yourself quite splendidly. On the morrow, the jewels will be found and you can draw the curtain on this outré episode in your life."

Such was the case. Several insurance companies were very grateful to Vons when the stolen jewelry was found right where he said it would be. An extensive search for Ricky Bonhomme was mounted by Scotland Yard but to no avail. The former London clubman and man about town slipped through the net again.

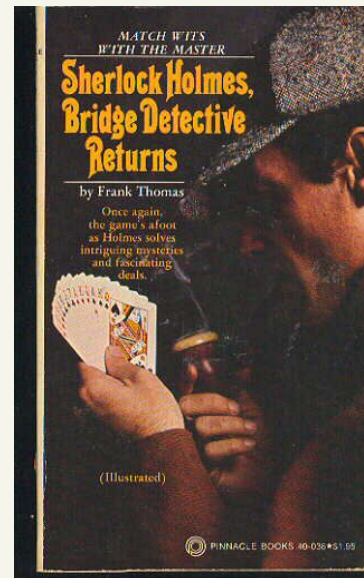
The 'Bonhomme Richard' was John Paul Jones' ship.

Vons, with that peculiar sixth sense of his, assured me that the larcenous socialite would reappear sometime in the future. I wonder if he is right? He usually is, you know!

This pastiche appeared in the 1977 issue (Volume 3, Number 2) of *The Pontine Dossier*.

Frank Thomas' Sherlock Holmes Bibliography

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- 1975 - Sherlock Holmes, Bridge Detective Returns
- 1979 - Sherlock Holmes & The Golden Bird
- 1980 - Sherlock Holmes & The Sacred Sword
- 1984 - Secret Cases of Sherlock Holmes
- 1985 - Sherlock Holmes & The Treasure Train
- 1986 - Sherlock Holmes & The Masquerade Murders
- 1989 - Sherlock Holmes & The Bizarre Alibi
- 2000 - Sherlock Holmes & The Panamanian Girls
- 2002 - Sherlock Holmes Mystery Tales
- 2002 - Secret Files of Sherlock Holmes



IN MEMORIAM: FRANK THOMAS

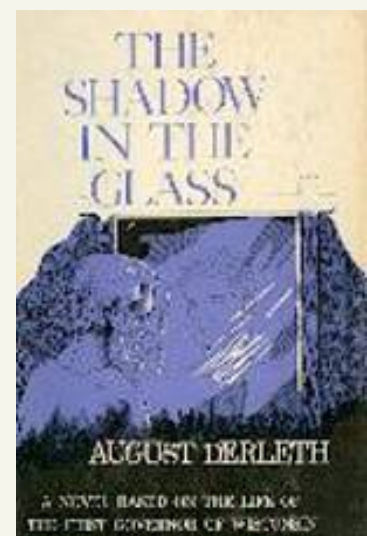
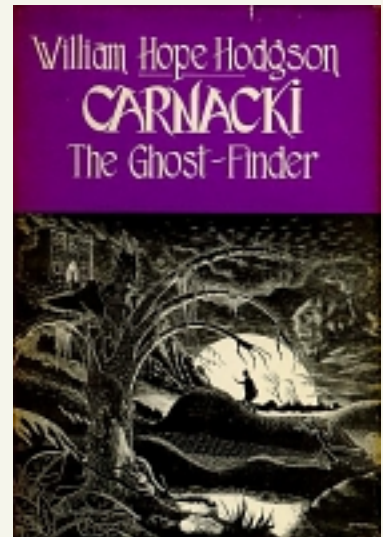
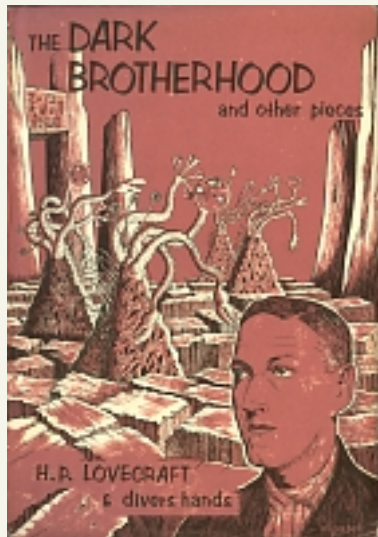
BY BOB BYRNE

Of books about Bridge there were two
 And Holmes countered the schemes of Chu San Fu
 First with a bird, then over a blade
 A later case involved a masquerade
 You helped ensure that Holmes would never die
 Thank you for keeping us in 1895

FRANK UTPATEL

1905 - 1980

Frank Utpatel is the artist most closely associated with Solar Pons. It is his drawings that adorn the Omnibus editions, and are found in the *Praed Street Papers* and the *Praed Street Dossier*. He also contributed illustrations to the *Pontine Dossier*. Within his circle, Utpatel was widely respected for his woodprints: principally, nature scenes of his native Wisconsin. Utpatel, who passed away in 1980, also created some excellent drawings for other authors. Here are a few examples, as well as the cover for a non-Pons book by August Derleth, *The Shadow in the Glass*.



The Slough Observer

March 18, 1925

JEPSON SUICIDE!! ACTOR KILLED SELF TO FRAME RIVALS

By Daniel Kearny

As reported yesterday, Ahab Jepson was found hung in his estate at Stoke Poges. Due to the diligent police work of Detective-Sergeant Peter Cobbett, it has been revealed that Jepson hung himself, contriving his own death to



Recreation by staff artist Frank Utpatel

throw suspicion upon the four men he invited as his house guests that weekend. Sir Malcolm McVeigh, Randolph Sutpen, Sir John Watkins and Lord Barick had all been invited by Jepson. These four well known stars of the stage have all been subjects of suits filed against them by Jepson in the past.

Regardless, they came to Irving with no idea of the macabre play they were to become unwitting participants in. Jepson provoked confrontations with the men and found the means to point an accusatory finger from the grave at each of them.

Constable Cobbett, following the individual links of evidence until a chain was formed, investigated the affair with intelligence, intuition, tenacity and sagacity. Stoke Poges is truly fortunate to have such a fine young man on the force.

Cobbett, following his instincts like a bloodhound on the hunt, discovered a mechanism hidden in the pantry that lowered and raised the chain which Jepson was found hanging from.

Refusing to believe that men of such fine character would conspire together in a group of two or more to kill Jepson, Constable Cobbett doggedly pursued the

clues and determined that Ahab Jepson, who had recently been diagnosed with a severe malady



Constable Cobbett

that made his death imminent, had in fact utilized the mechanism to hang himself. On the surface, suicide was impossible and the four houseguests, all with plausible motives and opportunity, were intended to be suspect. Regardless of the final verdict, surely a pall would be cast over the men and their careers. We can only be thankful for the fine work of Constable Cobbett.

It should be noted that private detective Solar Pons was of some minor assistance in the case.

THE BEST SUBSTITUTE FOR SHERLOCK HOLMES KNOWN

- Vincent Starrett

The Solar Pons Gazette is the on-line Newsletter of www.SolarPons.com, the world's only internet site dedicated to Solar Pons. The *Gazette* is published each summer with a year-end special as practicable. The *Gazette* is free of charge.

For questions, comments, or to contribute to the next issue of *The Solar Pons Gazette*, contact Bob Byrne at admin@SolarPons.com.

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