



An Inquiry into:
“The Norwood Builder”

“The Adventure of the Norwood Builder” was first published in October 31, 1903, in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine*. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

The chronology for this case varies, depending on which Canon expert one consults. The various estimates are shown on the table.

<i>The Norwood Builder</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
Canon	August
Baring-Gould	Tuesday, August 20, 1895
Bell	August 1895
<u>Blakeney</u>	August 1894
<u>Brend</u>	August 1894
Christ	August 1894
Dakin	August 1894
Folsom	August 1894
Hall	Summer 1894
<u>Keefauver</u>	Wednesday, August 1, 1894
Klinger	1894
<u>Zeisler</u>	Monday, July 2, 1894

If the case took place in 1894, as the majority states, at the time Holmes was 40 years old and Watson 42.

Notable Quotes:

“London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty.”

“Well, Mr. Holmes, it is difficult for me to refuse you anything, for you have been of use to the force once or twice in the past, and we owe you a good turn at Scotland Yard.”

“Take your breakfast, Watson, and we will go out together and see what we can do. I feel as if I shall need your company and your moral support to-day.”

“I much fear that British juries have not yet attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over

Lestrade’s facts.”

“Mr. Holmes, I could not speak before the constables, but I don’t mind saying, in the presence of Dr. Watson, that this is the brightest thing that you have done yet, though it is a mystery to me how you did it. You have saved an innocent man’s life, and you have prevented a very grave scandal, which would have ruined my reputation in the Force.”

“Instead of being ruined, my good sir, you will find that your reputation has been enormously enhanced. Just make a few alterations in that report which you were writing, and they will understand how hard it is to throw dust in the eyes of Inspector Lestrade.”

“And you don’t want your name to appear?”

“Not at all. The work is its own reward.”

The Doctor's Resources

Watson opens the story telling us that, at Holmes' urging, he sold his practice (abandoning his profession) and joined the Great Detective at their old Baker Street digs. While by 1894, it is certain that Holmes' financial resources had to be more than ample for him to retire in style had he so wished, the same cannot be said of Watson.

Other than for his medical practice, that we know of the only steady source of income that Watson had was the government pension for his war wound, which yearly paid him £209 17s 6d (≈\$78,700 today); a paltry sum for anyone having to live in the world's most populous city, capital of the greatest empire in history.

We know that *The Strand* paid very well for each Holmes story; however, from what Watson himself tells us, he was prohibited by our sleuth from writing about any new cases, so that source of income had dried up, unless he was writing other kinds of stories for that publication.

Although Watson tells us that the sum that was paid for his medical practice was surprisingly high, could he have afforded to live off it? Assuming Holmes paid £1,000 (≈\$375,000) for Watson's practice—a truly princely sum—and he were able to invest it in securities which yielded 7% per year, that would add a mere £70 (≈\$26,000) to his resources, bringing the grand total of his earnings to about \$105,000—not enough to survive as a gentleman in Imperial London. What say you, Hounds?

When Will Lestrade Learn?



Unquestionably, Lestrade's mental density easily surpasses that of lead. After all these years, and after all the case credits that Sherlock Holmes has freely provided him with (EMPT being the most recent, which occurred in that same year!) he still has the gall to scoff at Holmes when he begins “to get on [his] theories.”

He grandly admits that Holmes has “been of use to the Force once or twice in the past, and we owe you a good turn at Scotland Yard,” and generously allows him to question McFarlane. By this time, the old hound should have known better. He knew enough to remain after McFarlane was taken away, and yet again he scoffs at Holmes. Experience should have dictated him to “indulge” the Great Detective, even if he was convinced that he held the guilty party, and followed some of his theories.

The Cat in the Aviary

Sneaking an ecstatic cat into the aviary does not make Oldacre a candidate for the RSPCA's yearly award; however, it is not on a par with tripping old ladies into the path of carriages or stealing from widows and orphans. Particularly during a time when people did not hold as humane a view towards critters as we do in the West today, I find it hard to believe that this sole deed by itself was sufficient to turn the future Mrs. McFarlane away from Oldacre. If she loved him enough to have considered marriage, she would have been more forgiving. This tells me that there had to be more than just that, and the lady—either out of modesty or disgust—must have withheld from Holmes the real reason for the breakup. Hounds?

Oldacre's Preparation

It would appear that the scheme which Oldacre came up with to implicate McFarlane in his “murder” was not a spur of the moment thing; rather, it was a well-planned, calculated, evil plan.

That being the case, why would he be so careless about the centerpiece of his plot, his last will? Consider that this was the keystone of his victim's supposed reason for killing him—a considerable inheritance. It seems to me that he carried that part of his plan rather haphazardly. Producing a document of that kind in a moving, noisy and (in those days), dirty train was not the ideal way of doing things. This should have been done in the quiet of his study, where he could carefully think things out.

Incidentally, Holmes' deduction about the document having been written in a train is a classic!

Oldacre's "Remains"

I always wish that Watson had been more explicit about this factor. Unquestionably, late 19th century coroners (or just plain MDs) would have had no problem in identifying the "organic remains" found by the police in the ashes of the fire as belonging to animals—whether dogs or rabbits. Oldacre might have done much better by obtaining some old skeleton from a graveyard, that by stuffing Bugs Bunny's relatives up a pants leg.



Now, was this schemer that foolish or was it Watson once more being detail-economical?

The Man Himself

Oldacre whining that everything he did was in pursuit of a practical joke at McFarlane's expense was completely and absolutely revolting!

A Canonical Aside...

"My Little Monograph on the Subject"

"Yes, I have been guilty of several monographs. They are all upon technical subjects."

—Sherlock Holmes

This is a list, as complete as I can make it, of the technical subjects which I think that the Great Detective wrote about. Unlike some other students of the Sacred Writings, I am convinced that whenever Holmes mentioned a possible subject for a monograph, he eventually did take pen to paper to write about it. *Upon the Observation and Detection of Malingering* is, I believe, a good example. Another would be *The Complete Art of Detection*, even though some believe this work was laid aside, unfinished, in favor of his *Practical Handbook of Bee Culture*. Others in the list are derived from how specific our sleuth was when he referred to a specific subject; *Upon the Distinction of Various Perfumes* falls into this category.

If any Hound has undertaken a similar survey and has found others to add to the list, perhaps he or she would be willing to share this information with the rest of us Barkers.

The Complete Art of Detection (ABBE)—"I propose to devote my declining years to the composition of a textbook, which shall focus the whole art of detection into one volume."

Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen (LAST)—"Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years! Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London."



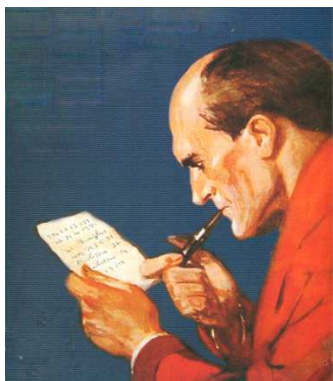
Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos (SIGN)—“I have made a special study of cigar ashes—in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand either of cigar or of tobacco.”

Upon the Tracings of Footsteps, with Some Remarks upon the Uses of Plaster of Paris as a Preserver of Impresses (SIGN)—Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a preserver of impresses.

Upon the Influence of Trade upon the Form of the Hand, with Lithotypes of the Hands of Slaters, Sailors, Cork-Cutters, Compositors, Weavers, and Diamond Polishers (SIGN)—“Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the hands of slaters, sailors, cork-cutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective—especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals.”

Upon the Dating of Ancient Documents (HOUN)—“It would be a poor expert who could not give the date of a document within a decade or so. You may possibly have read my little monograph upon the subject.”

Upon the Design, Execution, and Origin of Tattoo Marks (REDH)—“I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject.”



The Science and Art of Deduction and Analysis (STUD)—Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study.

Upon the Ciphering and Deciphering of Secret Writings, with the Analysis of 160 Different Ciphers (DANC)—“I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyze one hundred and sixty separate ciphers.”

Upon of the Variations of the Human Ear (CARD)—“As a medical man, you are aware, Watson, that there is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear. Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive and differs from all other ones. In last year's *Anthropological Journal* you will find two short monographs from my pen upon the subject.”

Upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus (BRUC)—As to Holmes, he returned refreshed to his monograph upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, which has since been printed for private circulation, and is said by experts to be the last word upon the subject.

Upon the Individuality of the Typewriter (IDEN)—“It is a curious thing that a typewriter has really quite as much individuality as a man's handwriting. Unless they are quite new, no two of them write exactly alike. Some letters get more worn than others, and some wear only on one side.”

Upon the Observation of Children and Dogs as a Means of Gaining Insights into Familial Character and Relations (CREE)—“You may recollect that in the case which you, in your sensational way, coupled with the Copper Beeches, I was able, by watching the mind of the child, to form a deduction as to the criminal habits of the very smug and respectable father. My line of thoughts about dogs is analogous. A dog reflects the family life. Whoever saw a frisky dog in a gloomy family, or a sad dog in a happy one?”

Upon the Distinction of Various Perfumes (HOUN)—“There are seventy-five perfumes, which it is very necessary that a criminal expert should be able to distinguish from each other, and cases have more than once within my own experience depended upon their prompt recognition.”

Upon Distinguishing Impressions Left by Bicycle Tyres (PRIO)—“A bicycle, certainly, but not *the* bicycle. I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tyres. This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover.”

Upon the Distinction of Typefaces (HOUN)—“There is as much difference to my eyes between the leaded bourgeois type of a Times article and the slovenly print of an evening half-penny paper as there could be between your negro and your Esquimau. The detection of types is one of the most elementary branches of knowledge to the special expert in crime, though I confess that once when I was very young I confused the Leeds Mercury with the Western Morning News.”

The Book of Life (STUD)—“I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical, are really extremely practical—so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.” Although originally published as an article for the popular press, I think that at some time Holmes must have incorporated the contents of that article—suitably updated and augmented—into a more complete professional work of the same title.

Upon the Observation and Detection of Malingering (DYIN)—“Malingering is a subject upon which I have sometimes thought of writing a monograph.”

A Canonical Anniversary

“Suddenly, without a note of warning, the great mutiny broke upon us. One month India lay as still and peaceful, to all appearance, as Surrey or Kent; the next there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell.” Jonathan Small (SIGN)

This week marks the 160th anniversary of the Indian Mutiny (1857-9). Also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, it was a revolt of some 35,000 Sepoys, who were



Indian soldiers in the service of the British East India Company. The native troops had a long list of grievances, but the last straw seems to have been the introduction of the new Enfield rifle. To load it, the user had to bite the cartridge before introducing it into the gun.

Although the cartridges were lubricated with vegetable oils, soon rumors spread (some say started by Russian agents) that the lubricant was made out of pig and cow fat, which would have anathema for both Muslim and Hindu Sepoys. This developed into a bloody and vicious Anglo-Indian war. British reinforcements

under Sir Colin Campbell regained Delhi and relieved Lucknow in late 1857. By July of the following year the revolt had been mostly put down.

When Small mentioned that “the women and children be treated as they were in Cowpore.” He referred to the massacre of women and children prior to the relief of the city in July 1857. This incident eventually led to the decline of the British East India Company’s control of India, which became more firmly under the authority of Parliament.

In India, the Sepoy Mutiny is called, “India’s First War of Independence.”



What else happened in 1894:

Empire

Uganda becomes protectorate.

Jameson occupies Matabeleland.

Britain

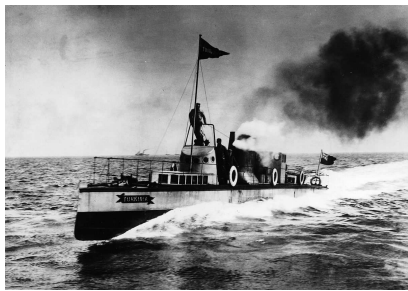
Gladstone retires; Rosebery becomes prime minister with his minority Liberal government.

Tower Bridge opens.

First Lyon's tea shop.

Big wheel erected at Earl's Court.

St Bride's Institute opens. Manchester ship canal completed.



Harcourt's Budget raises death duties.

Parish Councils Act: Parish, Rural, and Urban Districts established.

Thirlmere Dam completed; for Manchester water supply, aqueduct 96 miles long.

Water tube boilers fitted in HMS Hornet and HMS Sharpshooter.

◀ Turbinia, first steam-turbine ship launched.

Merchant Shipping Act: Masters, mates, and engineers to hold

Board of Trade certificates.

Railway and Canal Traffic Act; fixes existing rates as maxima.

Official opening of the Manchester Ship Canal (begun 1887).

Blackpool Tower opens, 518 ft high.

World

After the First Sino-Japanese War, China cedes Formosa (Taiwan now) to Japan and grants Japan a free hand in Korea (1894-1895).

French take Madagascar.



Alfred Dreyfus found guilty of treason.

◀ President Carnot of France assassinated by Italian anarchist.

French under Joffre capture Timbuktu.

Hawaii becomes a republic.

Sicilian bread riots lead to martial law and suppression of Italian socialist societies.

Italians defeat Dervishes at Kassala.

Kurds massacre Armenians at Sassoun.

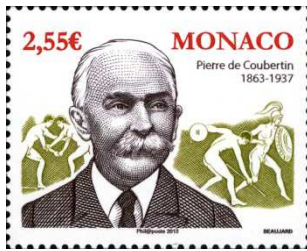
National Society founded in Greece to extend Greek authority in the Balkans.

Alexander III of Russia died; Nicholas II (last Romanov tsar) accedes to the Throne.

Sergius Witte becomes minister of finance in Russia.

War breaks out between Japan and China. Japanese naval victory at Yalu River; Japanese capture of Port Arthur.

Alexander Obrenovitch annuls liberal constitution of 1889.



Sale of spirits resumed in Russia as state monopoly.

Formation of French Agricultural Mutual Loan Society.

◀ Baron Pierre de Coubertin initiates congress reviving the Olympic Games.

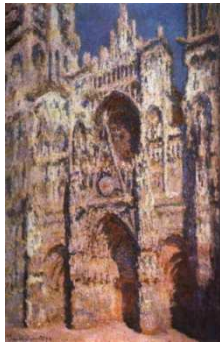
Lombok War. The Dutch loot and destroy the Cakranegara palace of Mataram. J. L. A. Brandes, a Dutch philologist discovers and secures the Nagarakretagama manuscript in Lombok royal library.

Beginning of car racing Paris to Rouen.

France and the Russian Empire form a military alliance.

Art

Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.



Debussy, *L'Après Midi d'un Faun*.

Toulouse-Lautrec, *Les Deux Amis*.

Degas, *Femme à sa Toilette*.

Strauss' first opera, *Guntram*, produced at Weimer.

◀ Monet, *Rouen Cathedral*.

George du Maurier, *Trilby*.

Anthony Hope, *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*.

Science and Technology

Escalators introduced (U.S.).

Halstead (U.S.) details his operation for breast cancer (mastectomy).



Sir William Ramsey and Lord Rayleigh discover existence of zero valence.

◀ Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona erected.

Oliver and Schäfer discover the nature of insulin.

Berliner modifies earlier work on the gramophone by using a horizontal disk instead of a cylinder. Not fully satisfactory until 1897.

J.H. Northrop (U.S.A.) invents automatic loom.

Louis Lumière invents the cinematograph.

First commercial film release by Jean Aimé Le Roy.

First gramophone record.

Guaranty Building, Buffalo erected. Metal-framed building.

Karl Elsener invents the Swiss Army knife.

Next week's case: DANC.

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