

Footprints on Film

by
Howard Ostrom

Part One

"But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did—some little distance off, but fresh and clear."

"Footprints?"

"Footprints."

"A man's or a woman's?"

Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered:

"Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"¹



Given the fact that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel "The Hound of the Baskervilles" is, more often than not, rated highly in polls of the 100 greatest novels of all time, and that the leading character of that novel, Sherlock Holmes, has appeared in more film, TV, radio, stage, and internet adaptations than any other literary character in history, I'm thinking it might be fun to explore the many (and I mean MANY!) filmed adaptations of "The Hound of the Baskervilles".

If you have read my "Silent Sherlock" series of essays on Sherlock Holmes in silent films you will be familiar with the fact that 1914 gave us the first two films from the series of seven related stories known as "Der Hund von Baskerville" series. 1915 would give us three through six, and 1916 the

¹ Doyle, A. Conan, "Hound of the Baskervilles" chapter 2 (1902).

seventh and final of the series. There is no Dr. Watson in this series. Due to the numerous different foreign language names for this German "Hound of the Baskervilles" film series, I will go with the English titles to simplify things a bit.

1914 - "The Hound of the Baskervilles"- Alwin Neuss as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).



Alwin Neuss

1914 - "The Isolated House"- Alwin Neuss as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).

1915 - "How the Hound of the Baskervilles Returned"- Alwin Neuss as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).

1915 - "The Uncanny Room"- Alwin Neuss as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).

1915 - "The Dark Castle"- Eugen Berg as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).



Eugen Berg

1915 - "Dr. MacDonald's Sanitarium"- Erich Kaiser-Titz as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).

1916 - "The House Without Any Windows"- Erich Kaiser-Titz as Sherlock Holmes. Vitascope Pictures (Germany).




Erich Kaiser-Titz

Below is an ad I've found for this series.

1400 THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD March 6, 1915

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

A four part sensational drama adapted from the story by CONAN DOYLE. 1-3-6 sheet posters.



THEN THE ICEMAN CAME
A one reel American drama especially made to cure chronic grouches. 1 sheet posters.

A TRIP TO MADEIRA
A colored scenic combined with

WILD BIRDS
(SCOTLAND) A colored educational. 1 sheet posters.

THE PATHÉ EXCHANGE INC.
25 WEST 45TH STREET
NEW YORK

Below are reviews and plot summaries from the series.

"The Hound of the Baskervilles" - Film Version of Sir A. Conan Doyle's Novel made by Pathe Freres Has Interesting Side. Reviewed by M. I. MacDonald

"It would be impossible to base a film production on any of the sensational works of the novelist A. Conan Doyle, without it being in some measure entertaining; nor can the excitement prevalent in the adventures of the detective Sherlock Holmes fail to thrill the average human being to the very marrow of his bones. In choosing "The Hound of the Baskervilles" Pathe Freres can have made no mistake, for even though the film version of the story may once in a while miss a cog, or so far presume upon the author's rights as to interpolate a scene or situation of which the original story is not guilty, the production has evidently been robbed of very little if any of its weirdly thinning characteristics. The filming of the story on the continent, presumably in Germany, interferes to some extent with the English atmosphere intended to be portrayed. This is perhaps as noticeable in the mannerisms of some of the players as in any other way. According to the film story Sir Henry Baskerville, upon the death of his uncle, whose estate he inherits, comes to Baskerville and falls a prey to the intrigues of Stapleton the caretaker of Baskerville and who, it later divulges, is the disgraced nephew of the deceased Sir Charles Baskerville seeking to gain possession of the estate. He it is who keeps the Great Dane in concealment, rumors of which have terrified the neighborhood; and he it is that intercepts the letter of Sir Henry to Sherlock Holmes, impersonating the famous detective himself. Later, however, the real Sherlock Holmes appears on the scene, and the events which occur when the great detective commences his investigation of Baskerville and its surroundings are as sensationally interesting as anyone would care to see. There is a marked similarity between the men playing Stapleton and Sherlock Holmes; the difference between them is just enough to explode the idea one man may be doubling on the parts. The production is an acceptable one, and where a spectator is unfamiliar with the story we cannot conceive that there could be any adverse criticism."²

"The Hound of the Baskervilles" - Feature Film Stories - "A drama adopted from the novel of the famous author, Sir A. Conan Doyle - Four parts; All who have read the celebrated novel remember the Great Dane that terrified the superstitious community surrounding the home of the Earl of Baskerville. The death of Sir Charles of Baskerville was connected by the tenantry with

² "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 23 Jan. - Mar. 1915 pg. 1302

the reported appearance of the dreaded hound. Subsequent to the Earl's death, his nephew, Henry, fell heir to the estate. He was notified by the attorney to come to Baskerville but received a warning from another source to remain away. Despite the warning, Sir Henry goes to the manor, where he meets Mr. Stapleton, the caretaker. He also learns of his Uncle's animosity against Roger, another nephew who was disinherited. Following his coming, Sir Henry soon has cause to fear the hound. He sends an urgent call to Sherlock Holmes, a great detective. The call is intercepted by Stapleton, who impersonates Holmes. The real Holmes learns of the interloper and goes to Baskerville to investigate. A series of remarkable and terrifying events follow, which almost result in the death of Holmes as well as the Earl and the entire household. Even Miss Lyons, Sir Henry's charming neighbor, nearly becomes a victim of the evil genius who is plotting the ruin of Baskerville. After a harrowing experience, the detective succeeds in killing the monstrous hound. Holmes doubles his efforts to unravel the dreadful mystery and enlists the aid of Barrymore, a discharged servant. Barrymore informs Holmes that Stapleton is the author of all the devilry. The detective lays a trap for Stapleton, who unwittingly falls into it. After a terrific struggle he is overcome by Holmes and Barrymore. Not until his confessions it is discovered that Stapleton is in reality the disgraced nephew, Roger, who for revenge, planned the destruction of Sir Henry in a desperate endeavor to gain control of the Baskerville estate."³

"The Isolated House" - Stories of the Films - "Under the assumed name of Stapleton, Roger Baskerville is condemned to death for being instrumental in the death of a relative and probable heir to the Baskerville estates. After his plea of clemency is denied, he overpowers his keeper and escapes, taking up residence near Baskerville Castle, and announcing himself to Lord and Lady Baskerville as Loris Collamore, a new neighbor. The next day he succeeds in inveigling them into a submersible house which he has built in a nearby lake, and making them prisoners. He then goes to the castle and announces to the servants that he is a relative of Lord Henry and has come to take charge of his affairs. The servants become suspicious of the intruder, and, being mystified at the strange disappearance of their master and mistress, seek the aid of Sherlock Holmes, who had been mainly instrumental in ensuring the conviction of Roger. The greg detective takes up the case and in the course of his investigations is locked in a secret closet in the castle by the criminal, who has recognized him. Armed with a pocket wireless outfit, Holmes calls an assistant and is quickly released. Later, Holmes and his assistant, see the submersible house and manager to get inside, where they learn that the Baskervilles are prisoners. When Roger sees that his nefarious

³ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 23 Jan. - Mar. 1915 pg. 1526

scheme has been frustrated, he breaks the windows, thus allowing the water to enter, but in the struggle which follows Holmes reaches the raising mechanism and the house slowly rises out of the lake. The prisoners are freed and Roger is captured. But as they leave the house he breaks away from Holmes and again enters his stronghold, sinking the house and disappearing from sight. A terrific explosion tells those on the shore that the villain has used one of the bombs, that he had hidden within, thus ending his career of crime."⁴

Germany in 1915 would also give us the first parody film of "The Hound of the Baskervilles".

1915 - "Der Floh von Baskerville" or, "The Flea of the Baskervilles" - Actors unknown. Luna Films (Germany).

Starting in 1921 Stoll pictures of Great Britain would release a series of 45 short and 2 feature Sherlock Holmes films starring Eille Norwood as Sherlock Holmes. Naturally, "Hound of the Baskervilles" was the first feature.

1921 - "The Hound of the Baskervilles", Eille Norwood as Sherlock Holmes and Hubert Willis as Dr. Watson. Stoll Pictures (U.K.).



⁴ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 24 Apr. - Jun. 1915 pg. 904

Real Atmosphere of Mystery in Sherlock Holmes Story

"THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES"

Film Booking Offices

DIRECTOR Maurice Elvey
AUTHOR Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
SCENARIO BY Not credited
CAMERAMAN Not credited
AS A WHOLE A perfectly fine number for those who like to solve riddles or favor mystery stories in their film entertainment
STORY A Sherlock Holmes adventure in which the great detective's ability to solve mysteries has to be taken mostly for granted
DIRECTION Has concentrated upon telling the story rather than in production values; some good effects
PHOTOGRAPHY All right
LIGHTINGS Usually good; occasionally too dark
PLAYERS The men do good work but the girl, Betty Campbell, is poor; Eille Norwood not given much prominence as Holmes; others Hubert Willis, Rex McDougal, Lewis Gilbert and Frederick Raynham, who makes a good deal of small role of butler
EXTERIORS Particularly appropriate
INTERIORS Good
DETAIL Ample
CHARACTER OF STORY Mystery in deaths of members of certain family, all of which follow the strange appearance of a dog
LENGTH OF PRODUCTION 5,382 feet

It seems rather strange that a story which exploits the remarkable ability of Sherlock Holmes to fathom mysteries should expose so little of the actual work of the detective. Or perhaps it is just the way in which it is told here that keeps Holmes' method of solving the mystery so much of a secret. At any rate you are asked to take his genius very much for granted while his assistant looks around for clues.

The picture, of English make, offers a perfectly good entertainment for those who like deep mystery

stories with the plot thickening with every foot of film that is unwound, the thrills sometimes uncanny and the characters in constant danger of death. It has been carefully developed and quite coherently, despite the complex situations. But, in order to keep it continually comprehensive, many subtitles have been found necessary, plus the written report of the detective's assistant which is shown to the spectator and cleverly recounts events that have preceded it. In this way incidents, perhaps not clear at the time they occur, are fully explained, leaving no doubt in your mind. The only objection is that it keeps you busy reading. And one criticism that is appropriate right here, and applies to many American films as well, is that it is very difficult to read some of the hand written communications. A legible hand writing should be used and the script reproduced large enough to be read with ease.

Director Elvey has obviously given the best of his effort to telling the story and in that respect he has succeeded splendidly. There are a lot of individually good touches and the manner in which he handles the more uncanny bits shows good restraint. There was plenty of room for exaggeration and gruesome touches but they have been passed by. The ending is a trifle too abrupt.

The acting is not especially noteworthy, although everyone fulfills requirements and is well suited to the part. Eille Norwood looks the part of Holmes but has little to do. The performance that seems to stand out most is contributed by Frederick Raynham, as the butler, Osborne. Betty Campbell is a poor choice as leading woman.

Story: Several masters of the Baskerville estate had died suddenly of heart disease, each death following the mysterious appearance of a hound, seen at midnight on the estate. The new master puts the matter before Sherlock Holmes who conducts a secret investigation arriving at the solution that a distant relative, in hope of eventually inheriting the estate, had caused the deaths.

Use the Author's Name and Let Them Know What It's About

Box Office Analysis for the Exhibitor

You know pretty well just what a picture of this type can do for you because you also know whether or not your patrons like mystery stories. If they do, you couldn't give them one that will set them guessing any more than "The Hound of the Baskervilles" will. In case they may not know it, be sure to say it is one of Sir Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes adventures.

Because of the recent publicity which Doyle received for his theories regarding spiritualism, and because he is noted as the author of the famous detective stories, give his name plenty of prominence and in case the title may not be definite enough, play it up with explanatory catchlines relative to the dog who appeared at midnight and following each appearance a death occurred. If they want detective stories, don't miss it.



Hubert Willis & Eille Norwood

Review

"The Hound of The Baskervilles" - "An English-made film built around one of A. Conan Doyle's best Sherlock Holmes tales. Remember the story of the mysterious deaths and the weird dog flashing fires on the moors? There is considerable suspense although the thing is maladroitly told. Dr. Watson has to write fearfully long letters to Holmes to get the plot along."⁵

The final attempt at "Hound of the Baskervilles" during the silent film era would come from the same country as the first HOUN silent film - Germany.

1929 - "Der Hund von Baskerville" or, "Hound of the Baskervilles" - Carlyle Blackwell Sr. (1884 - 1955) as Sherlock Holmes and George Seroff as Dr. Watson. Erda-Film GmbH. (Germany)



Carlyle Blackwell Sr.



George Seroff & Carlyle Blackwell Sr.

⁵ Photoplay Vol. 22 Jul - Dec. 1922 pg. 594

The first effort for “Hound of the Baskervilles” in the ‘talkies era’ would come in the year 1931.

1931 - “The Hound of the Baskervilles”, Robert Rendel as Sherlock Holmes and Frederick Lloyd as Dr. Watson. Gainsborough Pictures (U.K.).



Robert Rendel

“The Hound of the Baskervilles is a British crime film released in 1932 , directed by Gareth Gundrey and based on the novel The Hound of the Baskervilles (1902) by Arthur Conan Doyle. The screenplay was adapted by Edgar Wallace. Sherlock Holmes is performed by Robert Rendel and Dr Watson by Frederick Lloyd . The company Gainsborough Pictures produced the film with a budget of £ 25,000.”⁶

“For many years, it was believed that only the (silent) picture negative of this movie still existed. However, in 1991, a complete set of negatives and soundtracks were donated to the British Film Institute (BFI) by the Rank Corporation. As such, the film now survives intact (and with sound) in the BFI archives. Members of the general public are at liberty to view the film by special appointment at the BFI in London (via the BFI's public access programme).”⁷

⁶ [http://fr.cyclopaedia.net/wiki/The-Hound-of-the-Baskervilles-\(film,-1932\)](http://fr.cyclopaedia.net/wiki/The-Hound-of-the-Baskervilles-(film,-1932))

⁷ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hound_of_the_Baskervilles_\(1932_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hound_of_the_Baskervilles_(1932_film))

1937 - "Der Hund von Baskerville", Bruno Guttner as Sherlock Holmes and Fritz Odemar as Dr. Watson. Ondra-Lamac Films. (Germany).



Bruno Guttner

"Der Hund von Baskerville" is the first German sound film for a Sherlock Holmes detective story. It was one of two films found in Adolf Hitler's bunker by the Allies in 1945.

You can watch a trailer of this classic film at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4F1QLRNF2s>

1937 - "Murder at the Baskervilles" (U.S.), or "Silver Blaze", Arthur Wontner as Sherlock Holmes and Ian Fleming as Dr. Watson. Twickenham Films. (U.K.).



Why was this Arthur Wontner, Holmes film, renamed “Murder at the Baskervilles” in it’s U.S. release? Is it ‘hoof prints’ or ‘footprints of a gigantic hound’, even Watson would know the difference. Oh, I get it, it has Sir Henry Baskerville! “Sherlock Holmes takes a vacation and visits his old friend Sir Henry Baskerville. His vacation ends when he suddenly finds himself in the middle of a double-murder mystery.”⁸



Arthur Wontner & Ian Fleming

You can watch this classic film at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnyV6Ad4RgA>



⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnyV6Ad4RgA>

1939 - “The Hound of the Baskervilles”, Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson. Twentieth Century Pictures. (U.S.)

“It is the best-known cinematic adaptation of the book, and is often regarded as one of its better film versions. The film stars Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes, Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson and Richard Greene as Henry Baskerville. Because the studio apparently had no idea that the film would be such a hit, and that Rathbone and Bruce would make many more Sherlock Holmes films and be forever linked with Holmes and Watson, top billing went to Richard Greene, who was the film's romantic lead. Rathbone was billed second. Wendy Barrie, who played Beryl Stapleton, the woman with whom Greene falls in love, received third billing, and Nigel Bruce, the film's Dr. Watson, was billed fourth. In all their other Holmes films, Rathbone and Bruce would receive first and second billing respectively.”⁹



Basil Rathbone & Nigel Bruce

You can watch this classic film at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2re3oDtG7g>

⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2re3oDtG7g>

End Part One