



An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place"

"The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place," was first published in *Liberty Magazine* on March 5, 1927. It ran in *The Strand Magazine*, on April 1927. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

The chronology for this case is varied, as can be seen from the table. However, a majority of our experts agree that the case took place in 1902.

If this is so, then at the time Holmes was 48 years old and Watson 50.

Main Characters:

Sir Robert Norberton, Lady Beatrice Falder, John Mason, a Shoscombe spaniel, Shoscombe Prince

Notable Quotes:

"It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless."

"You do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles."

The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>May, no year given</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 6, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>May 1897</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>May 1896-1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>May 1894</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, May 9, 1883</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 6, 1902</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 6, 1902</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>End of May, 1888</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 26, 1903</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1902</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Tuesday, May 6, 1902</i>

Holmes, the Forensic Detective



Our case opens with Holmes, eye to the microscope, studying the "scattered objects in the field" to determine innocence or guilt in a crime. That he is carrying out his study at the request of Merivale of the Yard shows that he has been successful in making the official police realize the importance not only of the microscope, but of other scientific methods (such as the Holmes Test for hœmoglobin).

It is no small wonder that in 2002 our sleuth was distinguished by being receiving an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Society of Chemistry, for his use of forensic science.

Watson's Finances

When Watson confesses to Holmes that he knows "something of racing," since he pays for it with about half of his wound pension, he unwittingly reveals quite a bit about his financial situation. We know that when the Good Doctor was invalidated after Afghanistan, the government provided him

with a pension of 11s 6d per diem, which, in modern terms, came to a total of about \$79,000 per year.

That amount was as insufficient to maintain a gentleman's lifestyle in a megalopolis like 1888 London, as it would be today were one to reside in, say, 2017 Manhattan or Washington DC. We know from his own pen, that Watson found himself in what very quickly threatened to become a penurious situation, hence 221B.

The fact that he now considered at least half of his pension (\$39,500) as simple disposable income, would seem to argue for a much-improved financial situation.

An aside: One of the things that always puzzle me when we consider this case is Holmes coming to Watson for racing world information. In SILV, our sleuth appears to have been very well informed about the goings-on of that community.

Why the Interest?

Looking at things from the context of the times, John Mason's tale is little more than kitchen gossip, a possibly disgruntled servant tittle-tattling about the actions of his betters. While what he had to say about the actions of Sir Robert Norberton would certainly make him appear eccentric at worse, they do not come close to being criminal.

That being said why, then, would Holmes have been so interested from the very start? We must consider that there was nothing to indicate that Lady Beatrice might have been in any kind of danger—least of all dead.

Mason's claim that there had been a bitter quarrel, and that Sir Robert was mucking about in the old family crypt might have appeared as peculiar, perhaps, but by no extent of the imagination life-threatening to anyone. Even digging up a 1000-year-old skeleton from that self-same family vault, which was on personal property, could also hardly rise to the level of a crime.

Therefore, the question is why would Holmes have been so interested? Had he been true to form, he probably would have waited to see if something truly sinister occurred, as he did on other occasions, notably COPP, FIVE, or SOLI. Could it have been—as Dr. Roylott, of Stoke Moran once put it—a case of “Holmes, the busybody, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office”?

A Legal Perspective

Watson writes that, “Shoscombe Prince did win the Derby, the sporting owner did net eighty thousand pounds in bets, and the creditors did hold their hand until the race was over, when they were paid in full, and enough was left to reestablish Sir Robert in a fair position in life. Both police and coroner took a lenient view of the transaction, and beyond a mild censure for the delay in registering the lady's decease, the lucky owner got away scatheless from this strange incident in a career which has now outlived its shadows and promises to end in an honoured old age.”



When I look at what should have been a veritable avalanche of charges and lawsuits burying Sir Robert, I must confess my surprise at getting away with his plan.

Seeing how he was of a noble family, and important in the region, it might not be surprising that the local authorities—in this case the police and the coroner—would have only mildly censured him for not reporting his sister’s death and not say anything about his keeping an unembalmed four-week-old corpse above ground.

While the local authorities might have been accommodating, it seems that his relations and debtors might have various causes of action against him. An argument might be made about intent to defraud. Although it is made clear that the only profit that Sir Robert derived from Shoscombe Prince winning the race was derived from his personal bets, the law might not be so forgiving. At the moment of Lady Beatrice’s death, the horse became the property of the brother of Lady Beatrice’s husband.



When he did not immediately turn over the horse to its lawful owner, Sir Robert became guilty of Conversion, which is defined as “a distinct act of dominion wrongfully exerted over another’s personal property in denial of or inconsistent with his title or rights therein, or in derogation, exclusion, or defiance of such title or rights, without the owner’s consent and without lawful justification.” An argument for fraud might also be made.

Because, as Watson tells us, Sir Robert paid off all his debts and the (non-legal) argument could be made that Shoscombe Prince became an even more valuable horse after winning such an important race, it is logical to assume that none of those affected by his actions would have been interested in pressing the machinery of the law to ground him under.

In the end, Sir Robert received £80,000 in bets won; roughly about \$30,000,000. No question he could have paid all his debts and retired well for the rest of his life!

A Canonical Aside...

“How Intelligent Is Sherlock Holmes?”



Professor John Radford, Emeritus Professor at the School of Psychology of The University of London, in 1965 was the first head of Psychology at what was then the West Ham College of Technology, later becoming Dean of Science. He was responsible for the introduction of Psychology as an A-level subject in 1970. He was Chair of the Psychology Board of the Council for National Academic Awards, which oversaw the subject in non-university higher education to 1992.

In 1999, using the 60 stories, as data, and applying different methods, he estimated Sherlock Holmes’ IQ. He concluded that the Great Detective’s intelligence was indeed very high, in the 190 range.

A Good Read

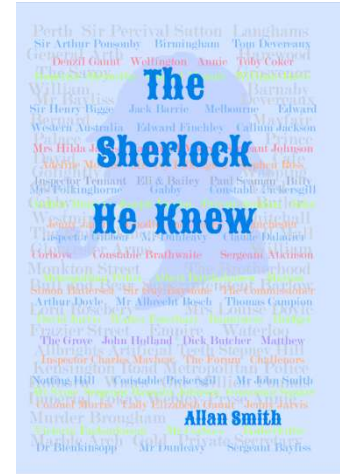
The Sherlock He Knew, by Allan Smith

A new book, by one of our Australian Hounds, is now available.

The Sherlock He Knew starts off as the author, while clearing out the belongings of his recently-dead father in 2017, finds a bundle of old handwritten letters. One is from his grandmother to his father in 1985, the other is a much longer one dated 1940 from his grandmother's father, William Jarvis, who in the mid-1890s was a detective-sergeant in London's Metropolitan Police. Both letters tell of a secret arising from Jarvis's police work, one to be kept hidden from the world until the time is right.

The author decides the time is now right, and reveals the secret by publishing the journal kept by William Jarvis during his service in the Metropolitan Police: this makes up the core of the book.

The secret is revealed as William Jarvis comes to know the detective-inspector to whom he is assigned at Scotland Yard, Denzil Gaunt. It is gradually revealed that Gaunt is a minor aristocrat whose investigative method and other abilities mirror those of the fictional Sherlock Holmes, and Jarvis begins to suspect Gaunt is Conan Doyle's model for Sherlock. That suspicion is hardened when Jarvis on two occasions meets Doyle, a long-time friend of Gaunt. Gaunt denies the link, but Jarvis's suspicions remain firm. This is all background to a series of investigations by Jarvis and Gaunt, the final one leading to the great secret known thus far only to the author's grandparents and Jarvis himself. It involves criminality at the highest levels of government and royalty.



The book may be obtained by going to the Lulu site [www.lulu.com]. They have the hardback at \$34.55 plus shipping. A search on Google Books might reveal retailers closer to your area.

What else happened in 1902:

Empire

First meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in London.



Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

◀ First celebration of Empire Day (renamed "Commonwealth Day" in 1959).

Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

Britain

Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.

Anglo-Japanese Treaty, for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East, recognizes the independence of China and Korea.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

Institution of the Order of Merit by King Edward for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.



Education Act abolishes School Board system. Local control goes to town and county councils.

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

◀ Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

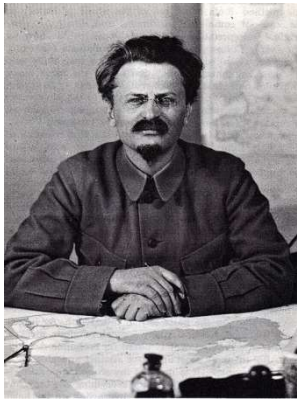
Boer War casualties: 5,774 British and 4,000 Boers killed.

World

Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.

Failure of second Belgian General Strike.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, Italy) renewed to 1914.



Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.

◀ Leon Trotsky escapes from Siberia, settles in London.

Martinique volcanic eruption destroys town of St. Pierre.

Coal strike in U.S.A.

National bankruptcy declared in Portugal.

French work day reduced to 9 1/2 hours.

U.S.A. acquires perpetual control over Panama Canal. Control is held until 1977, when President Jimmy Carter turned the canal over to Panama, which assumed final control in 1999.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

Aswan Dam opened.

St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

Abdul Hamid gives Germany concessions to build railway to Baghdad; rail system to stretch from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Tientsin Sanitary Police established; first Chinese public health measure.

F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.

Art

Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.

Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.

Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.

Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record—154 recordings in all.



Elgar composes the first of his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches.

◀ Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*.

Gauguin, *Riders by the sea*.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Elgar composes *Coronation Ode*.

Science and Technology

Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.

Oliver Heaviside, English physicist, reveals the existence of an atmospheric layer which aids the conduction of radio waves.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

As usual, in keeping with this time of the year, next week's case will be BLUE

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