

A Sherlockian Toast (posted 2018-1-29)

Treasure of Agra
The Pondicherry Lodgers
January 10, 2015
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Good evening all!

Growing up as a Sherlockian I have — and share with many of you no doubt — a great love of Victoriana. A particular area I'm drawn to are letters and notes. These people were great scribblers. Long-lasting correspondence, telegrams, and short notes ferried across London by messengers.

While communication thrives today through myriad technology, good old-fashioned mail is an endangered species. So I take the opportunity of holiday cards to go nuts, as it's a sort of last bastion of meaningful exchange by mail.

Some holiday greetings go to favorite old professors of mine. Yes, I'm a nerd. When I was a college student abroad in, where else, London, I happened to be a student of Robin Mortimer, who's been the Chief Executive of the Port of London Authority for the past three years.

Robin is one of those favored teachers I send a holiday card to. And the past year of 2015 being a very big celebratory year for me personally getting both my BSI and my MRS (no prize for guessing which of those certificates is hung on my wall) which I think inspired a lot of my recipients to actually write back with congratulations and seasons greeting. From my old prof Robin, I received a very extraordinary reply. It will be of great interest to all of you, but I must ask you to be discreet as the PLA will not be doing the press release and media show on this till the start of February.

Robin sent me a holiday greeting back with this very exciting discovery, to us especially.

“Dear Emily, loved your card, blah blah blah. Hoping to visit New York ... here we go ...

As part of our work to clean up the Thames, we've been doing some sampling and chemical testing of the soil from an area downstream of the Plumstead Marshes. Last week, I was sitting in my office when our lab tech Sally, suddenly came running in, clutching something in her hand. “What is it?” I cried, alarmed. “Look, look what we found in the sample!” She stretched out her hand and I could see a partially cleaned stone. Not just any stone or river rock, but what I would describe as a “brilliantly scintillating blue stone ... of such purity and radiance that it twinkled like an electric point in the dark hollow” of her hand. “That's a jewel!” I practically shouted. Nodding furiously, Sally said “They are more, there are more!”

More hardly begins to do justice to the little horde our team has since recovered from the muck of the river. Stretched over a few miles we've now dredged up 210 sapphires, 61 agates, 170 rubies, 40 carbuncles — including that first stone Sally showed to me, which apparently is an especially rare and valuable anomaly since carbuncles are typically red, who knew?! — and an assortment of beryls, onyxes, cats-eyes, turquoises, 143 diamonds, 97 emeralds, and 300 pearls!

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Based on the number of items we've got compared to the accounts of the business we have from Dr. Watson, and initial tests that confirm the sapphires are from Kashmir and the emeralds from Udaipur, I think what we got on our hand is none other than the Treasure of Agra, found at last since that fateful night when Jonathan Small threw it in the river when he realized escape from Holmes and Watson was impossible.

So maybe we can all look forward to a different but equally wonderful exhibition at the Museum of London in a year or two courtesy of Sherlock and Watson's handiwork? In any case, I for one am thrilled the treasure has at last been found, but happy on a very personal level that its finding was too late to spoil the happiness Dr. John Watson found as a non-fortune hunting husband of Miss Mary Morstan. Friends, to newly rediscovered, treasure of Agra!