



An Inquiry into:
“The Adventure of the Priory School”

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“The Adventure of the Priory School” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on January 30, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in February 1904. It is part of the *Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

As the table shows, our chronologists are almost unani-

mous regarding the date and year in which this adventure took place.

If, indeed, the case took place in 1901, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 47 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 49.

Main Characters:

Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, Head of the Priory School, author of *Huxtable’s Side-lights on Horace*. Lord Arthur Saltire, son and heir of the Duke of Holderness, missing student of the Priory School. The Duke of Holderness, late Cabinet minister, father of Lord Saltire. James Wilder, secretary of the Duke of Holderness, who is his secret illegitimate son. Heidegger, German master at the Priory School. Reuben Hayes, landlord of the Fighting Cock Inn.

<i>The Adventure of the Priory School</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>1901 (or possibly later)</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>May 1901</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>May 1901</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Thursday, May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Monday, May 14, 1900</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Thursday, May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday, May 16, 1901</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Thursday, May 17, 1900</i>
<small>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.</small>	

Notable Quotes:

“Perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it.”

“His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself.”

“A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with.”

Victorian Principles and the Princely Sum

This is one of those Canonical cases which require a smattering of awareness of the times during which Holmes and Watson lived. While the facts of the case are clear and interesting enough, scholars of the Sacred Writings have tended to concentrate upon Sherlock Holmes reasons for consenting to investigate.



Doctor Watson sets down that when Huxtable pleaded with Holmes to investigate little Lord Saltire's disappearance he flatly refused. At the time, he and Watson were concentrating on the matter of the Ferrers documents and the impending Abergavenny murder trial. One has to assume that part of the importance of the latter was the Great Detective's crucial testimony. His seemingly final word on the matter was, "Only a very important issue could call me from London at present."

All of this aside, it seems that upon learning that that the abducted boy was the son of the Duke of Holderness, who had offered to pay £5,000 for the solution to his son and heir's kidnapping, and an additional £1,000 for the kidnapper's identity, Holmes instantly discarded these other supposedly important pursuits, and started off for the Priory School with Watson and Huxtable.

Herein the conundrum.

What prompted Holmes radical change of mind? Was he tempted by the prospect of such a large sum of money? Were it to have been so, it should be considered that in 1901 £6,000 was not just a tidy little sum. In today's currency, our sleuth would have been looking at an offer of roughly \$2,300,000!

Was this sum compelling enough to convince the Great Detective to abandon his fixed professional charges? Did he vary them in this case, rather than remitting them altogether? Or was it because it involved the heir of one of the "greatest and perhaps the wealthiest" families of the Realm, the son of a former Cabinet minister?

Writing in *ILLU*, Watson tells his readers that he convinced Holmes to allow him to make a record of what was, in some ways, "the supreme moment of my friend's career." Supreme moment? Surely this was a hyperbole on the part of our biographer. After all the important and crucial investigations Holmes had been involved in, sometimes leading to the successful prevention of a European war, trying to keep a thoroughly thoughtless young fool from ruining her life by marrying a blackguard hardly comes to that level.

However, if one considers Holmes wide knowledge of British society, it could not have escaped him who Sir James Damery's illustrious client was (possibly Edward, Prince of Wales). This made the case one commissioned to him by the Heir to the Throne himself. He could not have possibly refused and, because of whom his real client was, this case would have been one of the highlights of his career.

(One should at this point—from a safe distance—raise a glass to Kitty Winter and her excellent aim with the contents of that bottle of vitriol. Had it not been for this, it is doubtful that Holmes would have enjoyed so complete a success.)

In CHAS, we tend to be shocked by the cold and callous fashion in which Holmes seduced Milverton's maid into falling in love with him to obtain needed information about the blackmailer's house. Once this was accomplished he so thoughtlessly dropped her that even Watson remonstrated:

“But the girl, Holmes?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“You can't help it, my dear Watson. You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table. However, I rejoice to say that I have a hated rival who will certainly cut me out the instant that my back is turned.”

Naturally, Lady Eva Brackwell was a more important and valuable person than a mere maid!

Before judging Holmes too harshly let us remember that, unavoidably, he a man of his time, with perspectives different to our own. Queen Victoria acceded to the throne in 1838, 16 years before his



birth. After having reigned for 64 years, she died in the year of this case. Until then, 47-year-old Holmes had known no other sovereign. She acquired mythological proportions while at the nation's helm as England attained imperial greatness.

For all of my elementary studies, my parents sent me to English public schools. My anglophilia dates from those days. We were enthusiastically brainwashed with the thrilling mythos of England. Our textbooks instructed us about the Empire's glorious history, and told us all about the courageous and breathtaking (often mythical) deeds of “extraordinary” people—many of them members of the nobility—who made, served, and expanded it: Clive of India, Lord Nelson, Queen Victoria, Winston Churchill, King Arthur, etc. We also had school on Saturdays—half a day of class and on the afternoon we would crowd into the auditorium to be further instructed by such exciting movies as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Kim of India*, and *Robin Hood*.

Legends are sturdy—they do not easily die. In London you find statues of Richard the Lionhearted, none of his evil usurping brother, Prince John. It is immaterial that Richard only ruled for some ten years—very few of which he actually spent in England, which he frequently abandoned to go on a crusade or engage in various wars and raids (sometimes against his own noblemen). Poor Prince John, although he turned out to be a miserable ruler, at least attempted to keep the country in one piece.

As a boy Holmes had to have been overwhelmingly exposed to all this wonderful mythology. Even as an adult, he must have been being influenced by the patriotic, Kiplingesque glitter of Empire, the parades, the changing of the guard, the flag-waving newspapers and literature. Possibly he may not

have been as deeply affected as most, but had to have been influenced nonetheless. Consider that even Watson was proud of his own short disastrous military service.

These were times when sharply defined class distinctions were casually accepted. People referred to their “betters” and if you served at a great house, you were proud to be called a lackey.

We have learned to expect more of Holmes than simply a well-solved case. It has been argued that our sleuth fell off the ethics wagon, and may have closed his eyes to the dictates of his own conscience due to Holderness's position. While this had to have had an influence, we really do not know just how much; there had to have been an influence as far as that is concerned, but we do not know how much pressure it exerted upon Holmes. Was he attracted to the reward offered? Certainly, the man was made of flesh and blood. Nevertheless it is well to consider that by 1901 his economic situation was quite and comfortably settled—he did not need the £6,000 in order to live well.

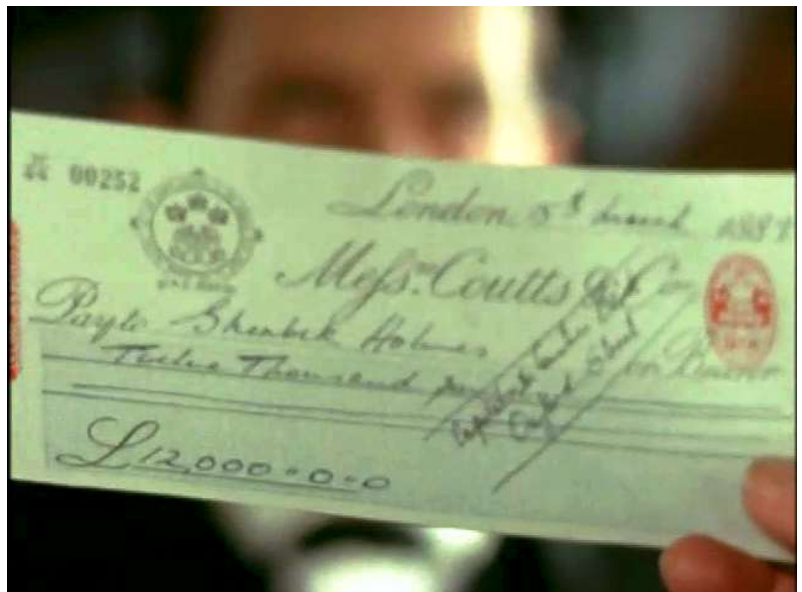


When it comes to the apportionment of guilt, however, the terrain grows somewhat muddy. Hayes murdered Heidegger, and so he had to pay the supreme penalty. However, it is well to recall that English Common Law judges *all* members of a conspiracy equally guilty of crimes are committed as a result of the conspiracy. By this standard, even the Duke himself could have found himself in a precarious situation because, unwittingly or not, he became a part of that conspiracy.

Wilder, the Duke's illegitimate son was morally and legally (as part of the conspiracy) equally as guilty before the law. Nonetheless, he was permitted to disappear to Australia, to “seek his fortune.” Although it was not unusual for Holmes to condone a felony, on this occasion, unhappily, it does not seem that he did it out of a sense of personal justice to protect an innocent or a victim as he did in BOSC—after all, Hayes had to pay the full measure.

One may fairly observe that with the exception of Huxtable, Saltire, and Watson, nobody emerged from this case with unsullied petticoats.

The two perennial questions asked by Canon students is whether Holmes entered the case, unsatisfactorily solving it as he did, for the reward, and what was the check's exact amount. His seemingly self-satisfied comment, while putting away the Duke's check, “I am a poor man,” is blandished as proof. Then there are endless discussions regarding whether the check's actual amount was £6,000 or £12,000.



In any case—to reference Holy Writ—none of us is sufficiently virtuous to throw the first stone. Even the great Sherlock Holmes was human.

Tracking the German Master

In a tracking contest with Sherlock Holmes, even Toby the hound would come second. Nevertheless, a sticking point for me has always been just how clear Heidegger's tracks could have been. Since little



Lord Saltire, being groomed to take his place in ruling the Empire, must doubtless have been sent to the best schools available (read "expensive") by the Duke, his father. Therefore one must assume that the Priory School had to be one of England's very best institutions. The point is that, among other pleasantries it would have had well-cared-for lawns. This tends to point to the fact that there would not have been much left of Heidegger's tracks the following morning.

Holmes remarked that the weather was dry. Considering that back then there were no such things as sprinkler systems, for the German master to have left such tracks he would have had to let himself down hard enough to compact the ground, most likely destroying his ankles.

Another discouraging element to consider is that the Priory was a boys' school, which means that

tracks of every size and description would have been plentiful everywhere, even where the students were not supposed to walk.

Of Visages and Family Secrets

It is startling to see Holmes being blindsided for not exercising his powers of observation. How can a man able to trace someone's ancestor by merely glancing at an ancient painting have missed the even closer family resemblance between the Duke and his illegitimate son Wilder?

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 well-loved by her people. She presided over her vast empire for nearly 64 years—the longest reign in British history until Elizabeth II. Born in 1819, the only child of George III's fourth son, Victoria was crowned queen in 1838. In 1840, she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Although the match was a political one, the two were devoted to each other, having nine children before Albert's death in 1861. Through dynastic marriages, Victoria's descendants are connected to almost all 20th-century Europe's royal houses. During her long reign the monarchy lost much of its political power to Parliament, but she was the beloved symbol of the Victorian Era—a golden age of British history. By the end of her reign London's population had reached 6.6 million. Upon her death, she was succeeded by her son, Edward VII, who was crowned King-Emperor.



Northern Nigeria becomes British protectorate.

Creation of the North Western Frontier Province in India.

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

Britain and Germany agree on boundary between German East Africa (later Tanganyika, Rwanda and Burundi) and Nyasaland (later Malawi).

Uganda railway reaches Lake Victoria.

Cook Islands were annexed and proclaimed a part of New Zealand.

The Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed. Although independent it still recognized Britain's royalty as its head of state. The governor-general, the representative of the Sovereign, is nominated by the prime minister and appointed by the British monarch.

Britain

Wigmore Hall opens.

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

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. Boxer Rebellion leaders Chi-Hsin (Chi-hsui) and Hsu-Cheng-Yu are publicly executed in Peking.



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

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.

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

Anti-Semitic riot in Budapest.

Compulsory military service established in Sweden and Norway.

New constitution in Serbia issued by Alexander.

Japan proclaims that it is determined to keep Russia from encroaching on Korea.

First female intern was accepted at a Paris hospital.

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

Opening of Trans-Siberian railway.

Hay-Pauncefote 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*.

Richard D'Oyly Carte, promoter (Gilbert and Sullivan operas), dies.

Chekhov's *Three Sisters* opens at Moscow Art Theater.

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

Matisse paints *The Japanese Woman*.

◀ Walt Disney is born in Chicago.

Picasso paints *Woman with a Cap*, *Casagemas in His Coffin*, and *The Absinthe Drinker*.

Van Gogh's painting *Sunflowers* is presented by art teacher Claude-Emile Schuffenecker at a Paris exhibition.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, French painter, dies at 36.

Science and Technology

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

Becquerel discovers dangerous effects of radioactivity on humans.

U.S. Congress creates the National Bureau of Standards as part of the Department of Commerce.



◀ Walter Reed leads Yellow Fever Commission, a four-man team, to Cuba to search for the cause of the disease. More than 200 American soldiers died from the disease over the previous 18 months. Aristides Agramonte, pathologist, James Carroll, bacteriologist, and Jesse W. Lazear, entomologist, were team members. Cuban Dr. Carlos Finlay theorized that yellow fever was spread by mosquitoes.

Alberto Santos-Dumont successfully circles Eiffel Tower in his Santos-Dumont No. 6 dirigible within a half hour and won a 100,000-franc prize. An initial ruling stated he failed by 40 seconds because the race wasn't finished until he touched ground. A second vote granted him the win. This proved the airship maneuverable.

Rene Dubos, French-American microbiologist who developed the first commercial antibiotic, was born in France.

Freud publishes *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

First isolation of the hormone adrenalin.

Peter Cooper-Hewitt produces mercury vapor lamp; invented by Arons in 1892.

Next week's case: BLAC.

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..."

All Sherlock Holmes illustrations have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

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

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