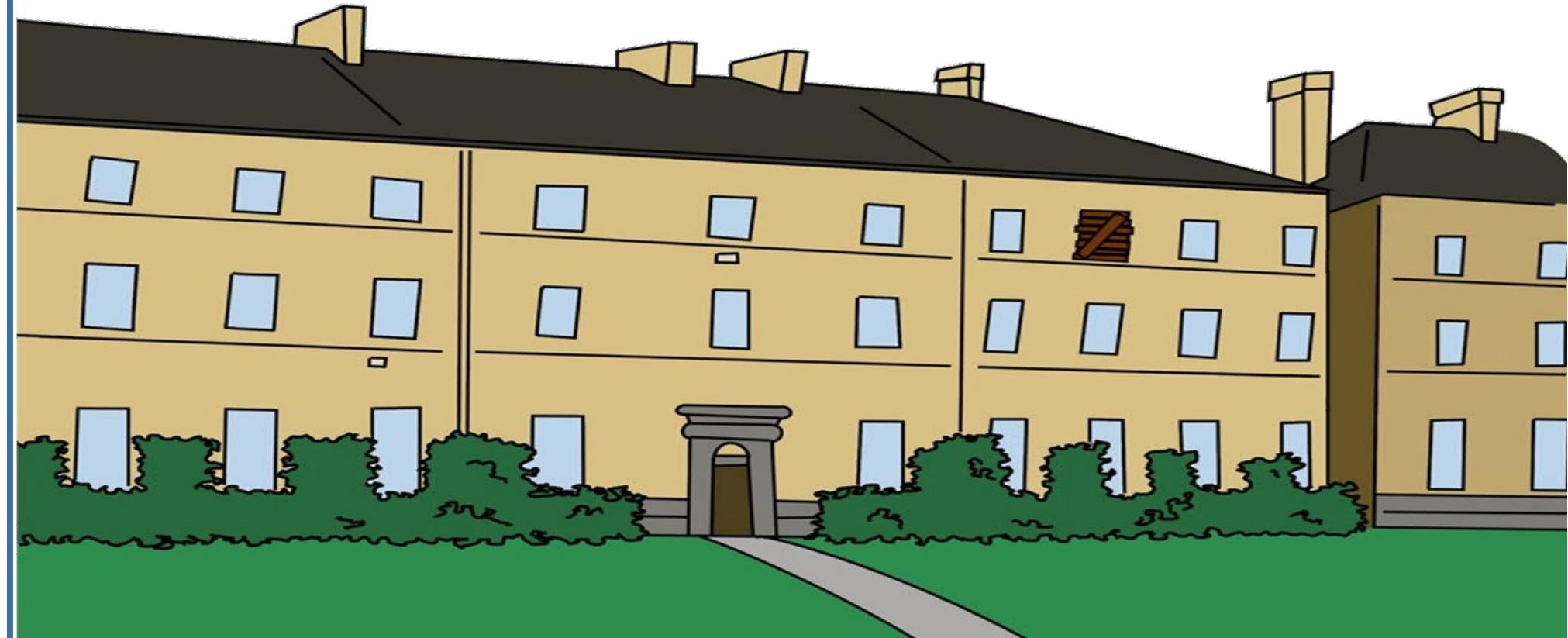


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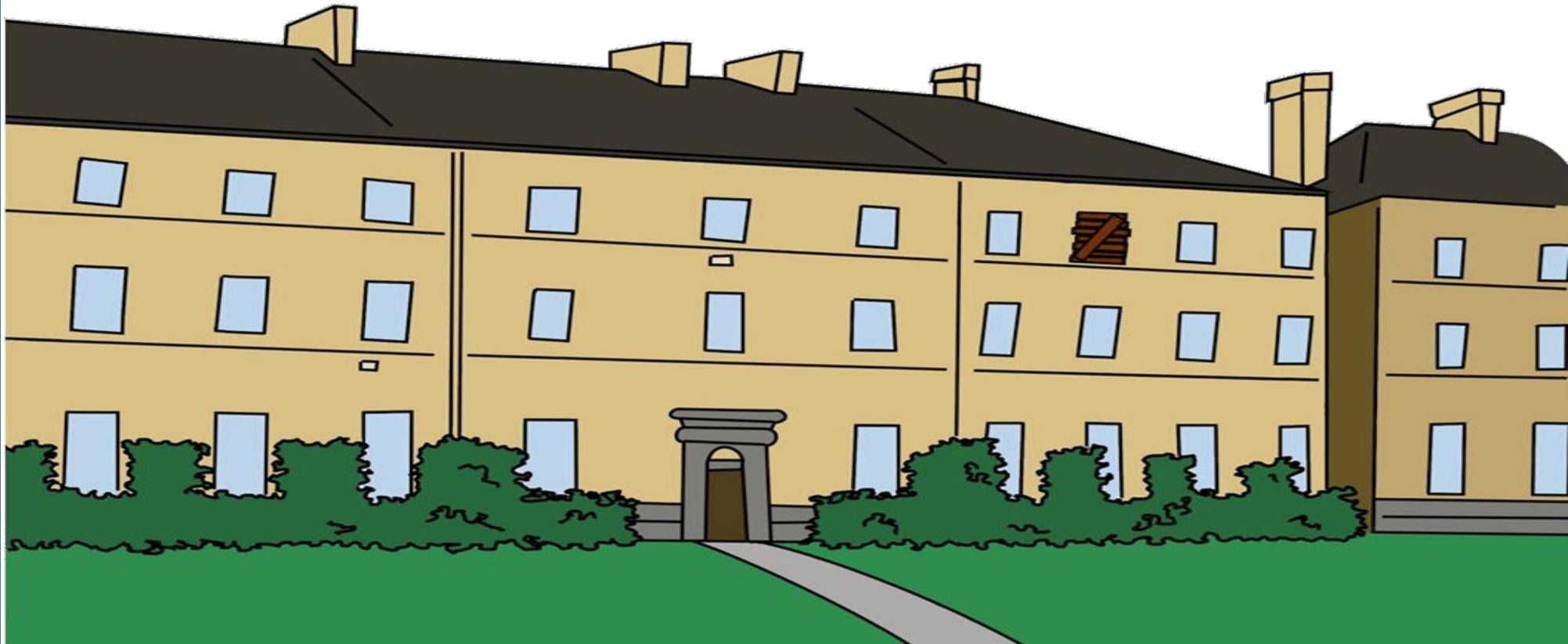
Presents

"The Life and Times in Victorian London"



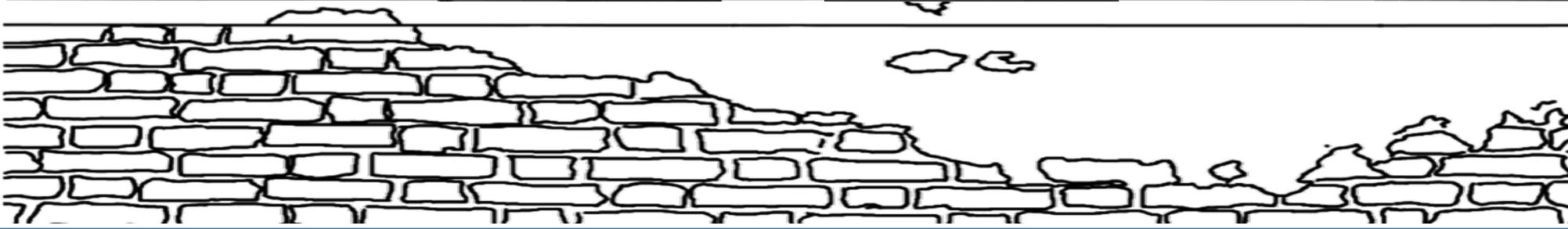
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The Life and Times in Victorian London
032 -- A Shot in the Dark -- February, 2022



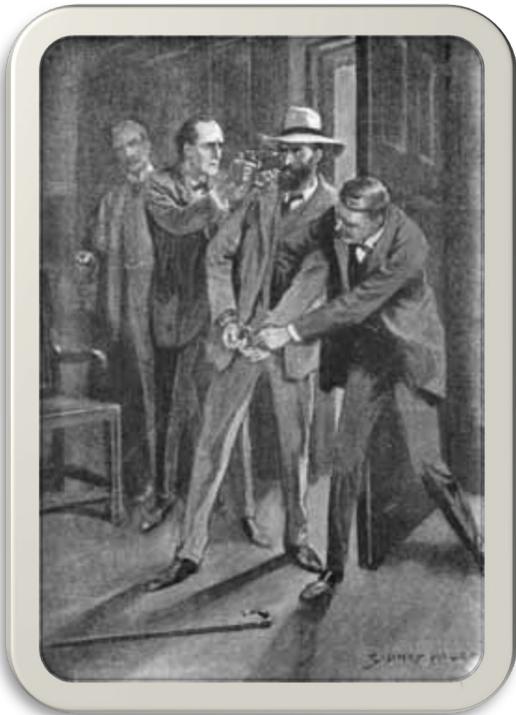


Welcome to topic # 032... Today, Master Gregson and I will look at the use of firearms in the Sherlock Holmes stories.



Firearms figured prominently in three of the cases in the Canon: the very special air-gun of Colonel Sabastian Moran in "The Adventure of the Empty House,"...





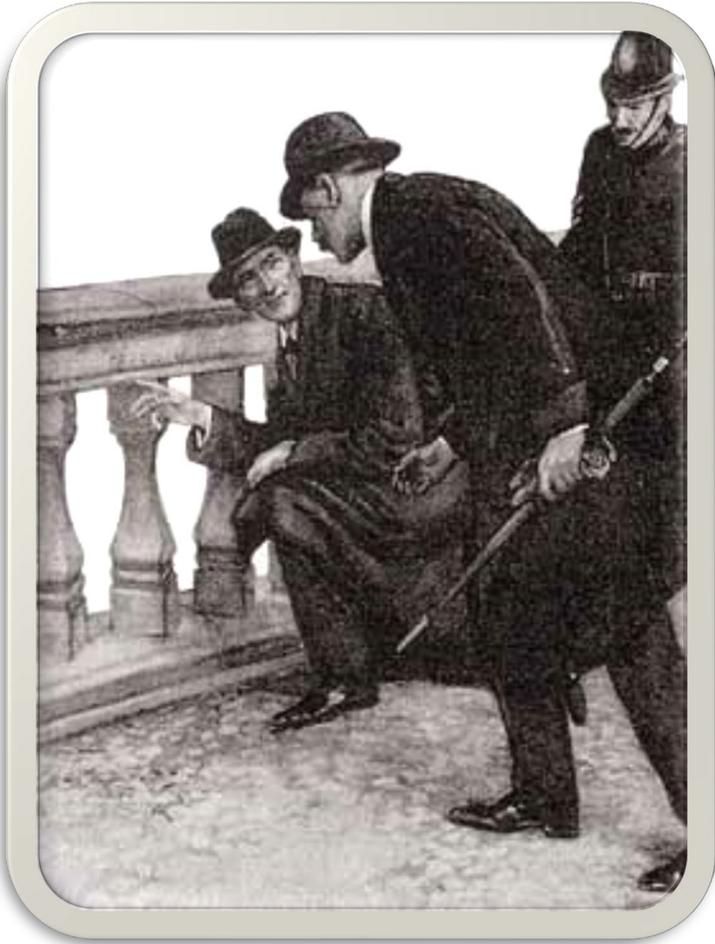
*...the apparent death of
Hilton Cubitt and his wife's
suicide in "The Adventure
of the Dancing Men,"...*



...and the apparent murder of Maria Gibson by one of a pair of her husband's revolvers from his "arsenal" in "The Adventure of Thor Bridge."



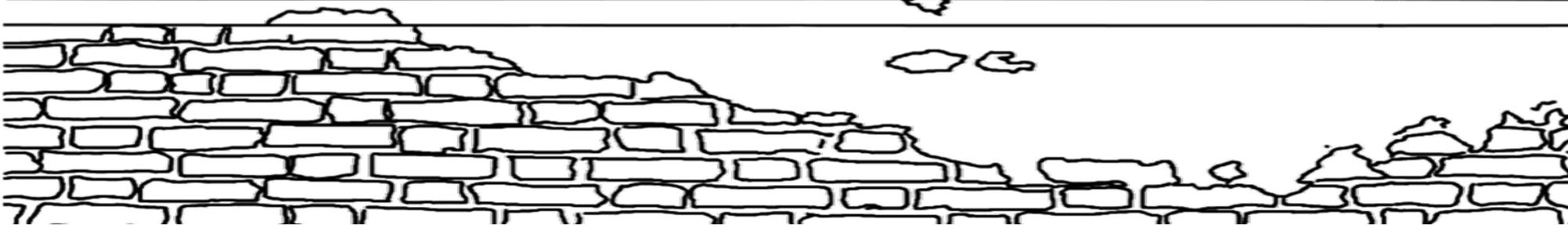
In all three deaths, Holmes' knowledge of weapons and ballistics provided the true nature and sequence of events.



Holmes was known to use several different firearms, including a .45-caliber Webley Metropolitan Police RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) revolver...



*...a .45-caliber British Bull Dog
(a pocket revolver), and a
Webley RIC chambered in .442
(his pistol of choice).*



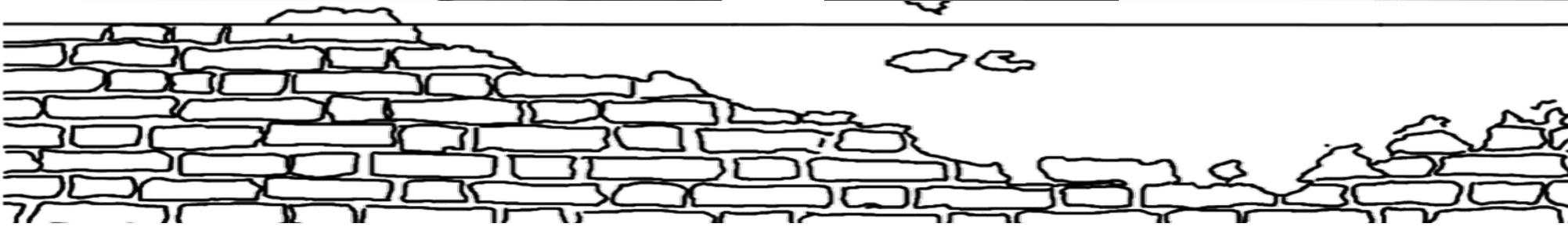
While it could be assumed Holmes was no slouch with his aim (he couldn't have "decorated" his flat with the initials...)



...“VR” in bullet holes without a great deal of precision), Baring-Gould concluded Watson was the better shot.



The doctor needed only a single bullet to take down a mastiff in "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches," while Holmes needed five to do the same with the hound of the Baskervilles.





When first developed, guns were basically hand-held canons where the shooter loaded gunpowder and a steel ball into the barrel and lit a fuse.



A trigger and a percussion cap later replaced the fuse.



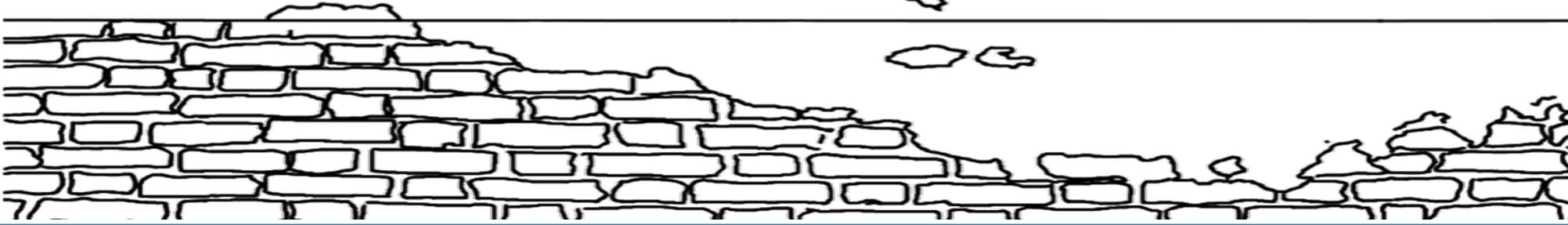
*Adding a revolving chamber
that held several shots,
reducing the need to reload
and created the revolver.*



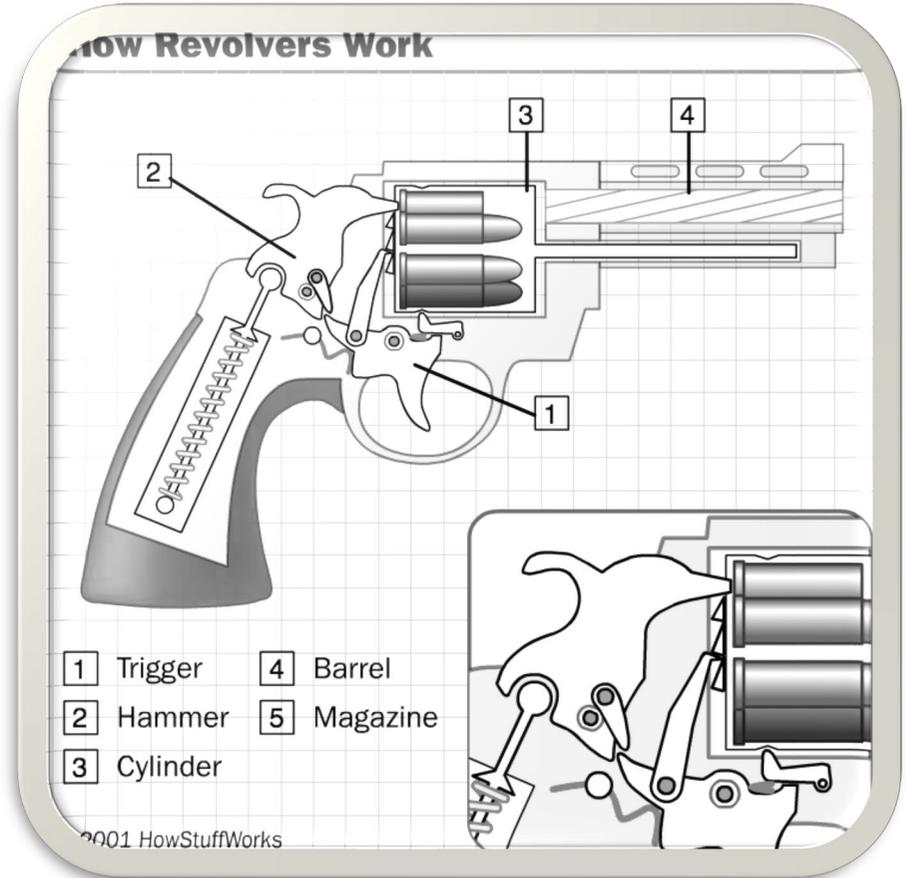
By the 1870s, instead of filling each chamber with gunpowder, these weapons used a bullet cartridge containing the projectile, gunpowder, and an explosive cap.



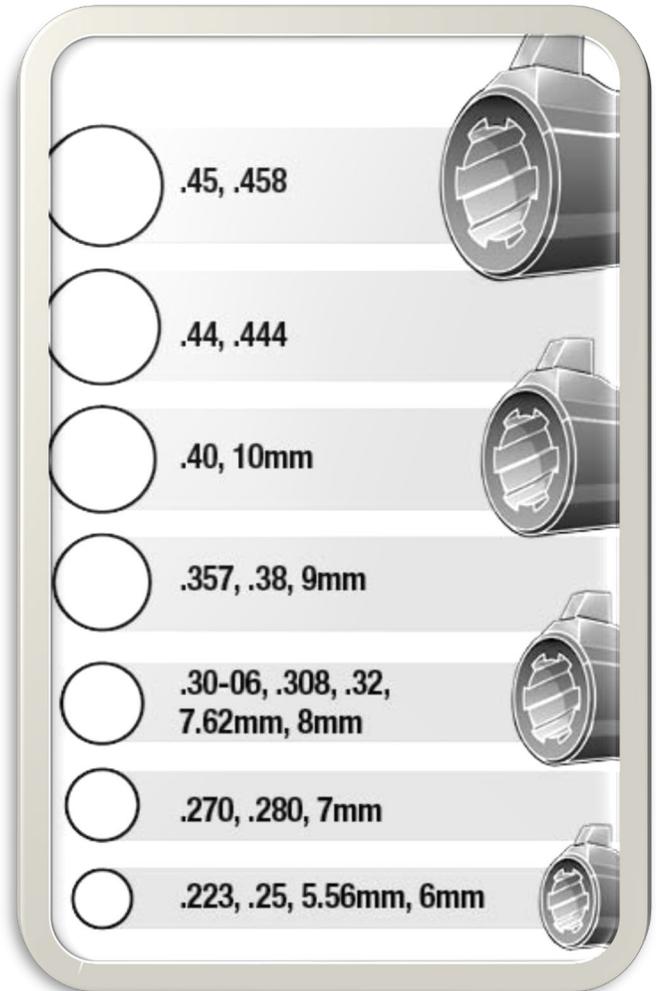
Today, as then, when the shooter pulls the trigger, a hammer draws back and then springs forward to hit the cartridge and its cap.



The gunpowder explodes and forces the bullet down the barrel of the gun.



A gun's caliber refers to the internal diameter of the gun's barrel and is important in identifying the make of handgun.

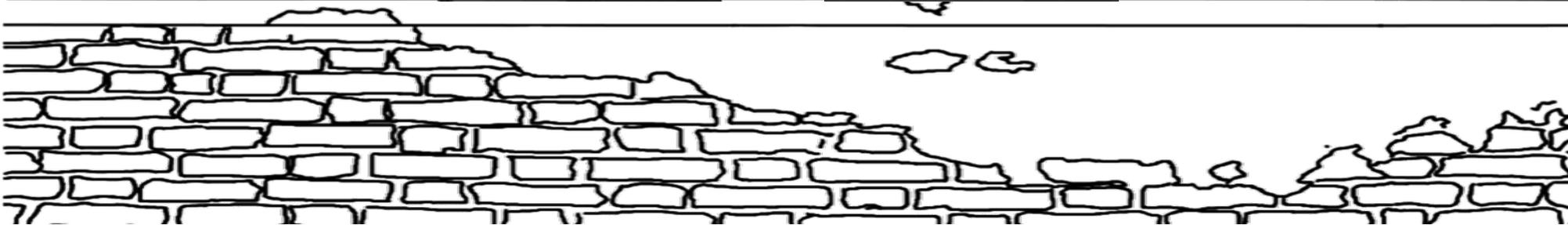
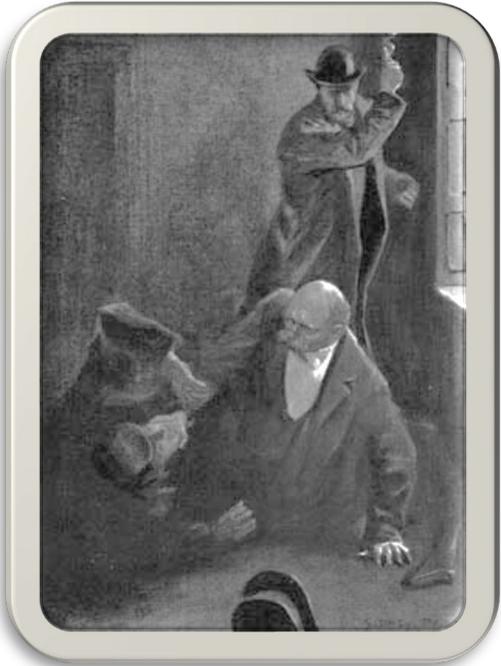




As noted above, most of Holmes' and Watson's firearms were .45 caliber, meaning the interior diameter of Watson's trusty service revolver was .45 inches.



Colonel Sabastian Moran, on the other hand, deceived law enforcement by using a soft revolver bullet in his airgun.



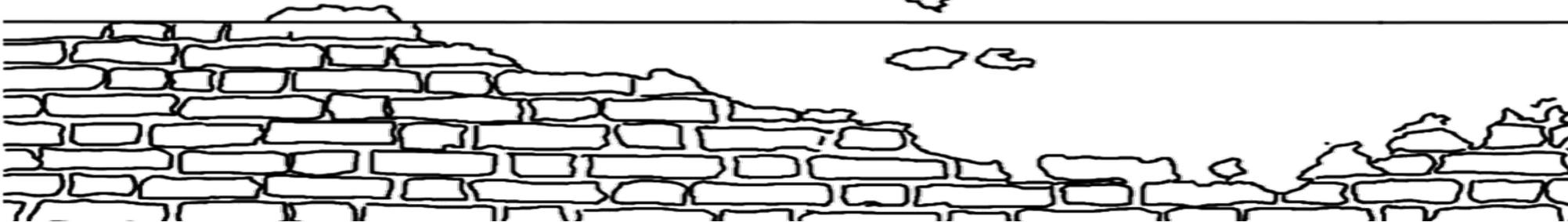
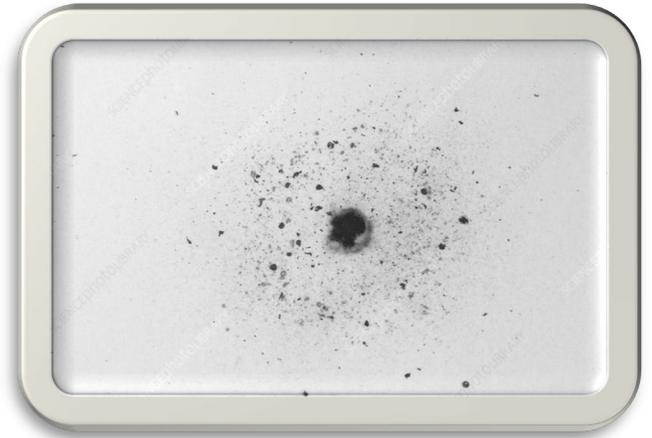
In addition to the type of gun and bullet used in a crime, another part of forensics — referred to “firearm examination” — involves gunshot evidence on either the victim or suspect.



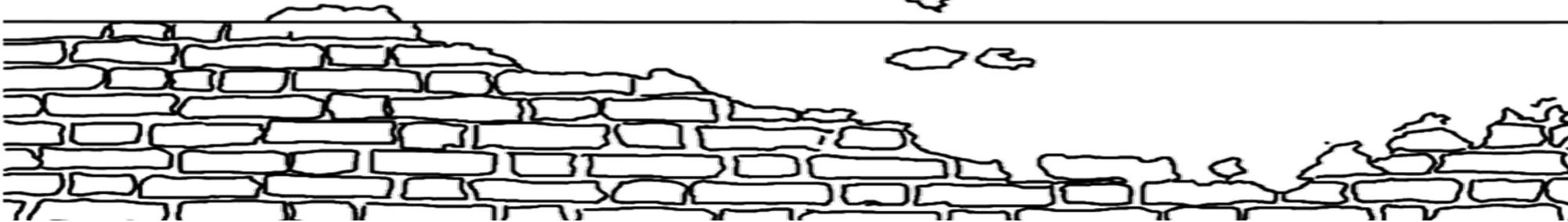
As noted above, when a bullet is fired, the gunpowder explodes.



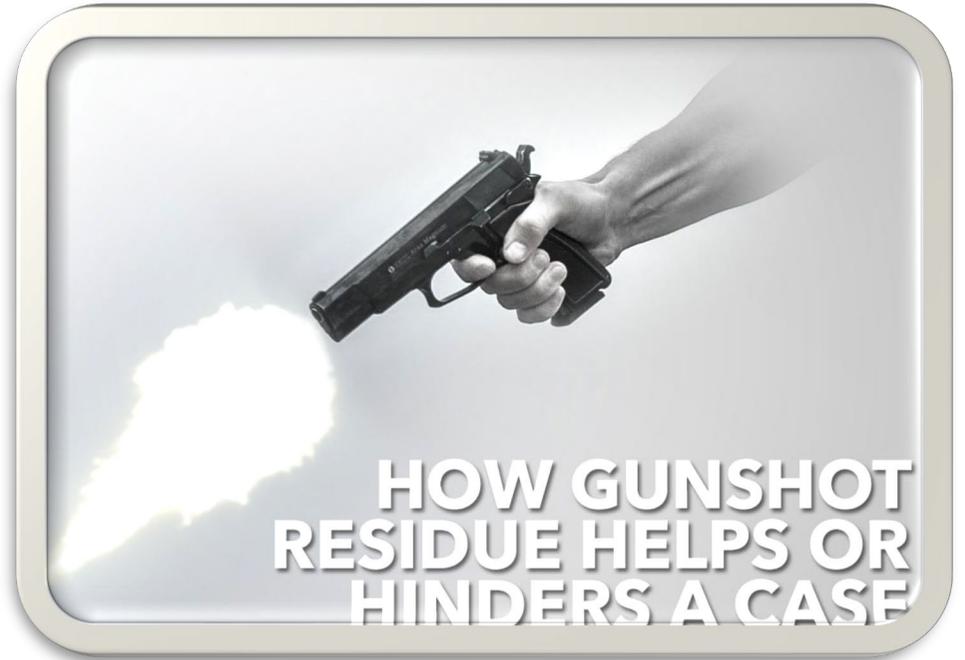
The gases and other particles created by this explosion follow the bullet as well as escaping through spaces in the weapon itself.



*Revolvers are particularly
"holey" and leave more of
this residue on the
shooter.*

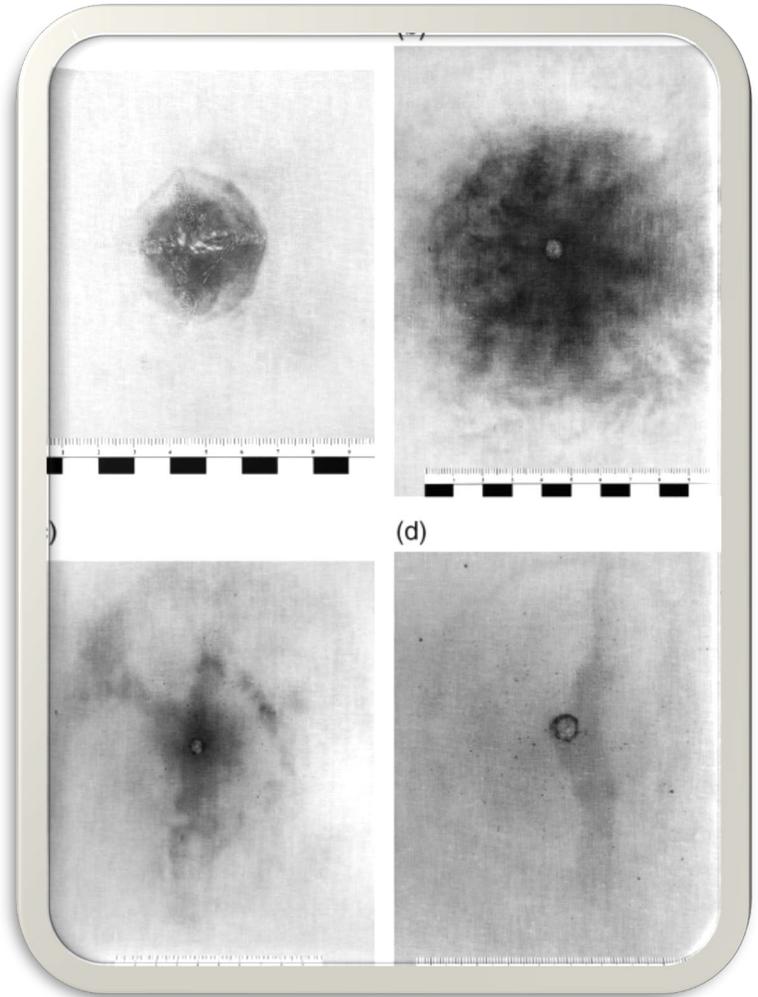


*In the case of the victim,
gunshot residue (GSR) can be
used to determine how far the
victim was from the weapon.*



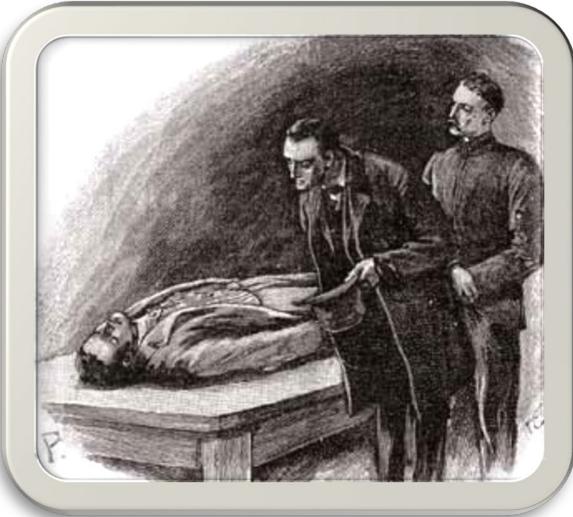
**HOW GUNSHOT
RESIDUE HELPS OR
HINDERS A CASE**

The closer the two, the more *GSR* will be found.

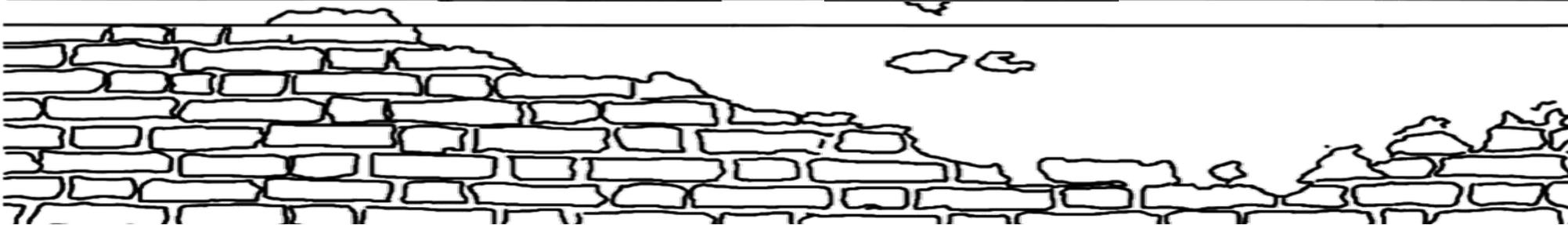


Holmes used this knowledge of GSR to conclude that William Kirwan in "The Adventure of the Reigate Squire" was not shot...





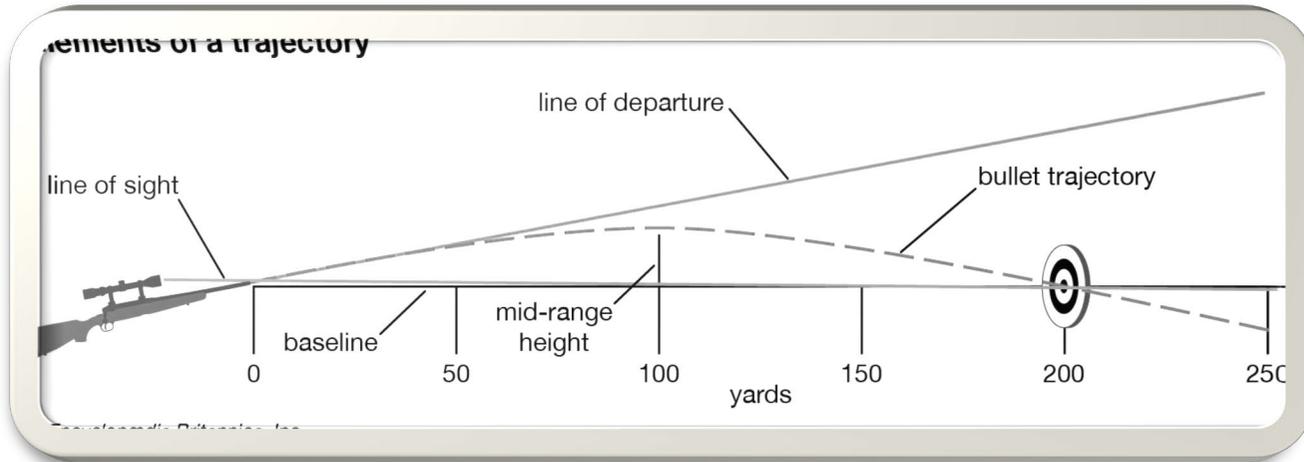
...during a struggle over a gun as reported, because his clothes carried no black marks from being shot at close range.



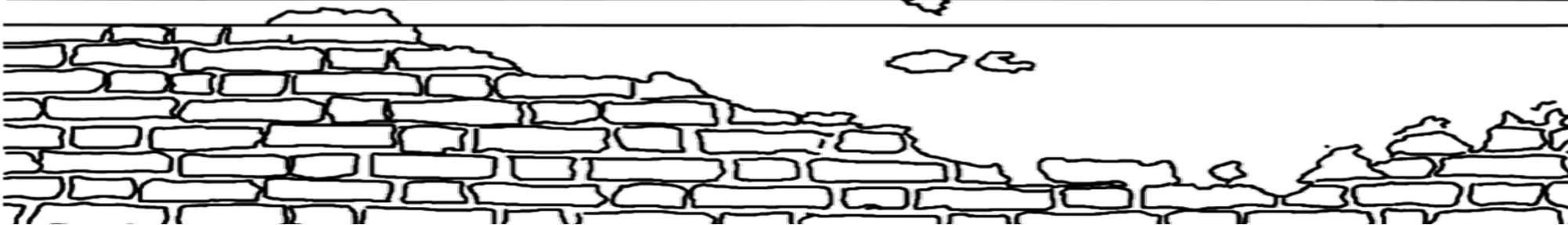
He also used his knowledge of GSR and ballistics in the "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" to determine the presence of a third shooter in the murder of Hilton Cubitt.



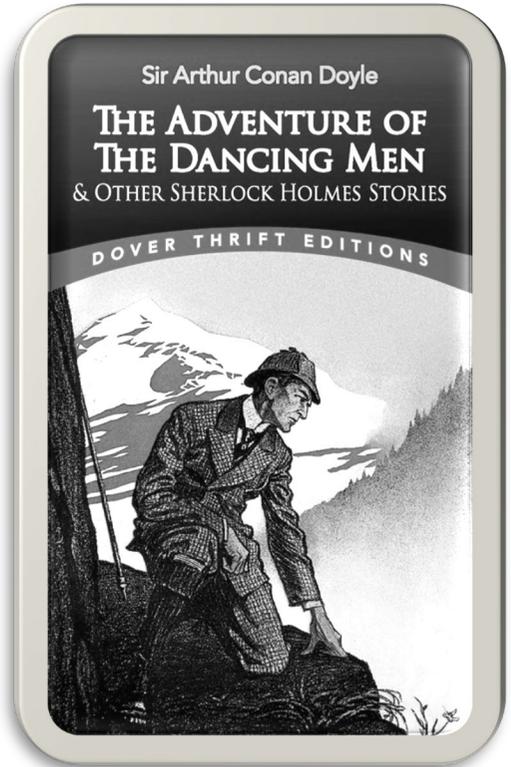
Ballistics is the study of how bullets (and other projectiles) travel.



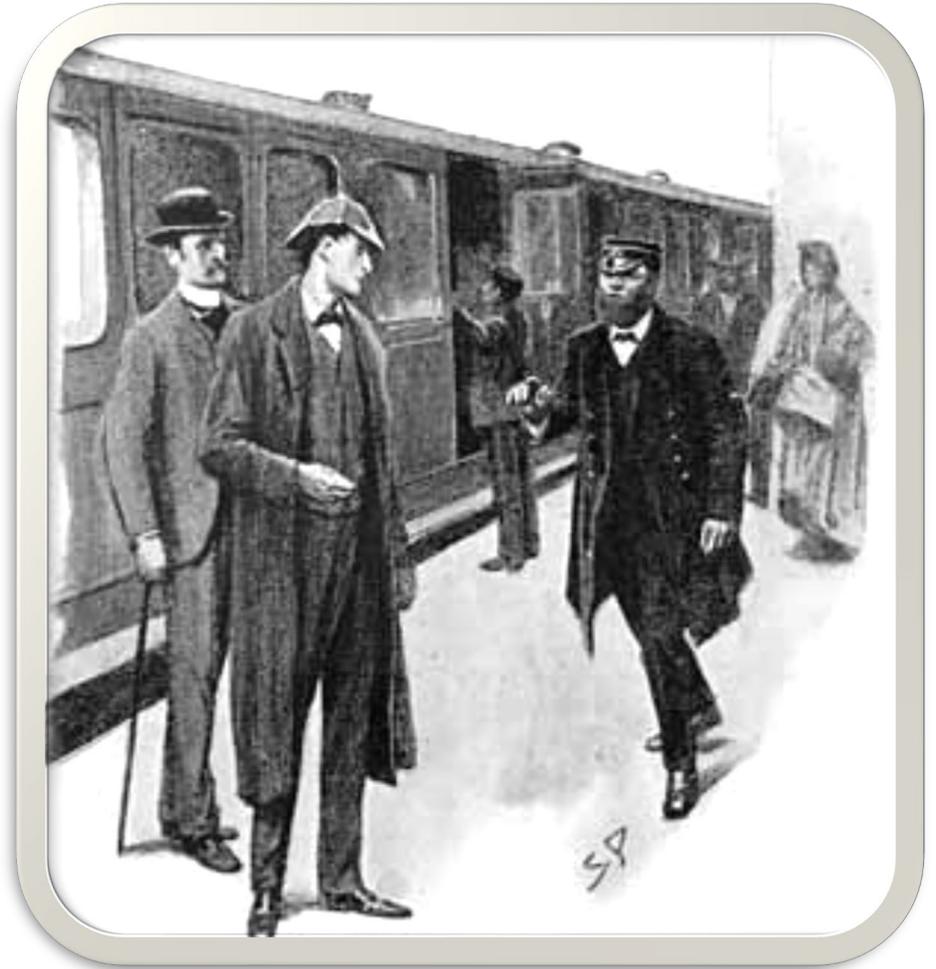
He noted the lack of powder marks on the victim, but some on Mrs. Cubitt's hands, and a third bullet hole through a window sash, indicating a third shot and shooter.



Taken together, the evidence indicated Cubitt and the third person exchanged gunshots — one with deadly aim and the second missing its intended victim.



*Upon finding her husband
dead, Mrs. Cubitt
unsuccessfully attempted to
take her own life...*



...and would have been tried for murder without Holmes' keen observations and discovery of the third shot.



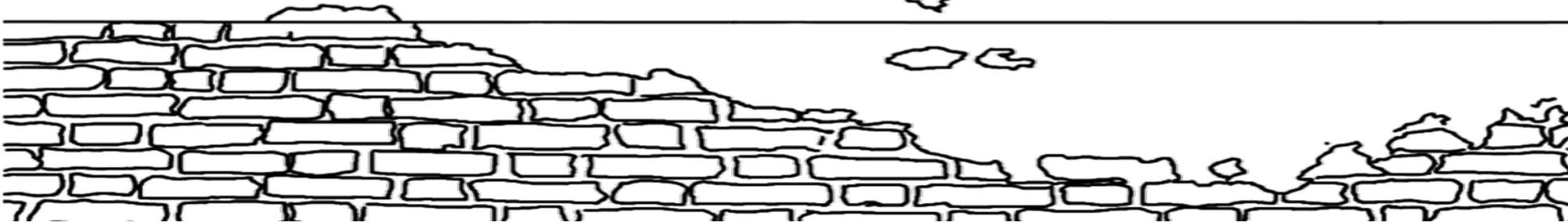


Holmes' knowledge of firearm investigations took a more mathematical bent in "The Adventure of Thor Bridge."





*One of a pair of
revolvers was found in
the suspect's wardrobe.*



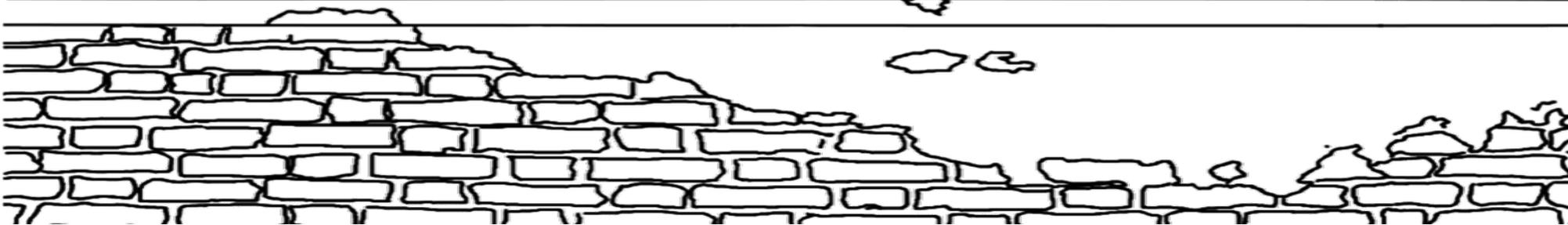
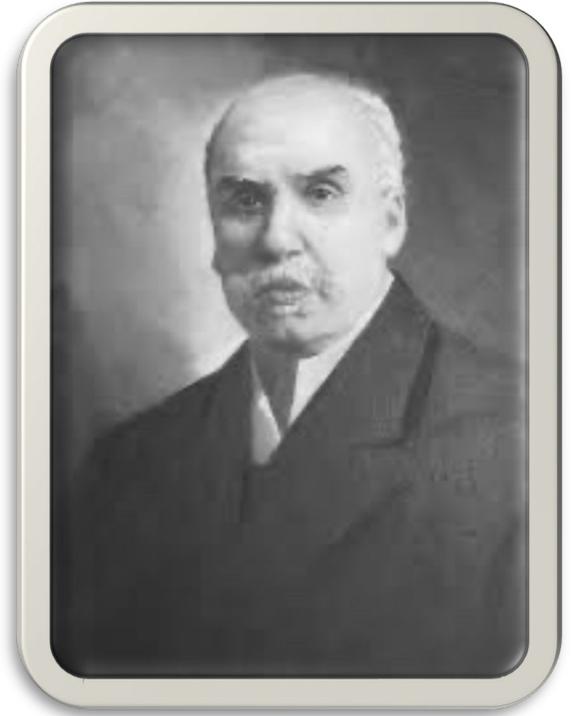
The other was missing. Given that two minus one leaves one, the second revolver was the murder weapon...



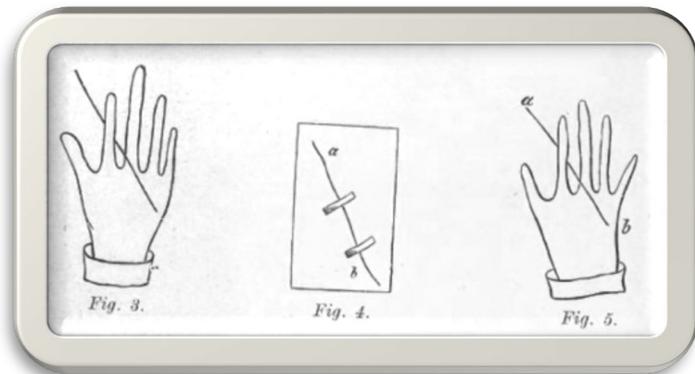
*...especially when a
new chip appeared on
the bridge railing
where the victim died.*



Several criminologists and Sherlockian have noted this case resembled an 1893 suicide described by Hans Gross.



In this actual event, a grain merchant staged his suicide to appear as a homicide by tying a stone to his pistol...



...and letting it be
dragged over a bridge
and into the water.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



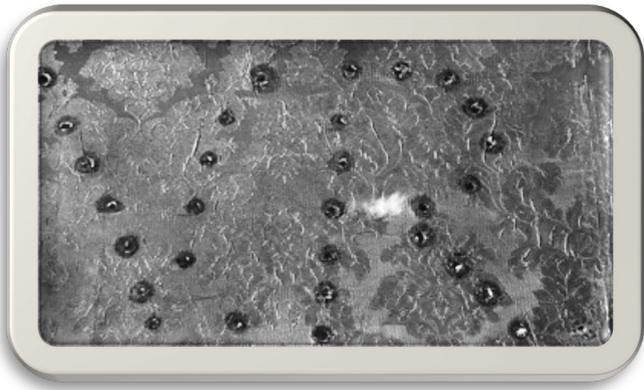
Fig. 5.

While firearms appeared in several of Sherlock Holmes' cases, including one where a mysterious widow fired "barrel after barrel," instead of "chamber after chamber" to end the life of Charles Augustus Milverton.



Holmes' observations and the use of his knowledge of ballistics and related firearm traits were of particular importance in a smaller number.



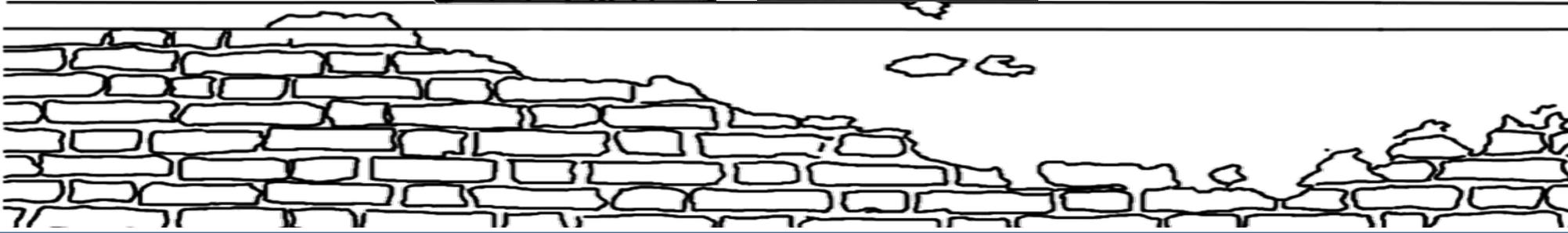


*All the same, his conclusions
were never proved to be a
shot in the dark.*



*So we have completed
topic # 032 in our
series...*

*... yes, but we'll be
back with another
topic soon...*



References for this topic:

- 1) <https://literary007.com/2015/03/31/armed-for-her-majesty-james-bond-and-sherlock-holmes-weaponry/>
- 2) <https://simanaitissays.com/2015/05/15/firearms-of-the-holmesian-canon/>
- 3) William S. Baring-Gould, *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes, Volume II*. New York: Clarkson N Potter, Inc., 1967, page 131.
- 4) <https://science.howstuffworks.com/revolver2.htm>
- 5) D.P. Lyle, *Forensics for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2019, page 311.
- 6) https://journals.lww.com/amjforensicmedicine/Fulltext/2016/06000/Disguising_a_Suicide_as_a_Homicide__Sir_Arthur.9.aspx
- 7) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>



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