

Silent Sherlock Sherlock Holmes and the Silent Film Era

by

Howard Ostrom

Part Ten (1914)

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's first published work, "A Study in Scarlet", would find its first screen adaptation, not once but twice, in the year 1914. A couple of other very significant but little known Sherlock Holmes film firsts would also occur in 1914. The first animated Sherlock Holmes film, and the first all black cast Sherlock Holmes film, featuring a black Sherlock Holmes, appeared, and on the same reel!

In 1914, Conan Doyle authorized the silent film "A Study in Scarlet" to be produced in the U.K. by film-maker George B. Samuelson. Sherlock Holmes was played by James Braginton, an accountant who had never before (and never after) worked as an actor. He was hired for his resemblance to Holmes as presented in the sketches originally published with the story. There was no Dr. Watson in the film. Due to the success of this film, or to not wanting to be outdone, a second U.S. version was produced that same year by Francis Ford. Conan Doyle sold the rights of this story to Beeton's magazine and never made a penny out of the novel again; this is why he did not interfere when the Francis Ford version of "A Study In Scarlet" was filmed. Francis Ford's younger brother, John Ford, later to become one of America's greatest movie directors, played Dr. Watson. Unfortunately, both films are lost.



1914 - "A Study In Scarlet" - James Bragington, as Sherlock Holmes, No Watson in the film. Samuelson Film Mfg.



1914 - "A Study In Scarlet" - Francis Ford, as Sherlock Holmes and Jack (John) Ford as Dr. Watson. Gold Seal Films.

THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD 1627



A wonderful detective story that's distinctly different

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

A Study in Scarlet

By Sir A. Conan Doyle

Writer of the World's Most Fascinating Detective Stories

Gold Seal-Universal. 2 reels. Released Dec. 29th, 1914—featuring that popular Universal Star, Francis Ford. This is first of a series of fascinating, mysterious detective stories by the noted author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in which Sir Arthur shows himself at his best. It is a story of the supreme cleverness of Sherlock Holmes in which is unraveled a tale of human suffering and in which an innocent man nearly suffers for the crime of the guilty one. The masterful style in which this absorbing plot is told in pictures will hold your audience spell-bound. It is a picture with a punch, action, dramatic intensity, romance and cleverness. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fame as a writer of absorbing detective stories is world wide. It's a privilege to be able to book such a production. Book it NOW. 1-3-6 sheet posters. Advertise it in a big way. You're bound to play to capacity crowds with this big 2 reeler. Wire or write your Exchange immediately.



Universal Film Manufacturing Co.
Carl Laemmle, President
Largest Manufacturers of Films in the Universe
1600 Broadway New York

"A Study in Scarlet" - (Gold Seal) - (two parts) - Dec 29 - Independent Film Stories - "This is the first of the Sherlock Holmes' stories by the famous English author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes, and his friend Dr. Watson, receives an invitation from Mr. Gregson, of Scotland Yard, to assist in unraveling a murder mystery. Holmes makes a careful study of the case and as result of his ingenious deductions rounds up the murderer, one Jefferson Hope, a cabman. The man confesses his guilt and tells his life story and of the vengeance of the many wrongs he has suffered at the hands of the deadman in the years gone by. Before the prisoner comes to trial he dies from heart failure. This is another victory for Holmes and his wonderful deductive methods, as the officers of Scotland Yard had all but fastened the quilt upon another and an innocent person."¹

1914 - "The Tale of a Chicken" - Maha Raja as Sherlock Jackson Holmes. Lubin Manufacturing Company

1914 - "Another Tale" - Featuring Sherlock Bug. Lubin Manufacturing Company

The comedy film, "The Tale of a Chicken", released by Lubin Manufacturing Company, on April 28th, 1914, is probably the true first all-black Sherlock Holmes film. Not only does it hold that distinction, but the cartoon sharing the reel with it, "Another Tale" is probably the first animated appearance of a Holmes character on film. "Another Tale" precedes the animated "The Adventures of Mr. Nobody Holmes" (1916), the earliest animated Holmes on record by two years. "The Tale of a Chicken" precedes Ebony Film's "A Black Sherlock Holmes", previously regarded as possibly the first all-black Sherlock Holmes film by four years.

Part of Sherlock Jackson Holmes is credited to Maja Raja (probably a name used by actors who didn't want their real name associated with the particular production).

Here are the plot summaries and reviews for the films. Be warned the plot description and reviews sound quite racist from today's perspective.

"Another Tale" - (Lubin) - April 28 - "Sam Bug & Raskus Bug are suitors for Mandy Bug. Her intentions are strong for Sam, so she gives Raskus the 'cold shoulder'. Raskus Bug's blood is aroused and he loses no time in telling his troubles to his gang, the leader being no other than "Gyp the Bug." They cook up a scheme whereby they kill a silkworm which is very much against

¹ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 22 Oct. - Dec. 1914 pgs. 1892/1894

the law in Bugland. They put the silkworm in the rain barrel near Sam Bug's sweetheart's home, then they get a Bug cop and Sam Bug is arrested. Mandy knows it is the work of the gang and gets Sherlock Bug, the great detective, who gets on the trail, traps the gang by blowing up the gang's den, puts them all in jail and Sam Bug is released."²

"The Tale of a Chicken" - (Lubin) - April 28 - Sam Johnson & Raskus Hudson are suitors for the hand of Mandy Jones, but Mandy's intentions are strong towards Sam. When Mandy gives Raskus the 'cold shoulder' his negro blood is aroused. Raskus loses no time in telling his troubles to his gang. They decide to cook up a scheme whereby they steal a chicken and hide it in Sam's house. They also put some feathers in Sam's pocket. They then inform the owner of the chicken. He gets a policeman and has Sam arrested. The chicken is produced in the courtroom and the feathers are found in Sam's pocket. Sam is thrown into jail, much to the delight of Raskus and his gang. But Mandy, knowing Sam's innocence, presses into service the great detective of international fame, Sherlock Jackson Holmes. Sherlock finds a trail of chicken feathers and in the course of a couple of hours he traps the gang in their den. He marches them to the court, where they are thrown into a dungeon and Sam is then released. Sherlock receives his reward a smile from Mandy."³

The reviews of these two films are not very nice, a sign of the times perhaps? Here they are:

"Another Tale" - "On the same reel with 'A Tale of a Chicken'. An animated cartoon of 'Bugdom'. Senseless."⁴

"A Tale of a Chicken" - "A photoplay that should be captioned 'A Tail of a Chicken'. This is a burlesque of "Sherlock Holmes", and intended to be "cute," evidently. If the cruel abuse of a speckled hen can be construed as a comedy then this misnomer is funny. The actors are colored individuals."⁵

² "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 568/570

³ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 568/570

⁴ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 968

⁵ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg 968

1914 - "Harry's Waterloo" - Harry Benham as Sherlock Holmes.
 Thanouser Film Co.

HARRY BENHAM NO VILLAIN.

YOU can't make a villain out of Harry Benham either. Not even in feature productions. Thanouser actors who had had heroic and generally pleasant "leads" for years in the Thanouser regular releases have had to appear in villainous roles in the "Big" productions—there were so many parts to be filled. James Crum, ever cast as "nice" parts, appeared in a mean one in "Frou Frou," and William Russell, another "always" hero, did a villain in "Moths." But Benham has been exempt so far. In "Moths" he was the long suffering Curran, who in the end won the persecuted Maude Pealy. Even in "Robin Hood" they let him play handsome care-free Alana-Dele and do nothing but make love, not to mention the girl again. And, luck consoling with him, he is thrust into "Frou Frou" as the gallant and triumphant Ferris. Indeed, Benham is no villain in the play casts.

But who wants to be a villain—even a good villain? Handsome Harry is not to be blamed for misstepping the "villain" parts if he can. It gets an actor nothing to be a good villain, for the better the "villain" the less is his pull with the mature girls and the fewer are his "smash" notes. Without "smash" notes how can an actor exist? What excuse has he for asking a raise in salary?

So, whatever Handsome Harry Benham may be in real life, he is no villain in the pictures.



Harry Benham.

ALONG THE RIASTO
 with PHIL M. DALY

EVERY ONCE in a while we meet an old-timer in this film biz who sighs longingly for the good old days when pictures were pictures.....film actors acted instead of talked.....and the studios turned out human stories with REALISM.....not these artificial monstrosities they make nowadays.....and we kid him along and agree with everything he says.....and say: you're right, old-timer.....remember that Thanouser photoplay called "Harry's Waterloo".....released in 1914—15 years ago.....oh, there was a picture, as you say.....a picture as was a picture.....a human story with REALISM.....Harry Benham was the star.....he was also the heroine.....and he also played the part of Pa, the heroine's daddy.....also he doubled for Sherlock, the sleuth.....yzzzzz, Harry was the entire cast.....and woot Realism!.....Harry would walk off the set as the hero.....the audience would sit patiently for a half minute staring at an empty room.....then Harry would come dancing in coyly as Mary, the heroine.....Mary would go out.....the audience would wait another half minute blinking at the deserted room.....and Harry would stagger in as Pa, the daddy of Mary, all hopped up on pre-war stuff.....then Pa exits.....the audience waits breathlessly as the flicker flickers on the deserted scene.....and then Harry dashes in as Sherlock, the sleuth.....and the climax was a wow.....they showed a series of close-ups of Harry.....first as Mary.....he bows to the audience, takes off his wig, and appears as the hero.....he adjusts side-whiskers and, presto, he's Pa.....after which he snags into his Sherlock disguise.....tearing this off, he appears laughingly as plain Harry Benham.....the audience gasps with amusement.....stunned, thrilled.....woot REALISM, they murmur, as they scramble out.....and about this time Old-Timer gives us a dirty look, picks up his hat, and stumbles out, too.....yesh, we're an old-timer, too.....his not so old that we can't keep up with the parade of an Advancing Industry.....

Who knew Handsome Harry Benham played Sherlock Holmes more than the one time in "The Sign of Four" in 1913? According to above article from "The Film Daily" Page 7, November 24, 1930, he also played Holmes in the 1914 Thanouser photoplay "Harry's Waterloo", a film in which he played all nine parts!

"The Intermission"

Here are a potpourri of articles and fan letters from movie magazines of 1914 with Sherlock Holmes mentions in them.

The Photoplaywright column - Adaptions - "This seems to be the week to explain to several different inquirers that if John Johnson prints a book and copyrights it, it is his advertisement to the world that he expects to be protected from thieves and that to take John Johnson's story and try and sell it is just as much stealing as taking the eggs from under John Johnson's hens. Just as a variant, Arthur Leeds sends a letter in which an "expert" adviser tells a lady she can dramatize the Sherlock Holmes stories. Sure she can, but if she tries to sell them she will get in trouble."⁶

⁶ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 19 Jan. - Mar. 1914 pg. 1229

The Photoplaywright column - Inquiries - In response to an inquiry that would take some investigation to answer - the response given is - "The Answers Man aims to be a compendium of useful information, but has no inspirations to be a Sherlock Holmes. Your question so clearly indicates a desire to do a little detective work that we must refer you to the company."⁷

Exhibitors News -Cincinnati - "A mystery of the real Sherlock Holmes sort was uncovered during the progress of the work of remodeling the old Gayety theater... missing valuables found in walls."⁸

"Please Take Your Seats for the Rest of the Programme"

1914 - "A Riot in Rubeville"- Sydney De Gray (1866 - 1941) as alias Sherlock Holmes. Majestic Film Co.



"A Riot in Rubeville" - Independent film Stories - "A 'Melodrama' company is billed for a one night stand in a tanktown in a lurid production entitled "Lizzie The Poor Working Girl." The picture of the 'heavy' in make-up, unfortunately resembles that of a horse thief and wife beater in the vicinity, for whose capture there has been a great reward offered. A village rube with Sherlock Holmes instincts, discovers the similarity, and makes his reevaluations to a few choice cronies, urging secrecy. The natural result is a town agog with excitement." What occurs from hear out is a mob scene at the show with Henry the innocent look-a-like almost hung, only to be rescued by his wife, who pulls off his fake mustache and vouches that he is not a wife-beater."⁹

⁷ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 19 Jan. - Mar. 1914 pg. 1675

⁸ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 22 Oct. - Dec. 1914 pg. 1549

⁹ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 19 Jan. - Mar. 1914 pg. 598

1914 - "Die unheilbringende Perle" or, "The Mystery of the Fatal Pearl and the Sequel" - Actors unknown. Continental Kunstfilm GmbH (Germany).

"The Mystery of the Fatal Pearl" - Review by George Blaisdell - Is a story about two men who steal a 'holy pearl' from an idol in India, and the ensuing travels of the gem. A line used by the reviewer in the review is, "... We are deeply in doubt as to the situation of affairs --- it is one that would give occasion for the consumption of many pipefuls of real strong tobacco on the part of a most competent Sherlock Holmes." This comment refers to the ending of part one of the movie which leaves the audience guessing as to who has the stone."¹⁰

1914 - "Stuart Webbs: Die geheimnisvolle Villa" or, "The Black Triangle"- Ernst Reicher (1885 - 1936) as Stuart Webbs. Continental Kunstfilm GmbH (Germany).

"The Black Triangle" - reviewed by W. Stephen Bush - "... it is high above the average detective story. The problem which the detective has to solve in this feature is worthy of the best efforts of Sherlock Holmes at his best. ... Webb, the detective, is a man of scientific deductions. He discovers by a microscopic test that one of the band wears a grey wig. The next moment Webb gets out his new revolver, which is loaded with ether, and calmly puts the villain under anaesthetics..."¹¹

1914 - "The Great Diamond Robbery"- Wallace Eddinger (1881 - 1929) as Dick Brummage. Playgoers Film Co.

"The Great Diamond Robbery" - Manufacturer's Advance Notes - Daniel V. Arthur Comes In - among his credits is stage production of "Sherlock Holmes. His first film will be "The Great Diamond Robbery. Arthur's first production for Playgoer's Film Company is described as such - "...'The Great Diamond Robbery' is one of the few really immortal melodramas, and universally ranked as a more thrilling and exceptional work than any of the 'Sherlock Holmes' stories. ..." ¹²

¹⁰ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 789

¹¹ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 655

¹² "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 19 Jan. - Mar. 1914 pg. 1251

1914 - "Sherlock Bonehead"- Lloyd Hamilton (1891 - 1935) as Sherlock Bonehead (Chief of Detectives of Rottenport). Kalem Film Co.



"Sherlock Bonehead" Kalem Pictures (1914) Director Marshal Neilan, began his career as a juvenile actor in William Gillette's stage play "Sherlock Holmes."¹³

"Sherlock Bonehead" - Kalem Company Ad - A Ruth Roland - Marshal Neilan Comedy - "The effort of this comedy detective to catch a smuggler is a scream. The chase across brings this to a rip-roaring finish."¹⁴

"Sherlock Bonehead" - Independent Film Stories column - "Chief of Police Ivorytop, and Chief of Detectives Sherlock Bonehead, of Rottenport, fall in love with Helen, a girl from the city. Ivorytop and Bonehead receive a visit from Bert Smith, Secret Service Agent, who informs them that \$1,000 is offered for the capture of Captain Kidd, a smuggler. Determined to secure the reward, Ivorytop and Bonehead go on the trail. The two work independently. seeing a suspicious character sneaking up the mountainside,

¹³ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 20 Apr. - Jun. 1914 pg. 1118

¹⁴ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 21 Jul. - Sep. 1914 pg. 806

Bonehead and Ivorytop follow. Neither suspects that their quarry is Bert in disguise. The chief and the sleuth get into a fight, during which Bert disappears. Accompanied by the entire police force, the two take up the trail again the following day. They see Bert, still in disguise, chasing another man. This individual leaps into a rowboat containing Helen and compels the girl to row the boat to the other side of the stream. Leaping into another boat, Ivorytop, Bonehead and the police force take up pursuit. Mere landlubbers, they experienced fifty-seven varieties of trouble, finally upsetting the craft. After floundering about in the stream, the officers swim to shore and get another boat. Helen rows her captor to the shore. When the man turns his back for a moment the girl strikes him on the head with the oar, rendering him unconscious. At this moment Bert runs up. Ivorytop and Bonehead arrive upon the scene in time to see Bert, who removes his disguise, snap the bracelets on the unconscious man's wrists. The rivals learn with dismay that Bert is Helen's sweetheart. But their anguish is deepened when they learn that the handcuffed individual is none other than Captain Kidd, and that the reward goes to Helen and the government detective."¹⁵

End of Part Ten
1914 Continues in Part Eleven

¹⁵ "The Moving Picture World" magazine Vol. 21 Jul. - Sep. 1914 pg. 998

