

Green Bags
by Ross E. Davies
Sherlockians of Baltimore
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Greg Ruby has invited me to offer an investiture toast at our meeting today. My SOB investiture is "The Green Bag."

In the Grand Game that is Sherlockian scholarship, the conventional standard of proof is that what I infer from the words and context of the Canon can be true until it is proven false.

A recent search of the Canon reveals 44 references to bags. One reference is to a brown bag. Five references are to black bags. Thirty-eight references are to bags without mention of color. Those 38 are green.

Why? Because green bags had special significance in 19th-century British culture.

First, there was the shared cultural memory of the infamous green bags filled with evidence that were presented to Parliament in June 1820 during King Charles IV's campaign for a divorce from Queen Caroline.

Second, there was the long tradition of lawyers carrying their papers in green bags — indeed, the practice was so common in the 18th and 19th centuries that lawyers were often referred to as "gentlemen of the green bag," or simply "green bags."

So, green bags were commonly associated with intrigue and controversy, and so the subtle reinforcement of an atmosphere of intrigue and controversy within the stories in the Canon was readily reinforced by the frequent appearance of green bags.

And so I ask that you raise your glass to all the green bags in the Canon, may they forever prompt controversy and intrigue!