



An Inquiry into: "The Problem of Thor Bridge"

"The Problem of Thor Bridge" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in February-March 1922 and in *Collier's Weekly* in November 1904. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

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

If the case took place in 1901, as the majority of our chronologists indicate, then Holmes was 47 years old and Watson 49.

Notable Quotes:

Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box with my name, John H. Watson, M.D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine.

"The faculty of deduction is certainly contagious."

"I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backwards."

"My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether."

<i>The Problem of Thor Bridge</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>October 4</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>October 4, 1896-1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>October 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1890</i>

A Sad Beginning

Once again, the Good Doctor tantalizes us with the contents of his now-legendary tin dispatch-box, full of the lost cases of Sherlock Holmes, by reminding us of the indescribable loss for all students of the Sacred Writings. Oh, well...

The Sinisterly Joyful Detective

As the story opens, Watson tells us that as he descended to breakfast, he found Holmes full of "that somewhat sinister cheerfulness which was characteristic of his lighter moments." According to my trusty dictionary, "sinister" means "singularly evil or productive of evil; of ill omen; presaging ill fortune or trouble; accompanied by or leading to disaster.

The Queen's English (both queens) hasn't changed that much that this word had another, less ominous meaning then than it does today. It is a peculiar way to describe our sleuth's lighter moments. Assuming Watson was not exaggerating for effect, what might this say to us about Holmes' character and personality?

Gibson's Residence

Within the framework of the times, I find it puzzling that someone like Neil Gibson would have moved to England. While today, someone of his fortune who did that wouldn't raise an eyebrow, back then things were very different. Traveling took time—even if you were rich. Rapid communications (important for a man running a financial empire) were pretty much restricted to the telegraph; news to the daily newspapers



Also, in view of the feeling Americans—particularly in the western states—had for their country, and the endemic dislike for England (which was cordially reciprocated by the British) it is interesting to theorize why a man as successful as Gibson, a multimillionaire, would have moved to England. Unquestionably, a wealthy man who

is a former senator would have had better connections and more latitude in his own country to engage in any sort of business he desired, than in one where he'd always be regarded as a stranger.

The Murder Weapon

Holmes tells Watson that a revolver of the same caliber as the weapon that killed Gibson's wife, with a discharged chamber, was found on the floor of Grace Dunbar's closet, which was considered as damning evidence. At the time there was no such thing as a well-developed science of ballistics even though the first successful case of forensic firearm examination occurred in London, in 1835. The science of forensic ballistics did not really take off until the 20th century, with the invention of the comparison microscope which allowed the simultaneous comparison of two different bullets and the close examination of striations for matches



One of the first true tests of this new technology came in the aftermath of the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929. The investigation stalled until officers searching a minor criminal's home found an arsenal of weapons including two Thompson submachine guns. The weapons were compared with the evidence recovered at the killing, proving that those were the weapons used to kill the members of the North Side Gang. This absolved the Chicago police department of all involvement; they had been under suspicion because the killers had dressed up like policemen.

Simmering Passionate Blood

Bates, Gibson, and Dunbar describe Gibson's deceased wife as, "Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. A child of the sun and of passion," and as one so ruled by her physical passions that she was unable to "understand the mental, and even spiritual tie" which held Grace Dunbar to her husband. Were one only go by what the Sacred Writings reveal, it would appear that Englishwomen operated at low temperatures. From what Watson has set down, passionate aggressive women belong to the "excitable races," whether Welsh or Latin. I can only think of two exceptions: Kitty Winter in *ILLU* and Miss Burnett in *WIST*, because Miss Violet de Merville in *ILLU* had been hypnotized by Baron Gruner. Any comments, Hounds?

Holmes, the Quintessential Victorian Gentleman

From a personal perspective, one of the things that most attracts me to Canon study are the occasional glimpses that it offers into that long-gone paradoxical era, during which poverty and brutality coexisted not too uneasily with a cultural and personal urge to overcome the baser self and aspire to attain an ideal of conduct: "I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection." And, "It is only for the young lady's sake that I touch your case at all. I don't know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences."



Watson's Gun

Holmes brilliantly used Watson's gun to prove Miss Dunbar's innocence. I may have mentioned this before, but in the Granada production Watson's expression as he sees his revolver disappear over the parapet into the water is priceless!

"After Seeing You"

We have learned to expect from Watson's romantic inclinations appreciative descriptions such as the one he makes here, of Miss Dunbar's physical and spiritual attractions. But what about Holmes? "After seeing you I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson's statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him." Indeed, sir? What happened to the hard-headed logician and theoretician who warned his friend that "Women are never to be entirely trusted—not the best of them"?

What else happened in 1901:

Empire



◀ Queen Victoria dies at 6:30 a.m. on January 22, aged 82. She lived through many changes and died loved by her people. By the end of her reign London's population had reached 6.6 million. On the same date, Edward VII accedes as King-Emperor.

Northern Nigeria becomes British protectorate.

Creation of North Western Frontier Province in India.

Uganda railway reaches Lake Victoria.

Britain

Wigmore Hall opens.



First electric trams from Shepherds Bush to Acton and Kew Bridge.

◀ Robert Falcon Scott commands the *Discovery* on Antarctic expedition.

First British submarine launched at Barrow-in-Furness.

Boxing is recognized as a legal sport in England.

Taff Vale case: Trade unions in Britain liable for actions of tort, stimulates Trade Union Congress to create the Labour Party.

World

Peace Protocol with China after Boxer Rebellion.

Law of Associations: gives French Roman Catholics the right to form associations, if neither secret nor illegal.

Labor Councils in France to settle disputes between masters and men.

U.S. President McKinley assassinated; succeeded by Theodore Roosevelt. ▶

Franco-Italian agreement defines spheres of interest in the Mediterranean.

Compulsory military service established in Sweden and Norway.

New constitution in Serbia issued by Alexander.

U.S. Steel Corporation organized under J.P. Morgan and Company, bankers.

Opening of Trans-Siberian railway.

Hay-Pauncefort Treaty gives U.S. power to build and police the Panama Canal if it remains open to shipping in peace or war.



Art

Kipling writes *Kim*.

Frank Norris, U.S., writes *The Octopus*.

Science and Technology



Becquerel discovers dangerous effects of radioactivity on humans.

◀ Marconi transmits Morse wireless signals from Poldhu, Cornwall to St. John's, Newfoundland.

First isolation of the hormone adrenalin.

Peter Cooper-Hewitt produces mercury vapor lamp; invented

by Arons in 1892.

Next week's case: CREE

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..."

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