



# Plugs & Dottles

Official Newsletter of the Nashville Scholars  
of the Three Pipe Problem  
2nd Quarter April-May-June 2018  
Jim Hawkins & Dean Richardson, Co-Editors

- Established 1979
- Meetings on third Saturday of every month (except Dec)
- Website:  
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Nashville Scholars members have helped preserve Conan Doyle's home, Undershaw, and continue to support the Stepping Stones School in Hindhead, Surrey.



In April, our friend Mattias Boström came to New York City and Bethesda, MD, to attend the Edgar and Agatha Awards. His book *From Holmes to Sherlock* was nominated for Best Critical/Biographical Novel in the Edgars, and for Best Nonfiction Novel of 2017 in the Agatha Christies; he came away the winner of the Agatha Award Teapot. Congratulations! (See p. 6)

## Nashville Scholars: Helping to Preserve the Past and Provide for the Future

The friendships inspired by the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle reach around the world. As literary fans, the Nashville Scholars reach out to like-minded readers in every part of the globe. In recent years the focus has been on saving **Undershaw**, Conan Doyle's home in Hindhead, Surrey (England), from demolition. Sherlockians and Doyleans worldwide joined in that effort. The house was built in 1897, and although Conan Doyle moved to East Sussex in 1909, he owned the property until 1920.



Figure 1. **UNDERSHAW** - Charles Bone original drawing (from GENI - a MyHeritage Company).

In 1924 **Undershaw** became a hotel and restaurant and had a long successful run, but the business closed in 2004 when it was sold to a developer with plans to convert it to apartments. The court blocked that plan, and the property began a gradual decline.

Exactly six years ago (May 19, 2012), Dr. Marino Alvarez drafted a petition to preserve this historic Conan Doyle home: "*We the undersigned strongly encourage and advocate for the saving and restoration of Undershaw, a place where the legacy of Arthur Conan Doyle and his works can be viewed with honor.*" It was signed by the nineteen Scholars present. (Continue p. 2.)

Marino and his wife Vicki first visited **Undershaw** on July 23, 2012 and were dismayed at its decrepit state. Boarded windows, overgrowth of grass and weeds, cracked walkways, and other features showed how this once historic home had decayed.



Figure 2. Dr. Alvarez points out important data about Undershaw.

In 2014 [David Forbes-Nixon](#) purchased **Undershaw** with the intent to make it into a school; soon renovation and restoration began. By 2016 the Conan Doyle home had been beautifully restored and is now the proud home of Stepping Stones School, “a special needs school, offering education to those students that fall between mainstream and full special needs provision.” ([Stepping Stones School website](#))

On their second visit in November 25, 2016, Marino and Vicki found a restored **Undershaw**, now Stepping Stones School. They met with Melissa Grigsby, Executive Head Teacher, who introduced them to a staff member and a student for a tour of the school. The purpose of the visit was twofold: to observe the conversion that had taken place since their first visit and to pursue an opportunity to involve students in a cross-cultural literacy project with a teacher in the United States, Shannon Carlisle, and her students.



Mrs. Carlisle, a teacher at Moore Elementary (Franklin Special School District) and a Nashville Scholar, has reached out to the staff and students at Stepping Stones. The students of both schools correspond regularly and discuss the Sherlock Holmes stories, penned by Sir Arthur at his home in Surrey. Of course, they also discuss their favorite video games. (See story of a visit to Shannon’s class written by Dean Richardson, p. 3.)

As part of Shannon Carlisle's class activities involving the saga of Sherlock Holmes, she occasionally invites Sherlockians to visit her students. Here is a report of a recent visit by five Fresh Rashers, a group founded by Bill Mason in 2012 from the Nashville Scholars.

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### Rasher Measures: A Visit to 221b in Franklin

by Dean Richardson

On May 8 at 7:50 a.m., five of the rasher members of the Fresh Rashers met Shannon Carlisle at Moore Elementary School in Franklin, Tennessee. The mission: inflict our curmudgeonly ways on an innocent group of fourth graders.

As Nashville Scholars know, member Shannon (BSI; Beacon Society) teaches an accelerated learning class at Moore, demonstrating the methods of the Great Detective via some of his documented cases to guide students in developing modes of rational thought. (O, that we could qualify for the class!) During the course, she references both the Nashville Scholars and the Rashers, and she invited the latter to fellowship on this date with the class and join in a fiendish friendly game of *Jeopardy* using "The Red-Headed League."



Marino Alvarez, Jim Hawkins, Bill Mason, Drew Thomas, and your humble servant were able to accept the invitation and were richly rewarded (not counting the Starbucks gift cards). Our visit began with a tour of the library, which boasts a large mural incorporating many literary references, including Sherlock and Watson in a hot-air balloon. Then we proceeded to her classroom, whose number is 221b, of course. The décor features a remarkable variety of Holmesian material, including books, figures, photos, slogans and sayings from the Canon, and Lego versions of the London Bridge and Big Ben.

The students began arriving a little after 8:00, and we had an opportunity to get acquainted with them before the first scheduled event. At 8:30, via Google Meet, Shannon connected with a similar class of Stepping Stones students at Undershaw, ACD's former residence in rural England (where he wrote HOUN). Due to technical difficulties on their end, we could see and hear them, but they could only see us. Still, through texting, writing on tablets, and gestures we were able to carry on a lively conversation with them. Their teacher showed us several of their Holmesian artifacts, including several first editions, and the Stepping Stones students traded questions and dance moves (something called "the Floss") with our students and one agile Rasher (who gave new meaning to the term *Freemason*). (Dean's story continues, p. 4.)



Next up was the highly competitive game of *Jeopardy*, with Rashers distributed among four groups of students. Last was a grilling session, in which the Rashers lined up in front of the class and answered questions about their backgrounds and interests in the Great Detective. At the bell the class ended, and reluctantly we said our goodbyes and were escorted off the premises.



Figure 3. Dean and Bill.

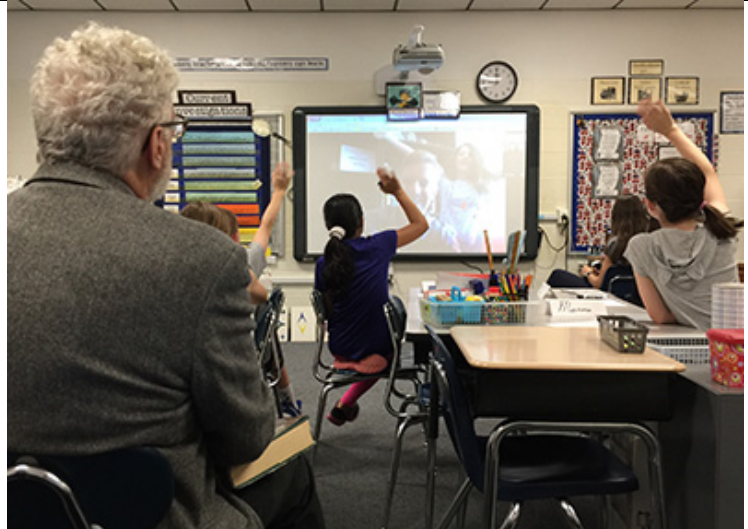


Figure 4. Drew watches TV screen with students.

Shannon truly teaches the best and the brightest, making at least this writer feel like a Watsonian conductor of light (at best). The girls and boys are sharp, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic. We were privileged and blessed to spend time among them.



Dr. Marino Alvarez has been a mentor to Shannon for several years. One of the ways he endears her students to him is to name each of the students Marino (for boys) and Marina (for girls). On the day we visited, when the students arrived they had names on their desks with the ever-present Marina or Marino on one side and their actual names on the reverse side.

### David Marcum and the Stepping Stones School

David Marcum became a Nashville Scholar this past January, our “Engineer’s Thumb.” He writes original stories and edits books of Sherlockian pastiches for MX Publishing in London (Steve Emecz, Publisher). David had a vision of publishing new Sherlock Holmes stories through MX Publishing to raise funds for the renovation of Undershaw and for establishing Stepping Stones School. He details much of this in **How I Came to Appreciate Undershaw**, located on the Undershaw website. Please read the entire story from the link below; it is most interesting.



Figure 5. Marcum writing, as Doyle did, in Doyle’s study at Undershaw.

*Beginning several years ago, a lot of people that I “knew” (in this modern sense of knowing someone electronically) through various Sherlockian connections were beginning to write about visiting the ruins of **Undershaw**, and more often about how they were interested in “saving” **Undershaw** from decay, or from being turned into condominiums. I vaguely noticed when I’d see something about it, but it never really affected me. I did purchase a couple of books produced by MX Publishing, whose author royalties were donated to the Undershaw Preservation Trust (UPT), an organization founded to save the house – but my interest was in the Holmes stories they contained, and not the charity.*

*But eventually I began to be educated about **Undershaw**, by way of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. [\(Read the complete story\)](#)*

Figure 6. Before the renovation of Undershaw.

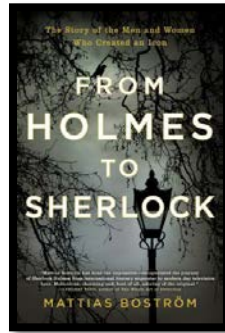


Figure 7. Today’s stained-glass windows. Marcum and Undershaw chronicler Luke Kuhns.



How did we get to be such obsessive fans? Here's the whole story.

The stories, the books, the films, the stage productions, the family and fans, all about Sherlock Holmes and his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is here: *From Holmes to Sherlock: The Story of the Men and Women Who Created an Icon.*



By Mattias Boström, winner of the Agatha Award for The Best Non-Fiction Book of 2017.

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We the editors of *Plugs and Dottles* hope we have told the story of **Undershaw** and the **Stepping Stones School** convincingly enough for you to appreciate our passion for the Sherlock Holmes stories and for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the world's most enduring literary character.

Sherlock Holmes and Doyle fans had a small hand in helping to preserve an historic and beautiful English home, and in encouraging others to find a most wonderful plan for its future:  
the **Stepping Stones School**.

The English people who came to the rescue of **Undershaw** and erected a marvelous school for gifted children are the real heroes in this ongoing story.

**Undershaw** today.  
Home of the [Stepping Stones School](#).

