

Slattery. A "Show and Tell" produced the following: Sherlock Holmes teddy bears from London; Japanese books on Holmes from 1928 and 1946; Sherlock Holmes Collected Works in English, Japanese and Chinese; and a recent newspaper cutting on the Swiss town of Meiringen. It was announced that Gary Nolan was producing a website and would be linking it to other Australian societies. Mike Duke has given a talk to The Cambridge Society on "Holmes and Psychiatry" and also an audio interview for SBS on "Poisons in the Holmesian Stories" which is to be transmitted over the Internet sometime in the future. A lively discussion followed on the story for the meeting, *The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet*.

## Doctor Watson's Agony Column



me to believe that there is one other mistress who now commands his attentions. Please help me Doctor. I want to live forever with my husband. How can I make him give his attentions to only me?

Yours sincerely, The Countess,  
C/- General Delivery, Borgo Pass  
Transsylvania.

Dear Countess,  
Thank you for your letter which I found most touching. There is a great deal at stake here and it is important for you to take a look at yourself. I find these matters of the heart need to be brought out into the light of day. Your husband sounds like a reasonable chap, though a little eccentric. I think the two of you ought to get together over a fine drop of red, I rather enjoy a pleasant claret myself. Cook him a lovely dinner, with some taste of garlic. I am sure that given what is at stake, after this he will not be the same man again. Your story, for some reason, seems to remind me of a young patient from America, Buffy I think she called herself. She seemed a nice girl. Let me know how it all progresses. Sincerely, John H. Watson, MD.



# DOCTOR WATSON, DRACULA and THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY

by Arthur Williams

This essay will present the details of a remarkable episode, not I believe previously known to Australian Sherlockians, which will be of interest to them. The evidence concerning this will firstly link Dr. Watson with one of the Royal Australian Navy's greatest heroes and then, in a further link just as bizarre, will show a relationship between both the Doctor and the Naval hero to the Dracula legend.

My investigation into this strange and unknown story began by accident when I bought in a secondhand bookshop a volume entitled *The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook*. Edited by Peter Haining, the book's pages are filled with newspaper and magazine articles, letters, cartoons and advertisements, every one of which has a Holmesian theme. These contents come from the years 1920 to 1970 and thus are a treasure trove of nostalgia for anyone with an interest in the Great Detective.

On one particular page, however, my attention was caught by the review of a play. This review came from the famous English comic magazine *Punch* and was dated 17th October 1923. The drama discussed was *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* by J.E. Harold Terry and Arthur Rose at the Prince's Theatre. Holmes was being played by the brilliant Eille Norwood, whose performance the reviewer stated was "admirable" (not surprisingly since he had just completed a series of 47 films for Stoll Pictures as Holmes).

The audience could not have complained of a lack of action either for the play presented no fewer than 14 criminals out of a total cast of 22! This would not have overwhelmed Norwood, however, for Conan Doyle once said of him, "His wonderful impersonation of Holmes has amazed me." As a piece of theatre the work - based on an interweaving of EMPT and LADY - was very successful and had a long London season.

While all of this was interesting enough, what riveted my attention was the detail that Dr. Watson was played by "Mr H.G. Stoker". By a happy coincidence my other reading interest happens to be Australia's involvement in the First World War and this allowed me to recognise the name instantly. Dr. Watson, in this production, was none other than Henry Gordon Dacre Stoker, one of the Royal Australian Navy's greatest heroes. I recalled having seen references in Naval histories I had read to his taking up an acting career on the London stage upon leaving the Navy.

Subsequent research in all the available Naval histories at my local Council library revealed a number of such references. Thus *The Navy at Gallipoli* has a tiny stamp-sized drawing of Stoker in this role while *Stoker's Submarine* has an anecdote about him in the play (I shall return to this anecdote later). Born in Dublin in 1882 Stoker grew into "a handsome, cheerful and somewhat flamboyant Irishman...who was liked by everyone."<sup>1</sup> He had entered the Royal Navy as a teenage midshipman thus revealing very early in life his talent for the unexpected (his father and several of

<sup>1</sup> Frame and Swinden p.34.





his relatives were doctors). Subsequently he had been accepted into the Submarine Service, later joking that he did this for the extra six shillings a day.

Although this doubled his pay it really was small compensation for serving on these highly unreliable vessels which on a number of occasions were involved in disasters with heavy loss of life. Stoker, however, was renowned among his fellow officers for his love of good horses and beautiful ladies and no doubt managed to spend it all. [Shades of Dr. Watson! – Ed] What everybody else did know was that only the elite of the Royal Navy, in either officers or men, was allowed to enter the ranks of the Submarine Service.

In 1913 the ships of the newly established Royal Australian Navy entered Sydney Harbour for the first time. As part of this fleet the Australian Government had also purchased two submarines and it was as commander of one of these – the AE2 – that Stoker, who had volunteered for the job, came to join the RAN.

On the 25th of April 1915, just as the Anzacs were landing at Gallipoli, the AE2 began a highly dangerous mission to travel (sometimes on the surface and sometimes under it) through the Dardanelles Strait with the object of entering the Sea of Marmara and attacking the ships bringing men and supplies to the battlefield. Eluding both Turkish gunfire and mines as well as the treacherous currents Stoker, with a crew half British and half Australian, did accomplish this. It was an extraordinary feat, not only in that the AE2 was the first submarine to enter the Sea (earlier attempts by the British and French had ended in death and loss) but in its strategic consequences. Once the Turks knew that there was a submarine in the area their battleship, which had been shelling Allied positions very heavily, scuttled back to port. Even more vitally, the Turks were forced to abandon the fast sea route for the transportation of men and supplies and use the much slower overland one, even though the AE2 was sunk some days later. Once one submarine had appeared, the Turks feared others would appear also – as they did.

The actions of Stoker and his crew have always been regarded as among the most daring in the RAN's history. Several of his men were decorated after the War while Stoker himself was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. Frame and Swinden, the Naval historians, question this,<sup>2</sup> pointing out that the two submarine commanders who followed him were both awarded the Victoria Cross. The AE2's crew spent the rest of the War in Turkish prisons. Stoker escaped twice, on one of these occasions being on the run for 18 days. As a consequence he spent weeks in solitary confinement.

On release from prison, Stoker's reputation was so high he was offered command of a cruiser but, to the astonishment of his fellow officers, he declined this opting instead for an acting career. When we remember that he was then in his mid-thirties, with no professional experience at all, the fact that he went on to have a successful stage and film career stretching over three decades certainly reveals that he had considerable natural talent for acting. A film still shown on late night television sometimes is *Brown on Resolution* with a very young John Mills as the sailor armed with a rifle and delaying repairs to a German warship. Stoker appeared in this film as the captain of the doomed British vessel sunk earlier in the film (surely an example of perfect casting!). Stoker had other talents as well - his autobiography *Straws in the Wind* went through several editions while, in later years, he was also a successful theatre manager.

Recalled to the Navy on the outbreak of the Second World War, he was given command of HMS

<sup>2</sup> Ibid p.99.

Minos, the base for operations against the Germans in the North Sea. It was an exhausting command, not only for the responsibility involved, but because the Germans bombed it with great frequency over a period of two years. After the War Stoker resumed his busy theatrical life for a decade before retiring. He died in 1966.

The *Punch* review gives us a glimpse of Stoker's Watson when it says "Mr H.G. Stoker's Watson seemed well done with the right degree of affectionate admiring stupidity". Earlier in the review there is mention of Holmes being "still handicapped by the egregious Watson". As Eille Norwood had also produced this play, in which he starred, he would almost certainly have wished to heighten the brilliance of Holmes by contrasting it to Watson's limited perception.

F. and E. Brenchley tell us an amusing anecdote<sup>3</sup> from the play's rehearsals. Both Holmes and Watson were required to use a periscope to spy on some criminal activity "Eille Norwood took Stoker aside: 'I'd better tell you about periscopes, and how to use them.' Stoker merely sighed."

From the files of the N.S.W. State Library I obtained a copy of the original 1923 *Punch* magazine and so was able to read the review in its entirety, the *Scrapbook's* account having been greatly condensed. The first act was based on LADY and gave Watson a major part to play as does the original story. The second act contained many of the features of EMPT and it was here that Holmes and Watson used a periscope together to spy on Colonel Moran's activities in the empty house opposite. The Colonel's ally is none other than Charles Augustus Milverton – surely a formidable pair of villains! Some contemporary references must have been included in the dialogue for the reviewer says of Milverton that he "drives a Rolls-Royce on blackmail". Stoker had not played Watson in any of Norwood's earlier films and I have not been able to establish whether he ever played the Doctor again.

This Watsonian link with the RAN's finest traditions of heroism is a very worthwhile one to bring out from the shadows of history but, for Sherlockians, the situation then turns from the remarkable to the bizarre. The Prince's Theatre audiences would have been treated to the spectacle of seeing, in the rooms of 221B Baker Street, a Doctor Watson who was a close relative of the creator of Dracula for, as is revealed in the recent Naval history *Stoker's Submarine*, "Stoker's cousin was Bram Stoker."<sup>4</sup> With this particular personal detail added we surely have here a Watson unique in the historical and literary associations he brought with him to the role.

Stoker's Watson appears to have been forgotten elsewhere but he deserves to be remembered, among Australian Sherlockians at least, for his portrayal inevitably causes us to recall the portrayer's own close and vital role in this Nation's most symbolically evocative moment – the landing at Gallipoli.

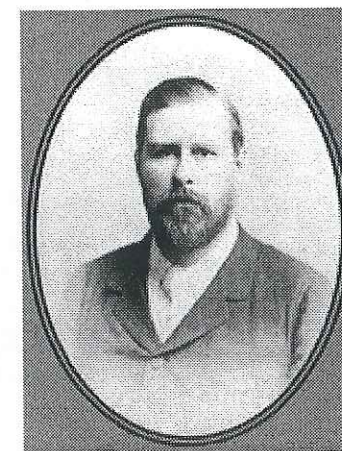
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*Punch* for 17 October 1923.

<sup>3</sup> F. and E. Brenchley, p.173.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.16.



Bram Stoker