

WHAT WOULD YOU KEEP ?

By Steve Mason

Once a year, thanks to HD cable television, I am able to re-indulge my childhood by completing a pilgrimage through the magical Land of Oz. During one of the commercial breaks in the recent showing, the network pointed out the estimated value of one of the surviving pairs of ruby slippers used during the film's production (up to \$3 million). I began to wonder, why do we never hear much mention, outside of the Oz circle, of the other objects from the movie which were so significant: the oil can; the awarded clock, certificate, and medal; the picnic basket; or Glinda's magic wand? Consequentially, this led me back to Sherlockian – or Holmesian (podcasts can be educational) – thinking: what would I desire to have from any of the Adventures of the Canon? What would other advocates of the Great Game seek from the Adventures?

After discussing the topic with my two mentors, Jim Webb and Don Hobbs (Inspector Lestrade, BSI) of the Dallas Diogenes Club, a survey was developed to determine what would be the most coveted item from the 60 Adventures. Participation was solicited through the *Hounds of the Internet*, the *Sherlock Holmes Social Network*, and the Scion directory in the *Sherlockian Who's Who*.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the very useful hints I received from two wonderful people, Peter Blau (Black Peter, BSI) and Jacqueline Morris (Baroness Gruner, ASH) on how to proceed with the survey.

PREMISE of the SURVEY:

Each respondent was given the chance to receive and keep one memento from any of the Adventures of the Canon. For example, the respondent could ask for and receive: a pipe used by Holmes, the Persian slipper, magnifying glass, or any token of appreciation given to Holmes; any item used by Watson, such as the tin box or his notebook; or receive any other item in the Canon -- a Napoleon bust, the orange pips, even the beryl coronet.

The survey asked for the item, Adventure citing the item, and the reason for wanting this particular item. Two rules applied: 1. The item must be from the Canon itself, and not from a pastiche, movie, or other media. 2. Respondent must agree to keep the item, and not re-sell it (removing the monetary value for greed purposes).

THE RESULTS:

A total of three hundred, twenty-seven (327) Sherlock Holmes scholars and fans participated in the survey. Although the survey did not request demographic information, certain elements can be deduced from the email addresses and information contained in the emails.

Approximately one-quarter (23%) of the voters are investitured members of the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) and/or The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes (ASH) societies. Sixty-one percent (61%) of the respondents are male, thirty-nine percent (39%) female. Almost seventy percent (69%) are associated with a recognized Sherlockian scion society. Thirty-one percent (31%) are identified as living outside the United States, including many from the Sherlock Holmes Society of London.

The 327 responses included fifty-nine unique items mentioned in thirty-six of the Adventures. Leading the vote, for the novels, eleven unique mementos were requested from *The Sign of Four*, followed by *A Study in Scarlet* with nine. For the short stories, *The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual* and *The Adventure of the Empty House* each received eight bids for items desired by the respondents.

.... AND WHAT DO THE VOTERS HAVE TO SAY ?

Out of the 327 responses, four individual items received more than ten votes as the memento most desired, and easily outdistanced all other choices (approximately two-thirds of total votes.) These will be discussed shortly. However, several items which may only have received one or two votes need to be mentioned, as their reasoning for keeping the item may have been as unique and priceless as the item itself. These will be referred to as the... **Honorable Mentions**

This first set can be categorized as the “for curiosity sakes...”

1. “...he returned refreshed to his monograph upon the *Polyphonic Motets of Lassus...*”¹ As a professional musician, did there exist Monophonic Motets as well as polyphonic Ones?
1. “... Sherlock Holmes, with his sharp, eager face framed in his *ear-flapped travelling cap...*”²: Was this a deerstalker or not?
2. “...He was lounging upon the sofa in a *purple dressing-gown...*”³ “...and now he was the Holmes of old in the *mouse-coloured dressing-gown...*”⁴: What color was the gown? The Canon says blue, purple, and “mouse-coloured.” Mr. Morley averred it was the same gown, changing colors as it faded from age and use. Two respondents also offered they would be the envy of any Sherlockian meeting if they arrived wearing this particular piece of attire; wearing the gown would also envelope you in the sensory environment of 221b on a foggy day.

3. "...I keep a *bull pup*..."⁵: Once and for all, is Watson referring to a pistol or a dog? The debate could be settled.
4. "and indicated a spirit case and a *gasogene* in the corner..."⁶: Did it really work as advertised, and provide a spirited, fizzy drink?
5. "...when I had my *purple plush* that I had never so much as taken out of the drawer"⁷: Having seen pictures of the voluminous garments women wore in those days, how did Mary Sutherland manage to keep hers in a dresser drawer?
6. "...Then I picked up a *magazine* from the table... one of the *articles*... its somewhat ambitious title was '*The Book of Life*'..."⁸: "To decide for myself whether or not the 'rules of deduction' laid out by Holmes are indeed what Watson considers 'ineffable twaddle' and 'rubbish.'"
7. "...and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a *jack-knife* into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece..."⁹: What a treat it would be to see the letters Holmes received from others.
8. Correspondence between the brothers Holmes during their lifetimes: Think of the questions that might answer.
9. "...The papers which this wretched youth had in his pocket were the *plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine*..."¹⁰: Just what was the fuss about? Mycroft calls it "the most jealously guarded of all Government secrets" immediately after stating "Surely you have heard of it? I thought everyone had heard of it."
10. "...These modern *gramophones* are a remarkable invention..."¹¹: Is this a cylinder playing machine, or one which played discs. This particular machine may have been custom built by or for Holmes, and superior to commercially-made machines.
11. "...He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he went off to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a *large tin box* behind him... 'There are cases enough here, Watson,' said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. 'I think that if you knew all that I had in this *box* you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in...'"¹²: "One can only dream of the tales hidden away in Holmes' personal stash."

This second set can be grouped as the "personal connection to the item..."

1. The *pistol* used by Holmes to "...adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks..."¹³: "Firearms have fascinated me since I was a little boy, and to have one wielded by Sherlock Holmes..."

2. "...*Silver Blaze*," said he, "is from the Isonomy stock, and holds as brilliant a record as his famous ancestor..."¹⁴: "For the past decade, I have been involved with the two Sherlockian horse races... the Silver Blaze Sweepstakes and the Professor Moriarty Memorial."
3. "...There is a cold partridge on the sideboard, Watson, and a *bottle of Montrachet*..."¹⁵: "When I attended my first Fusilier meeting back in the '70s, this was the story they were "doing" for that meeting. As a professional illustrator, I made a special label of "Poison" and glued it to a small blue bottle. I also brought a bottle of Montrachet to the meeting so everyone could have a sip... The Fusiliers were so impressed by my knowledge of the Canon and that I would bring those items to my first meeting that they gave me an immediate investiture. The Fusiliers are allowed to choose their own investiture, so I chose 'The Veiled Lodger.'"
4. "...It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a '*Penang lawyer*'..."¹⁶: "I have used a walking cane off and on for the last 25 years... a habit formed in my early childhood while searching for washed-up treasure at my home on the shores of Galveston Bay."
5. "...The bride gave me a *sovereign*, and I mean to wear it on my watch-chain in memory of the occasion..."¹⁷: "I am the first author to make a woman from the Canon the protagonist of her own novel series. And, like Holmes, I would not settle for the King of Bohemia's emerald snake ring."
6. "...the landscape is a genuine *Corot*..."¹⁸: Being an artist, through stages in your life, "one is more appreciative of beauty in one's immediate environment and Corot's paintings certainly meet the standard of beauty."
7. "...Keep clear of the *badger*, for he bites..."¹⁹: "I have a special affinity for Badgers, being a native of the state of Wisconsin, a graduate of its university, and a loyal fan of its athletic teams (the Badgers). There are badgers living wild around here and I see them occasionally."
8. "...Holmes had picked up the powerful *air-gun* from the floor and was examining its mechanism..."²⁰: "My alias is Lord Adair, Earl of Maynooth, ergo that is the weapon that took the life of my son, the Hon. Ronald Adair, and it would be the final keepsake of my memories of him."
9. "...found a plaster *bust of Napoleon*, which stood with several other works of art upon the counter..."²¹: "I am a French speaker having spent part of my schooldays at the Lycée Voltaire in the Avenue de la République in Paris before WW2 loomed and the family moved to England."

10. "...my eye caught the glint of a *shaded lantern*..."²²: "My grandfather and other relatives used a dark or shaded lantern in years past to conduct hunting trips that may have been marginally felonious, so I would like to own one (may do some hunting myself)."
11. "...He held an *old black boot* in the air. `Meyers, Toronto,' was printed on the leather inside..."²³: Sir Henry's boot was made by Meyers, Toronto, home of our Sherlock society, The Bootmakers of Toronto.
12. "...he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay *pipe* thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird..."²⁴: "I would dearly like to own it and keep it in my own Victorian era smoking cabinet..."
13. "...And so, my dear Watson, we have ended by turning the dancing men to good when they have so often been the agents of evil, and I think that I have fulfilled my promise of giving you something unusual for *your notebook*..."²⁵: "I already own what I wish for most...for in our hands, we each tangibly hold Watson's gift AND then I could always go back to their stories together in those days of 221B..." "...It would be wonderful to be able to refer to Watson's notebooks to see what details he may have left out of each adventure, as well as confirming whether many of the inconsistencies in the Adventures were Watson's responsibility, or his literary agent."
14. "...I had observed some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied by that little affair of the *Vatican cameos*..."²⁶: "...The case of which gave him great anxiety to oblige the Pope. I love cameos and I'm a Vatican aficionado....what could be wrong with that? Besides, it's my ASH investiture."

Just for the art of it...

1. "...That painting was by Jean Baptiste *Greuze*..."²⁷: "To see how the beauty of the painting would be perceived through Holmes' eyes."
2. "...I watched him as he covered *sheet after sheet of paper* with figures and letters..."²⁸: "These slips of paper showed his thought process, as it is his mind that we all love and admire rather than the objects that he owns."
3. "...I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, *my revolver* in my pocket..."²⁹: "It beautifully sums up the entire experience of being a Sherlockian. We've got everything we need in life.....friendship, a hero, security and the certainty that good things will ultimately come to pass."

4. "...You have doubtless heard of the *Beryl coronet*..."³⁰: "It has a happy ending and it happens at Christmas. The bitchy lady doesn't get her blue stone back, the innocent gentleman gets his family and reputation back, and lastly, I just love rocks of any kind."
5. "...my eyes had hardly glanced over the paragraph before I had sprung into a *hansom* and was on my way to Baker Street..."³¹: "One can hardly imagine a scene of Victorian London without at least one in the street. It would be a great place to sit and work out MY 2-pipe problems."
6. "...He handed me the *very paper* which I have here, Watson, and this is the strange catechism to which each *Musgrave* had to submit when he came to man's estate..."³²: "This is one of the most unique treasure maps ever described in literature."
7. "...Being a *reprint from the reminiscences* of John H. Watson, MD..."³³: Who wouldn't want to own the first appearance in print of a Sherlock Holmes story, preceding Beeton's Christmas Annual for 1887?
8. "...it consisted of *three pages torn from his notebook* and addressed to me..."³⁴: One of the few items written in Holmes' own hand, and written clearly and precisely even though he firmly believed he was facing certain death.
9. "...I have, at least, a well-polished, *silver-plated coffee-pot* in front of me..."³⁵: Both Watson and Holmes provided correct deductions concerning the walking stick, and those considered erroneous. This item would be a reminder that Holmes could occasionally belittle the doctor's deductive skills, and then possibly fail himself.
10. "...He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his *blowpipe* at the time..."³⁶: "In the words of The Chief High Executioner in the Mikado 'I have a little list of those who won't be missed.'"
11. "...my friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine *emerald tie-pin*..."³⁷: "I have twice been to Windsor myself, from which I have returned without such a tie-pin, and without meeting any august ladies for whom I had performed a small commission."
12. "...I have made a special study of cigar ashes - in fact, I have written a *monograph* upon the subject..."³⁸: "Aside from its intrinsic interest, it would also be a memento of Holmes's first recorded case in partnership with Watson."

The “Big Dream, Big Ticket” Category...

1. “...Two high, narrow towers rose over the trees. The driver pointed with his whip. ‘Baskerville Hall,’”...³⁹: “With the addition of electrical lighting it should be a pleasant place.”
2. “...the scene in the dining-room of the *Abbey Grange*...”⁴⁰: “I was born to live in a gloomy, genteelly run down gothic manor house, with quirky servants, a large pack of spotted hunting dogs, assorted horses, sheep, goats, geese and whatever else comes with this type of home.. I want it all right here in the good ole 21st century.”
3. “...Consider what the Ritual says...’Whose was it?’ ‘His who is gone.’ Then, ‘Who shall have it?’ ‘He who will come...’ ...There can I think be no doubt that this *battered and shapeless diadem* once encircled the brows of the Royal Stuarts...”⁴¹: “Simply for the ‘sake of the trust.’”
4. “...*Sherlock Holmes* seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me...”⁴²: “The Yard used him frequently, with very good results I'm told (also I like the way he keeps house)...”

This last one just has to have its own category...

1. ...the whip brandished by Irene Adler... (*A Scandal in Belgravia*): “...Just for the thrill of it...” There’s one in every crowd.

Other mementos which received more than at least one vote included: Toby, the butcher's dog (SIGN); the Monograph on tobacco ash (STUD); Holmes’ hypodermic needle & syringe (several adventures); Watson's original list of Holmes's skills and lack of skills (STUD); the Car driven by Holmes (LAST); Baskerville Hall itself (HOUN); Mary Morstan’s note to meet at the Lyceum (SIGN); the emerald snake ring (SCAN); the Persian slipper (several adventures); Porlock’s cipher (VALL); the horse shoe (SILV); Dynamics of an Asteroid, signed by the author (VALL); Curse of the Baskervilles text (HOUN) and Holmes' hunting crop (IDEN).

One respondent provided a riddle for their desired item:

What am I?

I am the item

That Holmes used to smite ‘em.

Through me he could view

What's unseen by the few,
Which included the many.
It could be worse—
Holmes saw “everything—that's my curse.”
What am I?

Answer: Holmes' magnifying glass ⁴³

... and the Winner Is....

As mentioned earlier, four unique mementos received more than ten (10) votes as the most desired item to retain.

4. (10% of total votes) “...Draw your chair up, and hand me *my violin*, for the only problem which we have still to solve is how to while away these bleak autumnal evenings...” ⁴⁴: Holmes used the violin as a relaxation from his uniquely advanced mental processes – and as a method of permitting inspiration to help solve the crimes he is investigating. “...I would keep the violin and make it known to great violinists who come to town that they could come to my house and play it. What fun that would be. I could invite my friends over to enjoy the music, meet the maestro and even get to handle the Stradivarius (very carefully).”
3. (11% to total votes) “...Holmes unlocked his strong-box, and held up the *[the Countess of Morcar's] blue carbuncle*, which shone out like a star, with a cold, brilliant, many-pointed radiance...” ⁴⁵: Scholars have always enjoyed the slight ambiguity about what the carbuncle might actually be. Is it a sapphire, garnet, ruby, or diamond? Many of the respondents wanted the carbuncle, just to see if they could outlive the curse, or to be able to will it to their heirs for future financial gain. This adventure provides an opportunity to read “... about the inherent goodness of Holmes, granting forgiveness to a stranger, someone who exhibited such human frailty. During that season of forgiveness, I believe he recognized his own frailties...”
2. (15% of total votes) “...The *photograph was of Irene Adler* herself in evening dress...” ⁴⁶: “This is the most precious item Holmes claims for himself. He refuses gold, money, and even the king's ring. With his choice to keep the photograph instead he reveals his innermost values and genius...” Watson never mentions Holmes keeping a memento from his mother, so this is the only apparent female reminder Holmes actually wanted to keep. Tongue in cheek, “...obviously it must be extremely pornographic...” Her photograph reminds many respondents of the brilliance shown by Adler in beating the great detective.

“...Gazing at her image would inspire me to be ever-so-clever, yet not forgetting to run off with the one I loved rather than settle for royalty. The best part: it would be a treasure to know that it was held by Sherlock as he, perhaps with a sigh and a smile, looked fondly at the photograph of THE woman...”

1. (30% of total votes) “...Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered *tin dispatch-box* with my name, John H. Watson, M.D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid...”⁴⁷: Most voters would publish the contents of the box, becoming the greatest pasticher of all time. “The late Madeline Kahn once appeared in a commercial where she spoke the line: ‘Haven't you ever wanted it all - just a little bit?’” As it would expand the Canon, “...what a wonderful gift to the world that would be... In the meantime, I would be the first in the world to know what is in them, and I would control the release of that information to the world. Just think of all the other Sherlockians out there eating their hearts out with envy!...”

We could all use additional, original Holmes, more Watson, more mysteries “...and where better to get them than the fountainhead?”

Imagine knowing the true plots and endings concerning a giant rat, canary trainer, or the man who simply disappeared. I believe Mr. Christ may have said it best....

"The Old Tin Box" by Jay Finley Christ⁴⁸

In the vaults of Cox was an old tin box
With Watson's name on its lid.
What wouldn't we pay for that box today
And the secret notes there hid?

Old Russian dame, Ricoletti the lame,
The famous aluminum crutch;
For Alicia, the cutter, the parsley in butter,
What *would* you give for such?

Story of Randall, the Darling scandal,
The coptic patriarchs,
The opal tiara, the Addleton barrow -
Dollars? or francs? or marks?

The tale of the pinch of Victor Lynch,
The furniture warehouse mob,
The case at the Hague, the murder at Prague
The powderless Margate job.

The giant rat, the cardinal's hat,
The Patersons (first name Grice),
The cormorant's bill, the Hammerford will -
We'd take 'em at any price.

The Phillimore fella who sought an umbrella,
The steamer Friesland (Dutch);
For Col. Carruthers or Atkinson brothers
One never could give too much.

The Vatican case and its cameo face,
The slithering, unknown worm,
The Abergavenny were none too many -
Where is this Cox's firm?

Oh, wonderful box in the vaults of Cox!
You come with a touch of salt!
But I offer two blocks of the choicest stocks
For the treasure of Cox's vault.

I actually have two mementos I would love to have and cherish from the Adventures (I get two choices since it was my idea).

1. “In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast and had fired two shots. I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron [*a bullet*] had been pressed to my thigh... 'You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!...' It was worth a wound - it was worth many wounds - to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask...”⁴⁹: To me, the bullet would always be a reminder of the true friendship between Holmes and Watson, regardless of the opinions of others.

2. "...He walked past the couch to the open window, and held up the drooping stalk of a *moss rose*, looking down at the dainty blend of crimson and green. It was a new phase of his character to me, for I had never before seen him show any keen interest in natural objects... 'There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion,' said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. 'It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers, our desires, our food, are really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers.'" ⁵⁰: "I would press it in an appropriate volume to be reminded of the importance of simple beauty in life..." This one paragraph shows the humanity and soul within Holmes more than any other passage in the entire Canon.

What started out as a simple question within my own mind rapidly grew into an enjoyable diversion, allowing me to contact Sherlockians nationwide, in Canada, and even across the Pond. And, with such a variety of opinions (as Mr. Edgar Smith once stated, "it [is] difficult to be objective on a question where sentiment and sentimentality are so urgently invited" ⁵¹), the responses from these scholars and fans will keep me smiling for years to come.

1. "The Bruce-Partington Plans".
2. "Silver Blaze".
3. "The Blue Carbuncle".
4. "The Empty House".
5. *A Study in Scarlet*
6. "A Scandal in Bohemia".
7. "A Case of Identity".
8. *A Study in Scarlet*.
9. "The Musgrave Ritual".
10. "The Bruce-Partington Plans".
11. "The Mazarin Stone".
12. "The Musgrave Ritual.
13. "The Musgrave Ritual".
14. "Silver Blaze".
15. "The Veiled Lodger".
16. *The Hound of the Baskervilles..*
17. "A Scandal in Bohemia".
18. *The Sign of Four*.
19. *The Sign of Four*.

20. "The Empty House".
21. "The Six Napoleons".
22. *The Sign of Four* and other stories.
23. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
24. "The Red-Headed League" and other stories.
25. "The Dancing Men" and other stories.
26. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
27. *The Valley of Fear*.
28. "The Dancing Men".
29. "The Empty House".
30. "The Beryl Coronet"
31. "The Illustrious Client"
32. "The Musgrave Ritual".
33. *A Study in Scarlet*.
34. "The Final Problem".
35. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
36. *The Sign of Four*.
37. "The Bruce-Partington Plans."
38. *A Study in Scarlet*.
39. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.
40. "The Abbey Grange".
41. "The Musgrave Ritual".
42. *A Study in Scarlet*.
43. McCauley, Carole, email to author, April 9, 2012.
44. "The Noble Bachelor" and other stories.
45. "The Blue Carbuncle".
46. "A Scandal in Bohemia".
47. "The Problem of Thor Bridge".
48. Christ, Jay Finley, "The Old Tin Box," in Edgar Smith, ed., *The Baker Street Journal*, (Morristown, N.J.: Baker Street Irregulars, 1947), p. 262.
49. "The Three Garridebs".
50. "The Naval Treaty".
51. Smith, Edgar, "The Editor's Gaslamp: On Fictional Characters," in Edgar Smith, ed., *The Baker Street Journal*, (Morristown, N.J.: Baker Street Irregulars, 1956), p. 3.