

Meeting Notes, Notorious Canary-Trainers,
November 18, 2018 at Fitchburg Public Library
Facilitator: John Hudson
Note Taker: Michael Stevens
Number attending – 14
Story – *The Red-Headed League*

Announcements:

Members shared Sherlockia, including a graphic novel about Enola Holmes (Sherlock's sister), a 1929 advertisement for pipe tobacco headlined "Shades of Sherlock Holmes," and a program from a performance of "Miss Holmes" by a Menomonee Falls community theater group.

In place of our January meeting, Sherlock's 165th birthday celebration will be held at Swagat Indian Restaurant, 707 N. High Point Road, Madison, on January 6, between noon and 2:30.

Case Study Discussion:

Most (though not all) members ranked the *Red-Headed League* was among their favorite stories, although for different reasons. Arthur Conan Doyle ranked it as his second-best Holmes story. Members who liked it commented on the well-developed characters, sufficient clues to allow the reader to reason toward a solution, the humor (directed at least once toward Holmes), the Baker Street setting, and famous phrases such as "a three-pipe problem."

Critics noted that it would have been impossible to smoke three pipes in the time allotted in the story, discussed Jabez Williams's red hair, and found the digging of the tunnel unrealistic due to the time needed and amount of dirt to be removed. This led to a spirited discussion on the tunnel, with the ingenious comment that the problems disappear if the tunnel was a short one rather than long. Because the buildings may have abutted each other, it's possible that the tunnel was only a few feet long.

Additional topics discussed included Holmes taste in music, the growth of the London subway system, and the playing of bridge. (Why did Holmes bring a deck of cards if they needed to sit in the dark?) Because this was only the second Holmes short story written and the fourth overall, many of the characteristics of Holmes had not yet been fully developed.

The story contains the only reference to Holmes frequenting a vegetarian restaurant in the canon. Thanks to Google, we learned that there were very few vegetarian restaurants in London in the late 1880s and early 1890s. Mohandas Gandhi frequented these restaurants while studying law in London and the group speculated about whether Gandhi might have met Holmes while dining at one of these establishments.