

A Case in Correspondence

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The following story tells of an episode in the life of Mary Russell, in 1992. She was 92 years old, and had decided (for reasons given in 2009's "MyStory") to send her collected memoirs to me, Laurie King.

I described the puzzling arrival of a trunk filled with odds, ends, and manuscripts in my introductions to the first four Russell stories (those introductions are available on the "Mary Russell's World" page of my web site, along with "[MyStory](#)") but Miss Russell's version of events has only recently come to light.

The Robert Goodman named in these varied communications, and their references to internal tremors of Britain's Intelligence community, concern the tenth volume of Miss Russell's memoirs, [The God of the Hive](#). They also underscore the lasting impact of those long-ago events.

Thanks are owed to Ben (Postcard Heaven) and Carole (Pretty as a Postcard) for their assistance in locating the cards used by Russell and her colleagues; to Zoe Elkaim for organizing them into some kind of order; and to Bob Difley, for his wizardry in restoring them to legibility. Although for true legibility, you can download this plain script version of the documents on the [web site](#).

Thanks, too, to everyone willing to play The Game with gusto.

Laurie R. King

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#1. Jan 1 posting

to: Holmes

from: Russell

written across the full back of the Houses of Parliament postcard; both message and address portions.

**

4 May 1992

Holmes—I trust you reached home without difficulty, following my crass abandonment of you on the banks of the Thames. As I expected, I had no problem creating the façade of aged and infirm old woman—one of my rescuers even insisted on pressing a £5 note into the cabbie's hand.

I will be here at the Vicissitude for two or three days, completing that research the Americans interrupted. If you wish anything from Town, a note will reach me in the usual way.

R.

PS. I discovered a box of ancient postal cards behind the shot-gun shells in the bolt-hole, hope you don't mind my using them.

2. Jan 8 posting

to: Russell

from: Mrs Hudson

4 May 1992

Dear Mrs Holmes, I opened the envelope with your post-card, but regret to say that Mr Holmes has not returned. Could he have gone to his brother's old flat? Quiet has returned to the farm, following the excitements of the previous week. The wireless reports that we are to expect rain, so when you find Mr Holmes, kindly remind him to carry his umbrella.

Yours,

Emma Hudson

3. Jan 15 posting

from: Russell

to: William Mudd

Victoria Embankment from Waterloo Bridge postcard

5 May

Hello Billy, I hope you and the family are well? I've lost Holmes again—I don't suppose you have seen him since Friday? I put him into a taxi that afternoon at Kew, having a punt to dispose of (long story) and expected him to return to Sussex. However, I have just learned that Mrs Hudson has not seen him. Ring me at Mycroft's old number if you have news.

Russell

P.S. The last time I looked in, your namesake grandfather seemed much better. We had a long chat about the Robert Goodman case—one which no doubt you have heard about in endless detail, due to its repercussions. You may even know why I chose this card.

R.

4. Jan 22 posting

From: Russell

To: Mrs Hudson

Kensington Gardens postcard, addressed:

Mrs. T Hudson

The Villa

Nr. Beachy Head

Sussex

5 May

Dear Mrs H,

(It is amusing how, even after having you as the Mrs Hudson in our lives for more than a decade, there persists a moment of astonishment as my mind's eye attempts to link your name with the face of your husband's great-grandmother!)

I am glad to hear that the American invasion of Sussex has ceased—no doubt they are still quartering Oxford in hopes of finding our scent. If they reappear, do not hesitate to call on Patrick for assistance.

About Holmes, please don't concern yourself, no doubt he thought of some urgent business in Town, I shall let you know when I find him.

M.R.

5. Jan 29 posting

From: Billy Mudd

To: Russell

Stationery w/ heading:

WILLIAM MUDD INVESTIGATIONS

No envelope

5 May (though only just)

Dear Miss R,

Sorry, haven't seen Mr Holmes since Easter. Neither has Granddad. If you wish me to stir up an enquiry first thing in the morning, just say the word.

Billy (II)

PS. The wife sends her regards and says that you are to come to dinner soon, now that Billy-the-Fourth is now quite house-trained, or enough that there will be no more accidents onto visiting laps.

P.P.S. Were you aware that The Cracker is in Town?

6. Feb 5 posting

From: Russell

To: Dr Jennifer Watson-Scopes

Stationery, no envelope

6 May

Dear Dr Watson-Scopes,

I read of your honour recently, my heartiest congratulations. Your grandfather would burst his waistcoat buttons with pride.

I wonder if I might ask a favour of you? Six days ago (Friday) I dropped my husband at Kew expecting him to make his way to Sussex, only to discover on Tuesday that he did not. I have begun the usual enquiries at hospitals and through friends and associates, but with your medical network, might you also put out the word that an aged and no doubt querulous individual has gone missing? I shall be moving about a great deal, but messages at the Vicissitude or at your "Uncle" Mycroft's old flat will reach me.

Mary Russell

7. Feb 12 posting

from: Russell

to: Billy

Undated; on Princes Street Edinburgh postcard

Billy- no doubt he'll be extremely cross when he finds out, but yes, I'd appreciate it if you would kindly put out that we're looking for Holmes. A week without a word, at his age, is not to be taken lightly.

MR

PS. If I haven't heard from him by tomorrow, I'll get into touch with the current M.

Who won't be happy with me either, for different reasons.

PPS. I wrote to ask Watson's granddaughter to enquire after him amongst her medical colleagues, however I have since heard that she is away in New York for another week.

PPPS. Get word to The Cracker that if he does not scuttle back under his Glaswegian rock posthaste, he should expect a broken nose from the cane of a 92 year-old woman.

And if Holmes catches him first, the nose will be the least of it.

8. Feb 19 posting

From: Russell

To: "M"

Typescript—old typewriter type, one word Xed out; stationery w/out heading

7 May 1992

Dear "M",

I write for a reason unrelated to our most recent series of communications, namely, that my husband seems to have gone missing. Holmes was last seen a week ago, on the afternoon of the first, at Kew Gardens. Telephone calls to hospitals and police stations have led to nothing, and I spent much of yesterday at Kew with a photograph, but the only response was from one attendant who thought he recalled a tall old man talking with a sturdy blond man in his thirties—an individual who may even have had green eyes.

This ironic resemblance to Robert Goodman is so striking as to be susp [**X** **across the susp**] unavoidable, but surely bears no significance apart from stirring up the recent conflict between us. I have no intention of removing the document related to Goodman from the memoirs I am sending to my American agent.

In any event, recent newspaper articles suggest that the government are already moving forward with the requisite public revelations.

If you receive news of Holmes, I would appreciate it if you would pass it on to me.

Yours,

Mary Russell Holmes

[signature in handwriting #1]

9. Feb 26 posting

from: Billy Mudd

to: Russell

(typos/misspellings) on St Thomas' Hospital London postcard

The Cracker's scarpered, so quick he all but left his shoes behind.

I'm working to track back a rumour putting Mr Holmes in a shiny black car Friday tea-time crossing Westminster Bridge. Funnly enough, I'd just been working a case involving a lost kiddie near the same bridge—calling to mind the Goodman affair for about the third time in three days. If I was your husband, I'd be hunting for hidden meaning, but me? I'd say it's coincidence. Just like coming across this postcard in the wife's desk was a coincidence.

I'll let you know if anything comes of the black-car rumour, so far it's just a third-hand mention of a resemblance.

Bill

10. March 5 posting

from: Russell

to: Billy

Hawkeshead Vicarage Lane postcard

7th

Just to let you know, Billy, I've just posted a somewhat incendiary letter to the man currently heading Mycroft's organisation. (I was tempted to pile on the alphabet soup of my degrees and honours, but in the end chose dignity over delivering a kick to the poor fellow's pride. That his father was a barrow-boy may have been one of the reasons Mycroft picked him from the crowd.) And as fate would have it, my letter too brought to mind l'ffaire Goodman. To say nothing of this stash of old postal cards, which for some reason are dominated by places from that case.

For a drop of insurance, I wanted to mention to you that I had riled the poor fellow, so that if I disappear from view along with Holmes, you should not only know where to look, but you would know to watch your back.

R.

11. March 12 posting

from: "M"

to: Russell

typescript on unmarked stationery; several words blacked w/ felt pen

8 May 1992

HM Treasury

Whitehall

Dear Mrs Holmes,

The 'recent conflict between us,' which you would present as a mild disagreement between individuals, has on the contrary developed into a major political consideration to the new government. As you no doubt saw in yesterday's Times, the Prime Minister has been forced to address those 'requisite public revelations' at a time that will have severe repercussions. My own recommendation would have been to arrest the two of you, but Mr Major and **XXXXXX** do not agree. Personally, I'd have thought your husband would care something for the life's work of his own brother, but clearly his wife's memoirs take precedence over matters of national security such as the history of certain **XXXXXXXXXX**
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

M.

12. March 19 posting

from: Russell

to: M

Port of London postcard: address:

M.

Treasury building

SW1

8 May '92

M—I have always believed in the freedom of certain kinds of information. Official protestations of embarrassment do not sway me, and have never swayed my husband. Threats even less. The Goodman manuscript goes to Ms King.

Perhaps you thought that your outpouring of bluster might distract me from noticing that you had failed to answer my question. I repeat: Do you know where Holmes is?

Mary Russell Holmes

13. March 26 posting

notice in the *Times* column of notices and announcements

piece of newsprint

Times announcements column, 9 May 1992:

LADY BEEKEEPER searching for her partner? She might try the home of lost causes.

14. April 2 posting

from: Russell

to: Billy

Oxford Vintage postcard

Billy—you saw Holmes' Times notice this am? Off to Oxford in haste tho' (thanks to the Americans) won't be at my own house. You could try St Hilda's—one of the young dons is Professor Ledger's great niece. Great-great? Or St Michael at the North Gate.

R.

15. April 9 posting

from: Bill Mudd

to: Russell

Undated, on Waterloo general postcard

Miss R—tried to reach you by phone but no answer at the flat and that ladies' hotel hadn't seen you. I've rung to the college, but in case you get one of these notes that I'm going to drop about the city, ring me immediately and I'll take you up to Oxford myself—I have a flash new motor that'll make you green with envy, we'll be there in no time. It may be a matter of grannies and eggs, but it didn't sound to me like you were taking into account that the Times advert may be a ruse, and you could be in danger.

Wm

16. April 16 posting

From: Holmes

To: Russell

Telegram

MARY RUSSELL CARE OF ST HILDAS COLLEGE OXFORD

RUSSELL I AM AT THE OXFORD DIGS OF THE GREAT NEPHEW OF OUR
MONACLED FRIEND STOP SEEMS I HAVE HAD TO PULL OUT VARIOUS
STOPS TO CONVINCHE HER MAJESTYS WATCHDOGS NOT TO PUT MY
WIFE IN THE TOWER FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE EMPIRE STOP YOU ARE
EXPECTED FOR TEA STOP UNFORTUNATELY THE SAME COOK REIGNS
THUS BRING SCONES FROM COVERED MARKET OR RISK ANOTHER
BROKEN TOOTH STOP HOLMES

17. April 23 posting

From: Russell

To: William Mudd

Oxford, up the Cherwell postcard

10th morning—the Sunday bells in
Oxford, like no others!

Dear Billy, thank you for your concern but the advert was in fact from Holmes, whom I have (finally!) retrieved from the household of a titled mutual friend (whose name I shall not commit to paper) who happened (coincidences do occur!) to be in Kew as Holmes passed across towards the taxi rank. They got into conversation & Holmes asked him about the political repercussions of my memoirs. And as men do, they decided to pursue their conversation over various libations, in London and then in Oxford. We are currently engaged in vigorous discussion concerning their proposed (slightly farcical and marginally offensive) solution to the situation, but I wanted you to rest easy and know that all is well, that the solution requires merely a trip to #10 to soothe ruffled feathers, and that we have seen no signs of the Americans.

Russell

18. April 30 posting

from: William Mudd

to: Emma Hudson

Stationery headed: WILLIAM MUDD INVESTIGATIONS

11 May 1992

Dear Mrs Hudson,

Yes, I have heard from Mrs Holmes to say that they are in Oxford for a few days with a friend. I can't think why she didn't write to you, perhaps she did and the boy lost it again. But if I were you I wouldn't object to them not being in Sussex, since her reference to "vigorous discussion" between the two of them has overtones of rug-scorching, paint-blistering temper on both sides. You'd think that at their age, they'd have calmed down a bit.

If I hear further, I'll let you know.

Yrs, Wm Mudd

19. May 7 posting

Clipping from the *Times* of London, May 7 1992:

MI6 chief named as

secrecy is lifted

BY MICHAEL EVANS, DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

MI6, Britain's secret intelligence service, is to be put on a statutory footing for the first time, as part of the prime minister's plan to be more open about an organisation whose existence has not been officially acknowledged.

Underlining the new mood of openness, John Major referred to Sir Colin McColl as the present head of MI6. He has never been named officially. Earlier this year, the Home Office named Stella Rimington as the new head of MI5, the domestic security service.

The naming of the heads of MI5 and MI6 brings Britain into line with other countries including Russia, which have not been so coy about their intelligence chiefs.

Robert Gates, the American CIA director, appears before Congress and on television. Russia's two intelligence chiefs were named on their appointment.

Official recognition of MI6, to be enshrined in legislation later this year, follows the implementation of the Security Service Act 1989, which put MI5 on a statutory basis for the first time. Under the act, Lord Justice Stuart-Smith was appointed an

independent watchdog of MI5, responsible for monitoring warrants issued to the security service for entering homes or business premises.

The proposed law covering MI6 is expected to include a similar watchdog arrangement. However, as Mr Major made clear yesterday, details of MI6 operations will remain secret. MI6 officers are based in British embassies abroad and gather intelligence for the government's foreign, defence, security and economic policies.

Sir Colin McColl, who took over as head of MI6, or "C", from Sir Christopher Curwen in 1989, is to retire at 60 in September.

Oleg Gordievsky, above, the former KGB head of political intelligence in London, yesterday cast off his usual disguise and appeared on television without his beard for the first time. Mr Gordievsky, who became a British agent, paid tribute to Sir Colin. He said: "He is not just nice, he is a brilliant man, extremely intelligent and a distinguished civil servant. The KGB has a very high opinion of him."

20. May 14 posting

from: Russell

to: LRK

Brathey Church, Ambleside postcard

19 May 1992

Dear Ms King,

I enclose the attached with the trunk of my memoirs, that you might understand something of its history. The Goodman case shook the Intelligence community 68 years ago. As these varied correspondences show, its effects still reverberate through the corridors of power. Thus, I would strongly urge upon you the solution offered by the Oxford friend referred to in the communications: that this volume be published as fiction. Personally (although our current Prime Minister would disagree) I suspect any readers of my memoirs will be too intelligent to fall for the ruse.

It rankles, to imagine my autobiography being published as mere entertainment, however I agree that in this one case, the world may not be ready for the truth about Mycroft's organisation. And if I may make a further suggestion? A whimsical title might be only appropriate. Something along the lines of, The Green Man, perhaps?

Yours,

MRH