

THE MAGIC DOOR

FRIENDS OF THE ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE COLLECTION • TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY

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THE LUMBER ROOM

PEGGY PERDUE

THE CURIOUS COLLECTION housed in the Toronto Reference Library's Arthur Conan Doyle Room has been enriched in the past few months by some rare and beautiful donations. Unusual ones, too, with unusual stories to match.

Julia MacLaughlan of Seattle donated a number of personal items that once belonged to Arthur Conan Doyle or members of his family. These included a fireplace bellows, an embroidered pillow, a North African dagger and a couple of inscribed books, all of which at one time belonged to Denis Conan Doyle, Denis' wife Princess Nina Mdvani or Sir Arthur himself. The tale that established the provenance of these items was as interesting as the items themselves, and complicated enough to sound like an advanced French exercise. It seems that Julia MacLaughlan's aunt was a foster mother to Michael Mdvani, son of David Mdvani whose sister Nina's second husband was Arthur Conan Doyle's son Denis. That's a full 6 degrees of separation between ACD and our donor, but the items remained in fine condition because the family had honoured the association with the famous author.

Our collection of Sherlockian artwork has been enhanced significantly over the last few years by a series of donations by Dr. Peter Lemiski of Ontario. A stained glass portrait of Sherlock Holmes that he donated in 2006 has already done its part to promote the collections, having appeared in a public gallery show and as part of a contest organized to improve internal awareness of library collections. A few months ago Dr. Lemiski gave the collection another of these lovely works. The new addition is even more appealing than the Holmes portrait. The intricate picture of Holmes and Watson in their sitting room is done in the rich jewel tones we associate with fine works in glass, and numerous clues to the stories embedded in the image add an intriguing bonus for those who like to solve mysteries.



ACD's dancing men code is cleverly worked into traditional patterns in Ramute Plioplys' colourful eggs.

Andrus Plioplys of Chicago also deserves a special mention here. In February, Dr. Plioplys donated some marvellous examples of Sherlockian art in memory of his sister Ramute Plioplys. Ramute, a Toronto-born, Chicago-based Sherlockian, combined her interest in Holmes with an interest and aptitude for the folk art of her Lithuanian heritage in her Dancing Men eggs. The eggs feature messages of Sherlockian import spelled out in the familiar code devised by Conan Doyle. They are a fine example of how people bring a diversity of interests to the Holmesian experience, and the forms that "art in the blood" may take.

Donations of realia such as those listed here have a special role to play in the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection. They may not be used for research in the way that printed and manuscript materials are, but they add to the atmosphere and interest of the ACD Room and are of great use when mounting displays and exhibitions. Personal items and artwork catch the eye and send a clear message: if you think you know the limits of Arthur Conan Doyle and the Sherlockian world, think again.

