

**TOAST TO SIMPSON'S IN THE STRAND By Rich Krisciunas 11/19/22 ©
Presented to Ribston Pippins at meeting celebrating 34th anniversary**

The best thing about doing Sherlockian research is climbing down various rabbit holes you find along the way. At the end of *The Dying Detective*, after the police took Mr. Culverton Smith to Scotland Yard, a hungry Sherlock Holmes, who hadn't eaten in three days, told Watson, "When we have finished at the police-station I think that something nutritious at Simpson's would not be out of place."

Today, 124 years later, Simpson's is still there and is known as "Simpson's in The Strand," part of the Savoy Hotel at 100 Strand in Covent Garden not far from Charing Cross station.

Simpson's was mentioned twice in the Canon. In *The Illustrious Client*, Holmes returned with Watson and sat at a small table in the front window where he looked "down at the rushing stream of life in the Strand," and told Watson he had hired Shinwell Johnson to find some "garbage" on Baron Adelbert Gruner.

Originally, the site was an 18th-century meeting place for the Kit-Cat Club, a group of influential writers and politicians that included John Locke, Sir Robert Walpole and the Duke of Somerset. Kit-Cats was what its owner, pie-maker, Christopher Catt, called his mutton pies.

In 1828, Samuel Reiss opened a smoking room and coffeehouse there called the Grand Cigar Divan, and began hosting chess matches between rival London coffee houses. In 1848, the owner teamed up with caterer John Simpson to add a restaurant and it became a popular dining spot and quickly became recognized as the home of British chess. Charles Dickens, William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli were all regulars.

A signature part of the Simpson's dining experience has been the practice of wheeling hefty, silver trolleys of roasted Scottish beef and Welsh lamb in silver domes around the dining hall, so that meats are carved tableside - a practice that started as a way to avoid interrupting chess players mid-match. This pioneering approach remains central to the Simpson's experience today. I wonder if Josiah Amberley, the retired colourman, or Dr. Raymond Ernest ever went there to watch chess tournaments in 1898.

In 1904, six years into the Savoy Hotel's ownership, the restaurant was refurbished and the rebranded Simpson's in the Strand, Grand Divan Tavern finally permitted men and women to share the same room. In 1974, it was one of only nine restaurants in London to be the first recipients of a Michelin Star.

It is fitting that I am telling you this history as part of a toast because the toasts of the Kit-Kat Club were famous at the time. A famous characteristic of the Kit-Kat was its toasting-glasses, used for drinking to the health of the reigning beauties of the day; verses in their praise were engraved on the glasses. So please raise your glasses in honor of the ladies in the room as we toast Simpson's In The Strand.