

Toast to Martha

By Regina Stinson

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His Last Bow

(Given at an Illustrious Clients of Indianapolis meeting via Zoom.)

As she sat there knitting and petting the cat, Martha may have appeared to be completely harmless, even a bit dense. Von Bork's description of her clearly indicated that was his opinion of the old woman. Her role as Von Bork's servant may have seemed insignificant, as well as her duties to Holmes, which were simple enough. Copy the addresses of any letters Von Bork sent and signal Holmes when the coast was clear. But consider Martha's situation. She had to inspire Von Bork's complete trust while performing her housekeeping duties. Since she was the only servant, those would have been fairly substantial. Meanwhile, Martha was responsible to Holmes who placed her there to gather certain information and to signal him at the proper time. If Von Bork had ever suspected her, the jig would have been up, Holmes' mission would have been foiled and Martha's very life may have been danger, not to mention Holmes'.

We do not know whether Martha had been recommended by Mycroft, but it is highly likely. We also do not know if she had previously worked in espionage. However, the fact that she could knit and that knitters were involved as spies during both world wars, makes that a strong possibility, as well. What we do know is that Martha was specially selected by Holmes to act as both Von Bork's loyal servant and to gather intelligence for Holmes who was clearly working for the British government. Therefore, she also must have been a government employee. Although she appears to be a rather insignificant character in this drama, Martha proved herself to be diligent, clever and reliable, not to mention brave. Holmes said she played her part to admiration. What better endorsement could there be for raising a toast to the dear old ruddy-faced woman in a country cap? To Martha! Hear! Hear!