



An Inquiry into:
*“The Adventure of the
 Bruce-Partington Plans”*

“The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1908. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

In this case, there is complete agreement as to the year in which the case took place. The chronology appears on

If the case took place in 1895, as agreed by all our Canon chronologists, then at the time Holmes was 41 years old and Watson 43.

Notable Quotes:

“The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow. Look out the window, Watson, see how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim.”

“It is well they don’t have days of fog in the Latin countries—the countries of assassination.”

“Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall--that is his cycle.”

“You are right in thinking that he is under the British Government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British Government.”

“I play the game for the game’s own sake.”

“We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

“How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension.”

That Fabulous Book of References

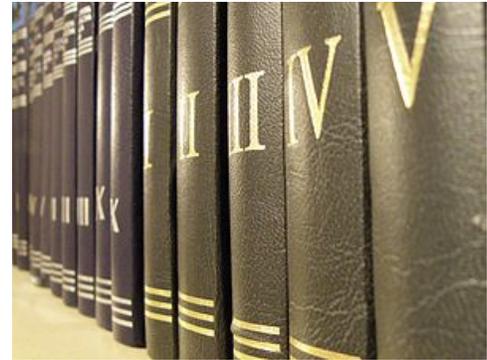
Watson once again titillates us by telling us that in his boredom, Holmes spent a day “cross-indexing his huge book of references.” I realize that I am not alone in this, but the matter is that I’ve always been mystified by Holmes’ indexing system. Clearly, according to the Canon, the material was in

<i>The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Bell</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Blakeney</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Brend</i>	Brend: November 1895
<i>Christ</i>	Monday, November 18, 1895
<i>Dakin</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Folsom</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Hall</i>	November 21, 1895
<i>Keefauver</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895
<i>Klinger</i>	1895
<i>Zeisler</i>	Thursday, November 21, 1895

book form; that being so, I cannot fathom how the Great Detective went about finding anything among that collection's vast contents.

I understand the cross-indexing part. For example, in the case of Irene Adler, he might have written at the bottom of her entry, "Q.v., King of Bohemia." But how would he remember where in the book or, as far as that goes, in which volume and page of his collection he can find Irene Adler's entry? Or the King's? After all, in SCAN, Watson tells us that the reference to Irene Adler was "sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes"!

It's unlikely that these entries could have been any sort of alphabetical order. Once a hardbound notebook begins to be filled, it will not allow one to paste newspaper clippings and other references alphabetically; eventually, one would soon lose track of exactly where the information is contained; especially if there is more than one volume.



It has always puzzled me why Holmes didn't keep all this information in alphabetized index cards, or even better yet, punch cards. In 1804 Joseph Marie Jacquard demonstrated his mechanism of punched cards linked into a chain, which automated loom operation. Others used punched cards for informatics for information store and search, and punch card technology was used for the 1890 U.S. census.

During pre-PC days, when I was in high school and later in college, I used cards that had knitting-needle-size perforations along their edges. I would write the information on one and code it by opening up a number of holes and leaving others intact. It would then go back into the stack in no particular order and later, when I wished to retrieve the information, I would insert a knitting needle through a hole of a stack and pull out the cards that had that hole intact. After a couple of such passes, I was able retrieve all the cards that specific bits of information, regardless of their position in the stack. As far as I know, this system dated back to well before 1895.

Mycroft's Position and Brotherly Status

There can be no question that Holmes is still reticent about revealing to Watson the complete extent of Mycroft's real position, although he tells the Good Doctor that he is telling him about it because he now knows him better than he did at the time of GREE.



Considering the zeitgeist of the time, it is believable that someone like Mycroft "will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country." Oftentimes, the opportunity to serve would be of greater importance than salary and position; remember we're dealing with country esquires here, possibly once minor nobility.

That being said, Mycroft could not have survived his gentlemanly life style on a mere yearly £450 (≈\$170,000 today); lodgings at Pall Mall and membership in an exclusive club did not come cheap. On such an income he could not have lived on Baker Street, much less Pall Mall!

If Holmes was correct about his brother's habits, which did not depart from a routine that took him to the club every day, it is more than likely that he took his meals (or at least dinner) there; again, not an inexpensive habit.

From this I conclude that Mycroft did not have to count pennies. A further conclusion would be that the older Holmes found himself in such a happy situation because Holmes *père* was not exactly destitute.

Should this have been the case, this leads one to wonder about our detective's early penury as he was trying to get his career started. While it is probably true that Mycroft, being the eldest son would have inherited the bulk of the family estate the question then arises, why didn't he assist his younger brother when he was just beginning to make his way in the world? This might indicate an early falling out. Holmes does speak somewhat satirically about his brother to Watson.

The Bruce-Partington Submarine

In view of the state-of-the-art of submarine warfare at the time (non-existent) one must wonder what was the submarine's real secret. After the doubtful success of the *Hunley* during the American Civil War and the often-displayed inability to resurface of later submarines of the time, it would seem logical that the sub in question would have been



more along the lines of a small version of Verne's *Nautilus*, ramming ships to the bottom rather than operating as a platform for launching torpedoes. This seems to be confirmed by the quality of the tin fish used over a decade later during WWI, whose accuracy was more a matter of the crew's skill in aiming the boat than the torpedo's technology.

The device in the stolen plans appears to have been involved with maintaining adequate air and ventilation. This, of course,

would have been of crucial importance because it would have allowed the boat to remain submerged longer—or at least until its very short-lived battery required surfacing for recharging.

It is interesting to note that at the time the British Admiralty was of the opinion that the submarine "is only the weapon of a weaker nation."

The Tragic Valentine

One must feel a bit of compassion for the would-be villain of the piece, Colonel Valentine Walter. If ever someone found himself trapped on all sides, it was him. A poor choice in the Stock Exchange leaves him with a £5,000 (≈\$1,900,000) debt which, like losing at a game of cards, is considered a debt of honor that in addition to destroying his reputation may land him in jail. He is then approached by Oberstein with a solution which he grasps desperately without fully considering the possible consequences.

In the end, he is still disgraced, causes the death of his brother, and winds up in jail anyway, where he dies. To end of his days, Holmes' denunciation, "How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension" must have echoed in his ears

Holmes at His Best

Splendid is the only way to describe Holmes' performance in this case. We truly see him at his best. His deduction in the subway tunnel, based on the points and curve of the tracks that Cadogan West had to have fallen from the roof of the carriage is pure vintage Holmes. Bravo, sir!

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.

Cardinal Vaughan lays foundation stone of Westminster Cathedral.

World

Chinese defeated by Japanese at Wei-hai-Wei; end of the Sino-Japanese war through the Treaty of Simonoseki. Formosa (now Taiwan) and Port Arthur ceded to Japan, but returned to China in exchange for indemnity.



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

◀ Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians by order of the government. Sultan Abdul Hamid II promises re-

forms in Turkey.

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

Cuban rebellion begins, the U.S.A. protests brutal suppression.

Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.

Nyssens Law extended to Belgian provinces and communes.

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

Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

Jack Dempsey becomes U.S. boxing champion.

Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*.

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

Queen of Korea is assassinated, the King imprisoned, all under Japanese encouragement.

Volleyball invented.

French troops capture Antananarivo in Madagascar.

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

Art

Tchaikovsky, first complete performance of *Swan Lake*.

Joseph Conrad, *Alayer's Folly*.

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, he unsuccessfully sues the Marquis of Queensbury for libel and is imprisoned.

Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*.

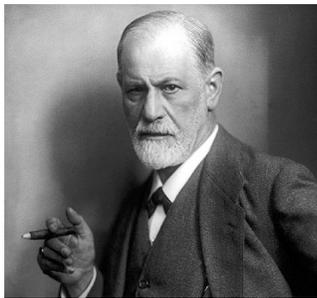
W.B. Yeats, *Poems*.

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.

Pasteur dies.

Konstantin Tsiolkovski formulates the principle of rocket reaction propulsion.

◀ Sigmund Freud, *Studien über Hysterie*.

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

Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.

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

C. von Linde devises apparatus to liquefy air.

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

Next week's case: DEVI

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

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