



*An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of the
Norwood Builder"*

"The Adventure of the Norwood Builder" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in November 1903, and in

Collier's Weekly on October 1903. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

Almost all our chronologists agree on the year in which this case took place. If the majority is correct, then in 1894 Sherlock Holmes was 40 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 42.

Main Characters:

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John Hector McFarlane, young solicitor accused of murdering Jonas Oldacre, who seeks Holmes' help; Jonas Oldacre, wealthy master builder, believed to have been murdered; Mrs. McFarlane, John McFarlane's mother; Inspector Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard detective.

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

Notable Quotes:

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

At the time of which I speak Holmes had been back for some months, and I, at his request, had sold my practice and returned to share the old quarters in Baker Street. A young doctor, named Verner, had purchased my small Kensington practice, and given with astonishingly little demur the highest price that I ventured to ask—an incident which only explained itself some years later when I found that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes's, and that it was my friend who had really found the money.

"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 Unfortunate Out-of-Work Specialist

It is somewhat amusing, at the beginning of this case, to find Holmes bitterly complaining about the lack of crime in London and see him reveal his nostalgia for the good old days of Professor James Moriarty during whose time the morning paper always presented infinite possibilities that “the great malignant brain was there.”

Whose fault was it for this sorry state in the world of crime? Why our sleuth’s of course—a self-inflicted wound!



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Watson’s Retirement

At the opening of our case, Watson tells us that he had sold his medical practice at Holmes’ request. This enabled him to leave the practice of medicine and return to 221B to live with the Great Detective and share and eventually document their adventures together—but was it sufficient for him to retire on?

It would be very interesting to know the amount of the “princely sum” that, according to Watson,



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Holmes arranged to be paid for what our medico himself described as a small practice. We must also consider that in this same case we find out that Watson had been forbidden by Holmes to further chronicle his cases—“Perhaps I shall get the credit also at some distant day when I permit my zealous historian to lay out his foolscap once more—eh, Watson?”—so no income there.

Therefore, although we know that increasingly his stories based on Holmes’ cases were very well paid for by *The Strand Magazine* and the other publications that carried them, and that he would have been able to make a very decent living from

his writing, it appears that this source of revenue was closed to him.

So just how princely was that princely sum?

It is possible to speculate how much Holmes may have paid out to free his friend from the necessity of being just another hamster on the Wheel of Life. We know that at that time a gentleman could comfortably live as a member of his class on a yearly income of some £500 (≈\$190,000).

If we start from that premise, considering that if someone chose carefully it was possible to invest a fairly large sum at a yearly 4% interest, then Watson would have had to receive somewhere in the neighborhood of £13,000 (≈\$5,000,000) for his practice.

Princely indeed! However, let us recall that later on in the Canon the Duke of Holderness alone paid Holmes £6,000 (perhaps as much as £12,000). Then there were all those Royals and Cardinals, the French government, etc. By the standards of his age, Holmes would have been quite wealthy; by the standards of ours, he would have been a multimillionaire.

Thus, added to his wound stipend, this would have provided the Good Doctor with more than enough funds to easily live well without having to concern himself with any other income-producing activity.

No Lesson Seems Sufficient

Amazingly, after all this time, it still appears that our favorite inspector is still unable to find the shoes on his feet at high noon in Trafalgar Square using a bull's eye lantern.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Here we have Lestrade himself conceding 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.” We know for a fact that the Scotland Yarde has not only experienced, but profited from Holmes’ capabilities in the past. He seems to know enough to remain at 221B after McFarlane is taken away to find out what the Great Detective has to say about the case and yet does little else but scoff when his better begins “to get on [his] theories.”

It would not be too farfetched to hazard the guess that perhaps subconsciously the inspector believed that perhaps Holmes knew something that he did not. However, even if he was convinced that he had laid his hands on the guilty party, based on past experience why would he not at least “indulge” the Great Detective and attempt to see where some of his theories might lead?

Oldacre’s Long-Lasting Villainy

While holding a grudge of the type Oldacre had for so long a time, and then attempting to get revenge through a completely innocent person may seem somewhat exaggerated in our day and age, one should always remember that Holmes and Watson lived in completely different times. Even those of us who have made a lifelong study of those times sometimes tend to think (during unguarded moments) that the Victorians were just like us, only without central heating. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

We tend not to brood over things as much as past generations have. Today, one rarely hears of a man shooting himself because a sweetheart left him. This may be due in part to the infinity of distractions that surround us. Our friends and relatives are constantly contacting us through smart phones or email, we do not need to go to the theater (or even to the movies) to be amused.



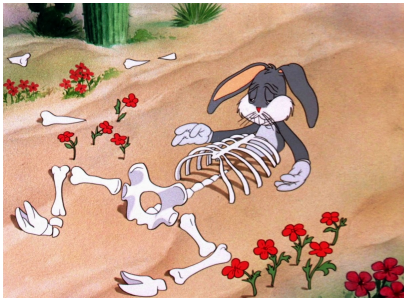
Courtesy of ITV Granada

We just turn on our big-screen TV, or listen to music, think nothing of a 50-mile drive to the beach or country, or flying to just about anywhere on the planet in under ten hours.

With less distraction it was easier to concentrate back then, as well as brood. I am sometimes asked by the heathen whether it isn't true that because of his disinterest in the fair sex Sherlock Holmes was a homosexual; otherwise, how could he not have had a least *one* girlfriend in his life! I point out that it was easier to lead what today would be considered a fairly monastic life, without the flood of stimuli constantly bombarding us through the news, movies, and—most definitely—the Internet. I tend to sneer when I tell the interrogator that back then visual pornography was mostly illicitly imported from France and was far from being free.

This could also explain why Mrs. McFarlane would have kept the photograph that Oldacre so “shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife” for so many years—she too would have brooded upon it. Today, a solution would have been practically immediate: call 911 over a threat to your life—you had the photo and the curse.

An Old Jeremiad



Whenever we study this case, I am perpetually bothered by the so-called “organic remains” found by the police in the fire’s ashes, which they identified as being Oldacre’s remains: “a dead dog, or rabbits, or what”? One would think that even during the 19th century coroners could tell the difference between human and animal remains; however, in view of Lestrade’s constant behavior towards Holmes, it may very well be that a calcined rabbit would have been mistaken for a man.

What else happened in 1894:

EMPIRE

Uganda becomes protectorate.

Jameson occupies Matabeleland.

BRITAIN

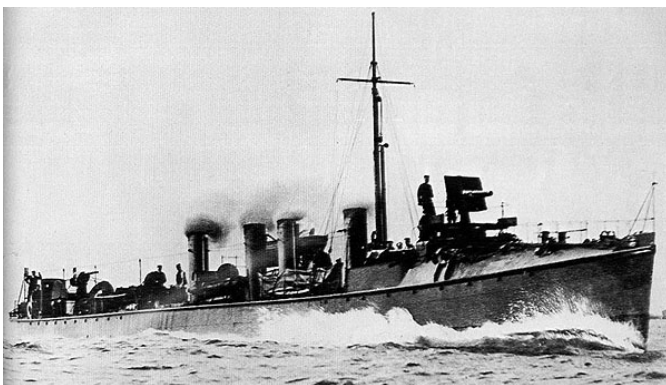
Gladstone retires; Rosebery becomes prime minister with is minority Liberal government.

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.

◀ Captain Alfred Dreyfus unjustly found guilty of treason, condemned to Devil's Island.

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 dies; 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.

Beginning of car racing Paris to Rouen.

France and the Russian Empire form a military alliance.

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.

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*.

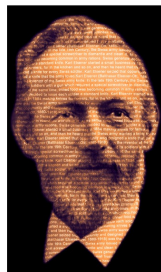
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Escalators introduced (U.S.).

The Karl Elsener Commemorative Knife



Karl Elsener (Balthasar Elsener-Ott, 1860-1918) was the inventor of the Swiss army knife. In the late 19th Century, the Swiss army issued its soldiers with a gun which required a special screwdriver to dismantle and clean it. At the same time, tinned food was becoming common in army rations. Swiss generals decided to issue each soldier a standard knife. Karl Elsener started a small business in 1884 making knives for farmers, for in the kitchen and so on, and then he heard that the Swiss army wanted a knife for every Swiss soldier. Karl Elsener seized that opportunity and designed a knife that the army loved.



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

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

Flagstaff (Lowell) Observatory erected.

Oliver and Schäfer discover the nature of insulin.

◀ Karl Elsener invents the Swiss Army knife.

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

Louis Lumière invents the cinematograph.

First commercial film release by Jean Aimé Le Roy.

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

Guaranty Building, Buffalo erected. Metal-framed building.

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