

of passages worn by the subterranean streams wound away into the depths of the earth. I was standing thus wondering whether I had, to the return or whether I dare venture further into this dangerous labyrinth, when my eyes fell upon something at my feet which strongly arrested my attention.

The greater part of the floor of the cavern was covered with boulders of rock or with hard incrustations of lime <sup>but</sup> at this particular point there had been a drip from the distant roof which had left a patch of soft mud. In the very centre of this there was a huge mark, <sup>an ill defined</sup> a great ~~irregular~~ blotch, deep, broad, and irregular, as if a great flat boulder had fallen upon it. No loose stone lay near however, nor was there anything to account for the impression. It was far too large to be caused by any animal, and besides there was only the <sup>size</sup> of a size that no corner <sup>I rose from the</sup> I rose from the <sup>had round into</sup> had round into the black <sup>for a moment</sup> I felt, a most unpleasant sinking of my heart, and that, as what I would, the candle trembled in my outstretched hand.

I soon recovered my nerve however when I reflected how absurd it was to associate so huge and shapeless a mark with the track of any known animal. Even an elephant could not possibly have produced it. I determined therefore that I would not be scared by vague and senseless fears from carrying out my exploration. Before proceeding I took good note of a curious rock formation on the wall by which I could recognise the entrance of the Roman tunnel. The precaution was very necessary for the great cave, so far as I could see it, was intersected by passages. Having made sure of my position, <sup>and reassured myself by</sup> examined my spare candles and my matches, I advanced slowly over the rocky & uneven surface of the cavern.

And now I come to the point where I met with such sudden and desperate disaster. A stream, some twenty feet broad

## WHAT IS THAT MARK?

Dr. James Hardcastle's account of the mark describes something large (both in depth and breadth) and ill-defined. It is clear that he thought it was the footprint of an animal despite his efforts to convince himself otherwise. For example, because of the print's isolation, he concludes that the creature must have a long stride. What animal, then, might have produced

such a mark? Let us consider the known fauna of Derbyshire.

Firstly, birds. The largest bird in Derbyshire at the time would have been the grey heron, which is about a meter tall. However, all the heron species leave a footprint of four distinct lines — three facing forwards and one backwards. ... (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 4, NUMBER 1, MARCH 2024



On January 11, during the 2nd running of the Wessex Cup at Otto Penzler's *The Mysterious Bookshop*, Al Rosenblatt, Curtis Armstrong, Ashley Polasek, Matt Hall, and Peggy MacFarlane watch Madeline Quiñones and Monica Schmidt urge their wayward wind-up ponies to cross the finish line while Mark Jones records the progress of the race. Photo by Christopher Zordan.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

On January 11 we presented seven Doylean Honors for outstanding recent work — to Emily Alder, Derrick Belanger, Douglas Kerr, Vincent Mallié, David Marcum, Lee Murray, and Sylvia Pamboukian — and one for a lifetime of it — to Brian Pugh. Congratulations to all! We will be back at Otto's shop on January 16, 2025 for the 4th annual Doylean Honors ceremony and 3rd running of the Wessex Cup. For the latest news, visit our website occasionally: [acdsociety.com](http://acdsociety.com).

## THE PAST

Mark Jones of *Doings of Doyle* spotted ACD in *Hansard* (the record of British Parliamentary debates). During debate on January 31 in the House of Lords about the Victims and Prisoners Bill, Baroness Sharmishta Chakrabarti said:

Without provisions of this kind and of the kind that we will debate in the next group, this whole part of the Bill will be Conan Doyle. In particular, for fans of Conan Doyle, this is *The Adventure of Silver Blaze*. This is the curious incident of the victims' code that made friends and did not always bark in the night. With that, I beg leave to withdraw the amendment and not bark in the night.

"Interesting," Jones notes, "that 'Conan Doyle' is used as a shorthand for the dog that did not bark." Read it yourself. Go to [hansard.parliament.uk](http://hansard.parliament.uk) and type "Silver Blaze" in the search bar.

At Windsor Castle, in the Queen's Dolls' House, there is a tiny library (picture below). ACD's gift of a tiny book to the library has been mentioned in the news, both published ([www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-68015966](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-berkshire-68015966)) and broadcast ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rrexe8e8LM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rrexe8e8LM)), and there may well be more mentions to come ...



## THE FUTURE

... when the Royal Collection Trust hosts an online lecture — by Senior Curator of Decorative Arts Kathryn Jones and Curator of Books and Manuscripts Elizabeth Ashby — about the Queen's Dolls' House on April 16. Register here: [www.rct.uk/event/queen-marys-dolls-house-100th-anniversary-04-2024](http://www.rct.uk/event/queen-marys-dolls-house-100th-anniversary-04-2024).

*(continued from other side)*

... A large bird might produce a track measuring 17cm between its furthest points. This track is neither huge nor ill-defined.

Perhaps it was the print of a reptile, then. The largest UK reptile is the sand lizard. However, weighing a mere 15g, it is unlikely that such a creature could leave a footprint which Hardcastle would consider "deep."

Amphibians have even less to offer. The largest in the UK is the great crested newt, which reaches a total length of 15cm at best.

Britain's fish fare much better in size. The largest fish ever caught in UK water was a 480kg bluntnose six-gill shark. Sadly though, UK fish do not have feet with which to leave footprints. ...

— Paul Thomas Miller

Consideration of page 7 begins with Holmesian humorist Paul Thomas Miller as he explains one possible truth behind the footprint in the Blue John gap. His piece continues on the *Blue John Gap* website ([acdsociety.com/bjg/7/bjg7](http://acdsociety.com/bjg/7/bjg7)), accompanied by Phil Bergem's exploration of ACD's knowledge of elephants, and our thoughts about Hardcastle's instinct and insight.

— Margie Deck and Nancy Holder

