



An Inquiry into:
*“The Adventure
of Black Peter”*

“The Adventure of Black Peter” was first published in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on February 27, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in March 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

The chronology for this case varies, depending on which Canon expert one consults. However, in this case, all of the experts cited almost unanimously agree on the date, as can be seen on the table below.

<i>Black Peter</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
Canon	Wednesday, first week of July 1895
Baring-Gould	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Bell	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
<u>Blakeney</u>	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
<u>Brend</u>	July 1895
Christ	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Dakin	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Folsom	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Hall	July 2, 1895
Keefauver	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Klinger	1895
<u>Zeisler</u>	Wednesday, July 10, 1895

If the case took place in 1895, as they all state, then at the time Holmes was 41 years old and Watson 43.

Notable Quotes:

"I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master."

The Five Refuges

Watson casually mentions that Holmes "had at least five small refuges in different parts of London in which he was able to change his personality." I find the Good Doctor's use of the word "refuge" intriguing. I tend to think that today we would have called these refuges "safe houses."

While these sanctuaries certainly could have indeed been used by the Great Detective as places where he could assume different disguises and changes of personalities, it makes sense that he would have had secret

places to hide, not just himself, but possibly people who might have needed protection.

Lest we forget, in 1887 he could have used one of these safe houses to secrete poor John Openshaw (FIVE) away from his murderous pursuers.

The Matter of the Fading Harpooner

In the beginning of our story, Watson is somewhat outraged over the idea of his friend walking about London's crowded streets holding "a huge barbed-headed spear tucked like an umbrella under his arm." Holmes' explanation that he had spent his morning attempting to transfix a hanging pig with his lance would seem reasonable—to a point.



The fact is that by the mid-1880s, when whalers on the hunt found their prey, they no longer went after it on longboats, à la *Moby Dick*. It had already been found that shooting (rather than arm-hurling) the harpoon using a cannon was far more practical and effective. Although it might be argued that some were still using the old method, I am struck by that fact that the *Sea Unicorn* was a steamship—i.e., not an old-fashioned sailing ship—and was very likely to have been equipped with such a harpoon-hurling cannon.

The fact remains that by that time, Queequeg and his lance were rapidly fading into legend. So if Patrick Cairns was such an experienced harpooner, wouldn't he have been much older and possibly weaker? Could he have hurled a harpoon with sufficient force to leave Black Peter "pinned

like a beetle on a card"? Would any of our salty Hounds care to comment?

The Matter of the Securities

Why didn't Cairns convert the negotiable securities he took from Carey into cash right away and leave for parts unknown? He had to realize that they were valuable. If he himself didn't know how to go about it, certainly a few discreet inquiries among the wharf rats therein would have led him to someone who would have known how to go about it even if he demanded an outrageous cut.

Another intriguing question: What was Holmes going to do in Norway?

The World of Sherlock Holmes

Victorian Extrapolations



We often complain these days, over the state of the streets in the cities and towns in which we live. It seems that they are not cleaned and watered down as often as they once used to be, and the dust and grime (particularly during the warm months) accumulates and gets into everything—kicking up allergies—stirred up into the air by traffic and wind.

Back in that place where "it is always eighteen ninety-five," the condition of the streets of all major cities in the world was nothing short of appalling. The main cause was, of course, that Queen Victoria's world moved propelled by "the power of steam and the pride of horseflesh." While

steam's worse offense was spreading coal soot along the train tracks, the proud ungulates' deposits on the streets oftentimes made them difficult to negotiate, particularly when wet weather transformed them into swamps of muck. During the sunny months, the dry horse apples would be transmuted by the crush of traffic into easily raised choking dust that would coat clothes and buildings.

Pedestrians had to navigate urban streets with the caution of a convoy sailing through a minefield. For a fee, "crossing sweepers" equipped with brooms and stationed at street corners, would clear a path across the street leading from one sidewalk corner to the other. Some corners, of course, had heavier foot traffic than others, and these worthies would lay claim to a certain corner, with vicious fights ensuing sometimes when one attempted to take over another's prized position.

In a now famous 1894 letter to *The London Times*, a mathematically minded reader observed, with justified alarm, that the greatest city in the world was "drowning in horse manure." He pointed out that in London alone there were over 11,000 hansom cabs. "Add to this," he noted, "several thousand horse-drawn buses, each needing 12 horses *per diem*, which brings the total to a staggering 50,000 horses just for transporting people." He then proceeded to enumerate other conveyances dependent upon equines, such as various carts and drays delivering goods. "This results in almost incalculable amounts of manure left behind on the streets."



The reader then shared his dire calculations: "On average a horse will produce between 15 and 35 pounds of manure per day, a fact that suggests the enormity of the problem. The manure on the streets also attracts huge numbers of flies, which are known to spread many diseases." He then pointed out that manure was not the only problem: "Each horse also produces two pints of urine per day."

The average life expectancy for a working horse back then was about three years; this already short existence was reduced even further by falls, injuries, and mistreatment. The toll averaged 36 horses each day, which is why our correspondent complained that, "This adds to the problem because horse carcasses must be removed from the streets, and very often the bodies are left to putrefy to make it easier for them to be sawn into pieces for removal."

The reader ended his letter with the following Parthian shot: "In 50 years, every street in London will be buried under nine feet of manure." (A similar prediction on the other side of the pond threatened that by 1930 horse droppings in Manhattan would rise to the level of third-storey windows.)

Fortunately, the disappearance of Imperial London, like Atlantis, into the depths of an ocean of manure was avoided by the timely introduction of the internal combustion engine and electric motors, enabling trucks and trams to be somewhat more practically propelled.

What else happened in 1895:

Empire

Freetown, Sierra Leone, granted municipal status and privileges.

Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.

U.S. intervenes in Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute, arbitration in Britain's favor.

Construction of Uganda railway commenced.

British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.

Jameson Raid in South Africa in 1895--failed attempt to overthrow the Afrikaans government.

Britain



Liberals defeated at general election, Salisbury forms his third Unionist ministry.

◀ Compulsory retirement of aged Duke of Cambridge as C-in-C of British Army.

London School of Economics and Political Science founded.

First automobile exhibition in London.

Electrification of first mainline railway.

World

Japan takes Formosa (now Taiwan).

Germany, France, and Russia unite to compel Japan to return Liaotung peninsula to China.

Treaty of Simonoseki, end of Sino-Japanese war.

Cuban rebellions begin, U.S.A. protests brutal suppression.



Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.

National League founded in Poland; aimed at autonomy under Russian suzerainty.

Nyssens Law extended to Belgian provinces and communes.

◀ Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians.

Frontiers of Pamirs fixed by commission of Russians, Afghans, and British.

Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

Completion of Kiel Canal (61 miles) makes Germany North Sea power.

Volleyball invented.

French troops capture Antananarivo in Madagascar.

Abyssinia defeats Italy in the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1885-1896).

Art

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, Wilde is imprisoned.

Corelli publishes *The Sorrows of Satan*.

H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.

Science and Technology



Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.

Ramsey obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun, in 1868.

◀ King Gillette (U.S.) invents safety razor.

On December 28th, in the Hotel Scribe, in Paris, the first public cinema show takes place.

Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.

Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian electrical engineer, transmits the first wireless signal.

Next week's case: CHAS.

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands
of the murderous Ghazis had it not
been for the devotion and courage
shown by Murray, my orderly..."

Email: CourageousMurray@aol.com