



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

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“The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place” was first published in *Liberty Magazine* on March 5, 1927. It was published in *The Strand Magazine*, on April 1927. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*. It also was the last Sherlock Holmes story to appear in *The Strand Magazine*.

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Not unusually so, our chronologists are not in full agreement to the year in which this adventure took place; however, as the table shows, a majority leans towards 1902.

If 1902 was the year in which this case took place, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 48 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 50.

Main Characters:

Sir Robert Norberton, the excitable resident of Shoshcombe Old Place. Lady Beatrice Falder, Sir Robert’s invalid sister. John Mason, Sir Robert’s head trainer. Mrs. Norlett, Lady Beatrice’s maid. Mr. Norlett, Mrs. Norlett’s husband, an actor. Stephens: Sir Robert’s butler. Josiah Barnes, landlord of the Green Dragon Inn. Sandy Bain, Sir Robert’s jockey.

Notable Quotes:

- “By the way, Watson, you know something of racing?”
- “I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension.”
- “It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless.”
- “You do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles.”

<i>The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>May, no year</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</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>

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist’s results for their research framework.

A Interesting, Different Case

Even though this story easily qualifies as a mystery, it is one in which no actual crime has been committed. It also has the distinction of being one in which all the main players come out as being good, caring, and honorable people.

Another shiny little diamond to be mined from this is how well the relationship between Holmes and Watson had developed by this time. It is clear that they have come to fully and comfortably depend upon each other when involved in an investigation. We see the Great Detective soliciting information from his friend regarding the goings-on in the world of the turf, and he also provides him with important information about Sir Robert Norberton's background and situation.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

The Horsy Doctor

Much has been made about Watson's gambling. His mention of paying for his supposed turf addiction with half of his wound pension was very likely a humorous exaggeration on the part of the Good Doctor. From *STUD*, we know that the pension provided him with an income of 11s 6d a day, which would come to £209 17s 6d per year—about \$79,000 today. Were he in reality habitually spend—and lose—almost \$40,000 per year on the noses of various horses, he would have most certainly been a

gambler with a serious addiction problem. And, were that addiction to dominate him to such a level, he would not have spent only half of his pension, but probably most of it.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

However, like mostly everything else, the good or bad of a situation may be only a matter of degree. I tend to think that by this time in his life, Watson was able to lead a very comfortable existence. Medicine and his undoubted ability as a writer would have been more than sufficient to meet his needs. Although not exactly a man of Spartan habits, our biographer certainly was no wastrel inclined to excesses.

It also appears unlikely to me that our medico's literary efforts would have been limited to solely chronicling the Great Detective's adventures. Even a cursory look at *The Strand Magazine* shows that during this unexcelled time of growth for popular literature, magazine publishers kept a good stable of writers. It was also the case, particularly during the Golden Age of science-fiction of the 1930s and 1940s that the various s-f magazines were most willing to buy the often exceedingly abundant output of some of the too-few best writers. Competition between the publications was keen and many writers tended to write almost exclusively for one or the other. Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and others often wrote under pseudonyms—generally at the request of some of the publications—so it would not appear that the offerings to their readers came from a very few authors. Often, some magazines would publish two stories written by the same person under different pen names.

Because Watson's byline came to be associated with Holmes' cases, it is not farfetched to posit that at times he would write under a different name or names. It was well-worth it; is good to remember that, by this time, the Literary Agent was commanding £790 (≈\$300,000) per story.

If, as I suspect, the same was true for Watson, his wound pension would then have fallen well within the “disposable income” category.

Unfortunately, we have no idea of what our medico’s pseudonym (or pseudonyms!) might have been.

Why Take the Case?

Some Canon scholars have wondered what prompted Holmes to investigate this matter. One of the arguments is that while John Mason’s tale and concerns were interesting, they do not seem to rise to a dangerous, criminal level. Watson expressed his disbelief in the interpretation of Sir Robert’s behavior, leading to Holmes’ famous consideration about carrion crows and eagles.

As Mason describes it, Sir Robert’s behavior falls very far from being something one would consider as being criminal. The fact that according to Mason he had been acting in a somewhat eccentric fashion is hardly felonious; particularly during a time when Great Britain was well-known as a factory for eccentrics of every conceivable stripe.

Added to this is the fact that the man was burdened by intolerable debt and seemingly headed for what seemed like an irrecoverable financial catastrophe, the outcome of this horrid situation to be solely determined by a horse’s speed. This alone would have indeed been explanation enough for unusual behavior!



The master seems to be spending an unusual amount of time in an allegedly haunted crypt? And he has been mucking about with the ancestral bones of someone who died a thousand years before? By that measure, James Mortimer, in HOUN, and so many others would also have been criminal suspects.

Regarding the seemingly changed and ostensibly abusive behavior towards his sister, there could



Courtesy of ITV Granada

have been sundry explanations for it. She was of delicate health and perhaps she was not taking good care of herself and he wanted to limit activities he might consider dangerous, including her going out with an overly energetic dog. On top of this, regardless of her frail health, she seemed to have developed a sudden unhealthy attachment to the bottle.

The fact remains that everyone who knew them, knew that their love and esteem for one another were powerful; his grief at his sister’s death proves this. There was nothing really sinister to give rise to the concern that she might be in peril. Properly viewed, particularly from the perspective of the time, Mason’s account of the goings-on at Shoshcombe Old Place barely rises

above the level of malicious servants’ quarters’ gossip.

Regardless of all the above, it was a good thing that Holmes got involved. Things might have taken a different turn for Sir Robert, had our sleuth not been able to bring things to a successful conclusion.

What else happened in 1902:

Empire

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

First meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in London.

Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

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

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

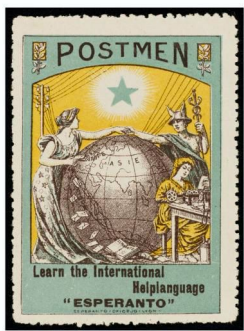
Britain

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.

◀ Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

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

Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

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, and 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 9½ 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; a 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.

◀ Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*.

Gauguin, *Riders by the sea*.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

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.

Next week's case: STUD

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...”

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.