

Silent Sherlock

Sherlock Holmes and the Silent Film Era

by

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Part Twenty (1925 - 1930)

The Final Countdown

With the 'talkies' on the doorstep, we would only have a sparse sprinkling of Sherlock Holmes silent films for the years (1925 - 1930). It is however, an atypical assortment of films, which includes a Laurel without a Hardy, and a Laurel with Hardy, marionettes, Felix the Cat, and a fellow who would much rather be in Philadelphia. So to conclude this series of essays on silent Sherlocks let's list the who, what, where, and whens for the end of the Silent Sherlock films era.

(1925)

1925 - "Sherlock Sleuth", Arthur Stone (1883 - 1940) as Cyril Fromage, Holmes as house detective. Hal Roach Studios.



"Sherlock Sleuth" - "Arthur Stone, all but forgotten today, stars as Cyril Fromage, the house detective of the Hotel Omigosh. The lovely Martha Sleeper (Pass The Gravy) is his sweetheart, the hotel switchboard operator

with Noah Young on board as the house manager. It seems a dastardly thief, "The Weasel" is on the loose in the hotel, assisted by a sultry vamp. The action that follows, and there is plenty of it, concerns Cyril's efforts to catch the thief. Plenty of hilarious gags along the way; a favorite involved Miss Sleeper taking a call from an irate lodger, so hot that it makes the switchboard steam. Taking advantage of the situation, she pulls out the offending plug and uses it to curl her bangs. The MGM lion even puts in a guest appearance."¹

1925 - "The Sleuth", Stan Laurel (1890 - 1965) as Webster Dingle. Joe Rock Comedies.



"The Sleuth" - Webster Dingle (Stan Laurel) is a detective who essentially relies on an assortment of different costumes to successfully complete his investigations.

¹ Paxson, Jenny http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0415270/plotsummary?ref_=tt_ov_pl

1925 - "The Sage Brush Sherlock", Art Acord (1890 - 1931) as Steve Caldwell. Universal Studios.



"The Sage Brush Sherlock," from L. V. Jefferson's "Horse Sense," is to be Art Acord's next for Universal, with Cliff Smith directing."²

"In his final film for Universal, Art Acord went through the paces of playing the innocent cowhand falsely accused of a killing that was actually committed by his brother (Duke R. Lee). Acord's battle with the bottle was catching up with him and studio head Carl Laemmle fired him for the final time. Leaving Universal, Acord found employment with poverty row producer J. Charles Davis before dying under mysterious circumstances in the Mexican desert."³

It appears they released this film as "Call of Courage".

1925 - "Spooky Spooks", Unknown actor as Sherlock Bones. Samuel Bischoff Productions.

"Spooky Spooks" - Two villains have Jimmy the messenger boy deliver a threatening letter to an Englishman in a spooky house. Jimmy falls for the Englishman's daughter, and sends for the famous detective Sherlock Bones. When the villains arrive things go wild with skeletons, spooks, men in armored suits and everything you expect to see in a haunted house.⁴

² "The Film Daily" (Volume 31--34) Jan - Dec 1925 Page 5 - August 24, 1925

³ Hans J. Wollstein <http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/86449/Call-of-Courage/overview>

⁴ "The Film Daily" (Volume 31--34) Jan - Dec 1925 Page 9 - October 4, 1925

1925 - "The Green Archer" - Pathe Exchange



Here is an example of a silent film which has nothing to do with Sherlock Holmes, yet, the first sentence of the full page ad is; "As great a mystery as any Sherlock Holmes ever had to solve." If a silent film was a mystery, or involved a detective, Sherlock Holmes always seemed to get a mention, a comparison, a parody of, or appeared with a name change. Sherlock Holmes was most certainly the definitive gold standard for the mystery genre.

(1926)

1926 - "The Radio Detective"- Jack Mower (1890 - 1965) as the American Sherlock Holmes, Craig Kennedy. Universal Pictures.



Craig Kennedy, the American Sherlock Holmes, battles the villains out to get hold of an invention called Evansite, that would revolutionize the radio.

1926 - "Slick Sleuths"- A Mutt and Jeff Cartoon. Modern Film Sales Corp.



A cartoon released theatrically. Private eyes Mutt and Jeff are on the trail of the ghostly shape-shifting criminal, the Phantom. Revised and re-released in 1930 in color with sound. You can watch the re-released 1930 version of "Slick Sleuths" at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W08fo5RJl0>

(1927)

1927 - "The Perfect Sap"- Ben Lyon (1901 - 1979) as a rich boy Herbert Allen, who tries to be a Sherlock Holmes. First National Film



"The Perfect Sap" - Review of Current Films - "An amusing tale of a rich boy who tries to be a Sherlock Holmes. Ben Lyon's best picture in a long time."⁵

1927 - "Sherlock's Rival"- "Fortune Hunters" series 2 reels - 1st in a series of 5. Actors unknown. Sun Pictures.

1927 - "Do Detectives Think"- Oliver Hardy (1892 - 1957) as Sherlock Pinkham. Pathe Exchange.

After watching "Do Detectives Think" at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1a3rseggDY> it would seem the only Sherlockian connection here is Oliver Hardy's name.

1927 - "Two Flaming Youths"- W.C. Fields (1880 - 1946) and Chester Conklin (1886 - 1971), as a sheriff who thinks Sherlock Holmes was an amateur compared with him. Paramount Pictures.

"Circus owner Gabby Gilfoil finds himself at odds with the county sheriff, Ben Holden, because of bad debts, and the sheriff is deluded into thinking the

⁵ Photoplay Magazine Jul-Dec 1924. Vol 26-27 Pg. 13

good-hearted carney to be one and the same as the notorious Slippery Sawtelle, whose mug is gracing \$1,500 "wanted" posters all over the county. Gilfoil could use a like amount to help pretty Miss Malarkey out of a financial debt to Simeon Trott, but he must elude the persistent sheriff. Holden finally nails the real Sawtelle."⁶

two flaming youths

¶ "W. C. Fields and Chester Conklin have forgotten more about the art of being genuinely funny than 95% of the screen comedians will ever learn. They are a scream," says a trade paper reviewer. The lad is right! Team these two rollicking troupers up, give them a refreshingly different story like "TWO FLAMING YOUTHS" and you've got something! ¶ Imagine! A comedy team in a comedy without a trench, a tin hat, cussing or a kick in the pants! Revolutionary? Yes, but very, very funny. Fields as the gabby city slicker who descends on a hick town to lure the gold out of the inmate's teeth. Conklin as the country sheriff who thinks Sherlock Holmes was an amateur compared with him. Mary Brian as Fields' cuddly daughter. Jack Liden as the young Henry Ford. John Waters Pro. ¶ We clocked the laughs. There's one every two minutes. ¶ "TWO FLAMING YOUTHS." Fields and Conklin, a REAL comedy team. Your patrons will thank you for a Happy, Laffy New Year when you give them "TWO FLAMING YOUTHS"! ¶ It takes Paramount to make the honest-to-God team comedies! Your experience with "Behind the Front" and its imitators has taught you that.

PARAMOUNT
100
ANNIVERSARY
PROGRAM

Ad states - "Conklin as the country sheriff who thinks Sherlock Holmes was an amateur compared with him."⁷

⁶ TCM.com

⁷ "The Film Daily" (Volume 39--42) Jul - Dec 1927 Pg. 3

(1928)

1928 - "Let 'Er Go Gallagher"- Junior Coghlan (1916 - 2009) as the young Sherlock Holmes. Pathe-Demille.



"Let 'Er Go Gallagher" - "Cast: Junior Coghlan great as the young Sherlock Holmes. Harrison Ford first rate as the egotistical reporter. Ivan Lebedeff the notorious "Four Fingers," famous crook..."Young John Gallagher wants to be a newspaper reporter. One day he witnesses a murder committed by a mysterious man with only four fingers on one hand. He gives his account of the murder and a description of the killer to his hero, newsman Henry Callahan, resulting in his getting a job on the paper as an office boy. When circumstances arise that result in Callahan losing his job on the paper, he and Gallagher set out to discover the identity of the killer and help Callahan get his job back."

1928 - "The Oily Bird"- Felix the Cat cartoon. Educational.

"The Oily Bird" - "Felix the Cat is accused by the lady of the house of stealing her jewels. He sets out to find the real criminal, who proves to be a wise old hen. Felix the Cat does a regular Sherlock Holmes, and at last tracks down the guilty one."

⁸ "The Film Daily" (Volume 43--46) Jan - Dec 1928 pg. 170

⁹ "The Film Daily" (Volume 43--46) Jan - Dec 1928 Page 13 - March 4, 1928



1928 - "Sure-Locked Homes"- Felix the Cat cartoon. Educational.

"Sure-Locked Homes" - "Felix starts out to do a real Sherlock Holmes and the atmosphere is worked up in the real detective thriller fashion with clever cartoon work. There is the Bat and the Spider, and the latter is made a partner by Felix to help the cat sleuth capture the criminals. So he has the spider spin a web to capture the villains."¹⁰

See Felix the Cat in "Sure-Locked Homes" at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VjUehiO5eM

(1929)

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)



(1930)

1930 - "The Lime Juice Mystery", or "Who Spat in Grandfather's Porridge" Marionettes as Herlock Sholmes and Anna Went Wrong . Joseph Seidon Productions.

¹⁰ "The Film Daily" (Volume 43--46) Jan - Dec 1928 Page 7 - May 13, 1928

“The Lime Juice Mystery” - Sherlock Holmes parody made with puppets.



Watch “The Lime Juice Mystery” at; <https://archive.org/details/TheLimejuiceMysteryOrWhoSpatInGrandfathersPorridge>

An Epilogue in Two Reels

There's a satisfying 'Watsonian' artistry about locating the close of the Silent Sherlock Era in 1930, the very year of Conan Doyle's death . But, in the words of Sherlock Holmes (recorded by the good doctor but 4 years earlier): "Cut out the poetry, Watson!". Our film does not end there...I present for your delectation not one but two post-1930 Silent Sherlock reels.

Reel One (1931)

1931 - “福爾摩斯偵探案”, or “**Fu er mo si zhen tan an**”, or “**Sherlock Holmes Detects The Case**” or “**Stories of Sherlock Holmes**”. Li Pingqian (1902 - 1984) as Sherlock Holmes. Shao Zuiweng Films.

“During a burglary of his mansion, wealthy businessman Yang Bofan is murdered. Concluding it happened when he accidentally walked in on the intruders and sent them into panic, the police launch a citywide dragnet for suspects, concentrating on known burglars. But one person apparently uninvolved in the case has doubts: a young woman, a shopkeeper named Shen Liyun, comes to consulting detective Sherlock Holmes and asks him to look into the case. She explains that several months earlier the murdered man had begun regular visits to her shop and gradually made her acquaintance, inquiring into her background, getting to know her, and offering business and financial advice. Her mysterious benefactor even

invested in her small business so she could expand it. But while the young woman was puzzled by the older man's attention to her, at no time did she feel his kindness was out of romantic interest. Whatever his motivation, she feels he deserves the investigation be widened to ensure justice is done. Holmes accepts the case, and in a search of the victim's mansion he uncovers clues the police had missed, which lead him to an amusement park. There he finds additional clues that lead Holmes and his friend Watson to a seedy tavern, located at No.13 Waterfront Road, an address matching that on an envelope found in the victim's mansion. The tavern is actually the secret headquarters of a criminal gang, and the two investigators have walked into a trap. They are captured and locked up in a cellar. Holmes is able to find a way out through a tunnel, so the two escape and go to the



police, but when they raid the tavern, the police find it cleaned out and abandoned. Holmes and Watson return home to learn there has been an attempt on Shen Liyun's life, for no apparent reason. This strange attack on the young woman steers Holmes into exploring an alternate path of investigation. After further inquiries and serious thinking, he disguises himself as a beggar and enters a cave where many beggars live. After talking to various beggars, he uncovers another clue in one's possession, a pearl stolen during the robbery. When Holmes finds out how the beggar obtained it, he leads the police back to the mansion. There, Holmes explains how the clues led him to this resolution of the mystery: the murder was the real objective and the robbery was actually a diversionary action to cover it up. Also, the mysterious attack on Shen Liyun was directly related to the crime. The villain behind the plot was Yang Bofan's younger brother Yang Jifan, who hired the gang to commit the robbery and murder. Jifan's motive: his elder brother had learned the young shopkeeper was his long-lost daughter from an early love affair, and after locating his only child and mentoring her in business, Yang Bofan was planning to leave his own business and his entire fortune to her instead of Jifan."¹¹

¹¹ <http://www.chinesemirror.com/index/2013/01/>

Reel Two (2013)

2013 - "Sherlock Holmes and the Stolen Emerald". Edward Daw as Sherlock Holmes and David Forde as Dr. Watson. A Celine Terranova Production.



"Sherlock Holmes and the Stolen Emerald" (2013) is a six-minute comedic short silent film. The premise is that Watson is the real genius of the duo, it features several characters dressed in exuberant steampunk attires. From an original idea by Celine Terranova, this short film was initially developed in May 2012 and financed thanks to a funding campaign on IndieGoGo. The film was shot at Bart's Pathology Museum in London in two weekends in early 2013. Word is they will be making a sequel, and it will be called "Sherlock Holmes and the Wrath of Moriarty." More information can be found on Facebook, or twitter (@StolenEmerald).

Sherlock Lives On!

Finally, I'd like to thank some people who assisted a great deal with this essay (whether they realized it or not).

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Phil Bergem - who has made available an excellent "Checklist of Sherlock Holmes (and Holmes related) Films and Television Programs" which you can download for free at; http://www.sherlocktron.com/SH_Films.pdf