

an invalid stranger. Truly the old maid is a most useful person, one of the reserve forces of the community. They talk of the superfluous woman, but what would the poor superfluous man do without her kindly presence. By the way in their simplicity they very quickly let out the reason why Sanderson recommended their farm. The Professor rose from the ranks himself and I believe that in his youth he was not above scaring crows in these very fields.

It is a very lovely spot and the walks are picturesque in the extreme. The farm consists of grazing land lying at the bottom of an irregular valley. On each side are the fantastic limestone hills formed of rock so soft that you can break it away with your hands. All this country is hollow. Could you strike it with some gigantic hammer it would boom like a drum, or possibly cave in altogether and expose the sea. These must surely be the mountain sides never to be seen from the rocks, and when you are at caverns which wind down into the bowels of the earth. I have a small acetylene fragile lamp and it is a perpetual joy to me to carry it into these wild solitudes, and to see the ^{wonderful} strange silver & black effects when I throw its ~~rain~~ light upon the stalactites which droop the lofty roofs. Shut off the lamp and you are in the blackest darkness. Turn it on and it is a scene from the Arabian nights.

But there is one of these strange openings in the earth which has a ^{special} ~~peculiar~~ interest for it is the handiwork not of nature but of man. I had never heard of Blue John when I came to these parts. It is the name given to a peculiar mineral of a beautiful purplish shade which is only found at one or two places in the world. It is so rare that an ordinary vase of Blue John would be valued at a great price. The Romans with that extraordinary instinct of theirs, discovered that it was to be found in this valley, and sank a horizontal shaft deep into the mountain side. The opening of their mine has been called Blue John Gap, a clean cut arch in the rock, the mouth

For a sharper version of this image,
please visit the website of
"The Terror of Blue John Gap" Project
at www.acdsociety.com/bjg/a/bjga.html.

WHAT IS BLUE JOHN?

Blue John is a local name for a banded purple and white variety of fluorite that is found only in the Castle-ton area of Derbyshire, in the Carboniferous limestone at Treak Cliff. It was and still is mined in Blue John Cavern and Treak Hill Cavern, and vases of Blue John were and still are valued at a great price: a Regency Blue John vase (ca. 1815-20) sold at Christie's in 2015 for £314,500.

But: Blue John is not blue, and no one seems to have any idea who or what John was. Nor is anything known about the history of the mineral with any real certainty. Everything else you may read about Blue John must be qualified as "they say" or "perhaps" or "maybe." It is often said by locals that Blue John was mined by the Romans, but there is no actual ... (continued on other side)

A COMMON NEWSLETTER

— with a nod to Micah Clarke —

BRINGING TIDINGS FROM THE ACD SOCIETY

— a community dedicated to studying and enjoying the works of Arthur Conan Doyle —

via Ross Davies (editor pro tem, and publisher)

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2, AUGUST 2022

EDITOR'S NOTES

Our big news is that the Doylean Honors nomination season is upon us. Please visit our website (www.acdsociety.com) for forms you can use to nominate the finest Doylean works released in 2021 and 2022 in the three Honors categories: “Fiction and Poetry,” “Performing and Visual Arts,” and “Scholarly Writing.”

The Doylean Honors will be presented at The Mysterious Bookshop on Jan. 5, 2023.



THE PAST

125 years ago, *The Sketch* (a now-defunct U.K. society weekly) reported on “the tent which Dr. Conan Doyle proposes to pitch [in Hindhead] according to the design of Mr. J. Henry Ball.”



Allosaurus versus Triceratops in The Lost World (1925), with special effects by Willis H. O'Brien.

In May 2022, *The Guardian* (a respectable U.K. newspaper) published “The top 20 dinosaur movies — rrrraaanked!” The 1925 silent production of ACD’s *The Lost World* was #11 — the oldest film on the list by 30 years. Three of the modern “Jurassic” flicks ranked higher.

Also in May, the Portsmouth Central Library (www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conan-doyle) hosted its second McCaw Lecture Series, with talks by Michael Comben (*Conan Doyle as A.C. Smith*), Antonija Primorac (*In Search of Sherlock Holmes’ Doubles*), David Gigauri (*Conan Doyle and the “Magnificent Mdivani”*), and Anne Chapman (*Arthur Conan Doyle in The Idler Magazine*).

Paul Chapman and Mark Jones had Doylean Honors winner Stephen J. Carver on their *Doings of Doyle* podcast (www.doingsofdoyle.com) in June for a conversation spanning worlds lost, remembered, imagined, and written, with a fascinating spiritualist surprise near the end.

THE FUTURE

Jubilee@221B (www.acdfriends.org/events.html) is coming soon (Sept. 23-25) in Toronto.

(continued from other side)

... evidence for that earlier than a suggestion in William Adam’s book *The Gem of the Peak* (2d ed. 1843). It’s not known with any certainty who named the mineral, or why, or when, and there is no agreement on the source of its purple color.

The Blue John Mine and its “beautiful spar” are recommended for tourists in Baedeker’s *Great Britain: Handbook for Travelers* (1890). Guides were in attendance all day, the charge for admission was two shillings, and you could pay extra for Bengal lights that burned in open, hand-held wooden cups.

Conan Doyle may well have heard about, and perhaps even visited, Blue John Cavern when in 1878, not yet 19 years old, he briefly worked as an assistant to Dr. Charles Sydney Richardson in Sheffield, only 15 miles or so east of Castleton. Richardson, according to Conan Doyle in his *Memories and Adventures* (1924), had “a low-class practice in the poorer quarters of Sheffield,” and at the end of three weeks they “parted by mutual consent.” It’s nice to imagine that he remembered such a visit, years later, when he wrote this story.

— Peter E. Blau

A longer version of Peter’s work is in the annotations for Page 2 of the MS at the BJC website, www.acdsociety.com/bjc/a/bjga.html. Also new on Page 2 are Elinor Gray Howell’s *The Victorian Superfluous Woman* and Peter Adrian Behravesh’s *Doyle & “The Arabian Nights.”* And on Page C, Roberta Pearson raises some tantalizing questions about Doyle, author branding, and the Sherlock Holmes proto-fandom. Enjoy!

— Margie Deck and Nancy Holder

