



# An Inquiry into: "The Boscombe Valley Mystery"

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"The Boscombe Valley Mystery" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in October 1891. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

As the table shows, except for Dakin and Zeisler most of our chronologists agree that this case took place in June

1889. The disagreements spring from Holmes' quote about "Monday last" being June 3. Within Canonical range, 1889 is the only year where that is true.

If the case took place in 1889, as the majority states, then Holmes was 35 years old and Watson 37.

### Main Characters:

Charles McCarthy, murder victim, a tenant farmer from Australia. James McCarthy, son of the murdered Charles and the main suspect for his death. John Turner, wealthy widowed landowner, formerly from Australia, McCarthy's landlord, and father of Alice. Alice Turner, John's daughter. Inspector Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard detective.

### Notable Quotes:

"It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biased."

"It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely difficult."

"Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home."

"Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing. It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different."

"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact."

<i>The Boscombe Valley Mystery</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Early one June in the late 1880s</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Saturday, June 8, 1889</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Early June 1889</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>A Thursday or Friday in June 1889</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Early June 1889</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, June 7, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Monday, June 23, 1890</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Thursday, June 6, 1889</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>At or close to June 6, 1889</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, June 8, 1889</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1889</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, June 27, 1890</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.*

“God help us! Why does fate play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter’s words, and say, ‘There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.’”

### *The Extremely Understanding Wife*

As our case opens, we witness Watson’s wife urging him to abandon his patients and join Holmes who is off to the country on one of his cases. Mary Watson *née* Morstan (as well as the Good Doctor himself) would have felt gratitude towards Sherlock Holmes for solving her case and through this, meeting her future husband. Nevertheless, it seems to go very much against the grain of a good wife—



particularly during those days of a single bread earner per household—to see her husband abandon his work to engage in an adventure that might cost him his life. She, of all people, should remember that Tonga was not expelling rose petals through his blowpipe.

At this time, Watson was just beginning to launch his literary career and while each sale might have brought him a goodly penny, at the moment it would not have earned him as much as a decent practice. Let us recall that Watson muttered about his heavy caseload of pa-

tients. Her reply, of course, “Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the change would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes’ cases,” would seem to show loving concern instead of anything else.

Then, of course, there was the (one would hope!) very remote possibility that Mary wanted her husband safely out of town for purposes of her own.

In his book, *Sherlock Holmes Detected*, Ian McQueen posits:

At the start of “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” . . . all is sweetness and harmony. Watson asks Mary for her opinion about his going with Holmes, she thinks the change would do him good as he has been looking rather pale lately, and he alludes to *The Sign of Four*, in which he gained a wife. Are these outward expressions of conjugal bliss to be taken at their face value? Is it possible that Watson is behaving so politely in this exchange because of some recent quarrel in which Mary has let him know that his conduct leaves a lot to be desired? Mary may have approved so readily of the Boscombe Valley trip not so much on account of Watson’s pallid looks, but in order that she might have a day or two of peace and quiet without him. When she remarks “you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes’ cases,” could she have meant it sarcastically, implying that her husband took more interest in Holmes’ doings than in hers? If so, the doctor’s rejoinder, “I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them” takes on a new meaning. Possibly he hoped that the adventure in the west of England might put him in touch with some rather more congenial female company.

Undeniably, some occasional friction takes place even in the best of marriages; however, this does not make for a failed relationship. It is puzzling, however, that sometimes Mary urged her husband to follow a perilous path. I have already mentioned SIGN, then there is the present instance and later, in TWIS, Mary raised no objections over the Good Doctor leaving the comfort and safety of their cozy home to go alone to rescue her friend's addicted husband from an opium den.

All things considered, the truth is that we have insufficient facts from which to draw any firm conclusions about the state of Watson's marriage. It was he, after all, that wrote the stories. There had to have been some details that he left out, such as Mary's objections to his placing himself in harm's way. Considering that Watson being unquestionably a man of action may have needed a respite from sore throats and apprehensive patients.

### *Lestrade the Moonlighter*

Holmes tells Watson that those who believe in James McCarthy's innocence "have retained Lestrade" or, as he affectionately referred to him, "that imbecile."

It appears that the concept of "rent-a-cop" is not unique to our time. When requested, Scotland Yard would often assist the provincial police; however, the officers that did so did it as part of their duty; i.e., no extra remuneration. It was possible then, nevertheless to have someone like Lestrade rent himself out, so to speak, if this was done on his own time and it did not interfere with regular duties.

Lestrade could not have been officially "retained" in the sense a barrister would. "Retain" implies a fee, which Lestrade, as a Scotland Yard inspector performing his regular duties could not accept without breaking the law. It may have been that he was taking a few days of vacation.

According to Scotland Yard's salary list of the time, Lestrade—"the pick of a bad lot," being a top detective (thanks to Holmes) but as yet not a chief inspector—would have earned a weekly salary of £2 18s. Yearly, this would amount to about £150, or ≈\$56,300 in today's currency.



Not much seems to have changed career- or salary-wise. Police detectives still start as patrol officers and may be promoted to detective after three or more years of experience. England retains this distinction: DPC (detective police constable) DSI (detective sergeant inspector) and DCI (detective chief inspector). The median starting salary for a police detective is about \$55,000. In the United States, the average salary for all police detectives in 2008 was about \$64,000. Detectives earn more in large metropolitan areas such as New York, N.Y. and Los Angeles. Median salaries in those areas run from \$70,000 to \$88,000. But this did not seem to be the case in 19th century England.

We know nothing about Giles Lestrade's private life, other than that—for all of Holmes' remarks—he works hard at his profession. We do not know if he is married and has a family—nothing. However, we do know that like all great metropolises, Imperial London was not an inexpensive place to live in. Imagine trying to survive in New York City today, on a \$55,000 salary. Grim. Small wonder our friend might sometimes have stretched the rules and moonlighted to supplement his earnings.

### *Ignoring the Crime Scene*

Undeniably, it was important for Holmes to meet McCarthy; however, his urgency to do so is puzzling—after all, he was securely locked up in a jail cell and therefore exceedingly available. It seems quite incredible that after all of his tirades (starting with SCAN), about a crime scene being trampled before he was able to get to it, that he would so casually postpone visiting the murder scene just because it did not appear it would rain! Did he not think that after such a bloody event (aside from the police), many of the townspeople would be interested in seeing the place of the terrible occurrence and stomp all over it—which was exactly what happened!

The fact that there were enough clues left in the murder scene to enable our sleuth to solve the murder speaks more of luck than genius.

### *The Very Definition of Imbecile*

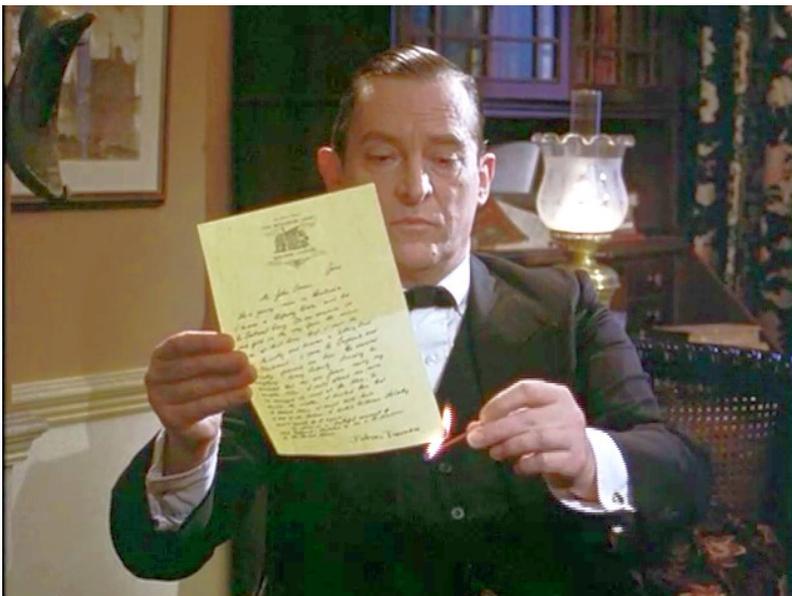
Unquestionably, in the dictionaries of the time, the definition for the word “imbecile” should have been illustrated with a picture of Lestrade.

By now, the inspector had to have had a high opinion of Holmes' abilities; otherwise, he would not have called him in on the case. Then Holmes arrives, talks to the accused, peruses the murder scene, and provides the Scotland Yarder not only with a description of what took place, together with the murder weapon, but also gives him a detailed description of the murderer.

Incredibly, Lestrade who already knew about Turner's infirmities blithely shrugs off the Great Detective's indications, does not make a connection to Turner, or even bothers to run the description of the murderer past some of the local folk. In such a small community, old Mr. Turner would have been immediately identified as someone fitting Holmes' description.

One can only hope that, for the benefit of future generations, Lestrade willed his wilted brain to science.

### *Holmes, the Dispenser of Justice*



This is another case, like CHAS, in which Sherlock Holmes, having given the official police the necessary clues to catch the perpetrator dispenses his own brand of justice, in this case by letting a multiple murderer go.

It is impossible not to sympathize with old Turner's years-long Calvary imposed by the elder McCarthy, and his wish to dispose of Turner's daughter as well. Few in a jury might not at least consider all this as a justification for such a murder; but what about the rest? In his recount to Holmes of his past life in the wilds of Australia, Turner confessed not only that he

stole, but that he shot and killed troopers guarding the gold shipments. These additional murders would have been very difficult to overlook.

Perhaps what decisively tilted that balance of justice in old McCarthy's favor was the strong possibility that he would have been unlikely to survive long enough to stand trial, and far less possible that he would have been alive to fulfill whatever sentence was passed on him. Also to be considered by Holmes was the scandal that would have ensued, blasting two young innocent lives. *Fiat justitia!*



## *The Jewel in the Crown*

While closing this week's edition of our newsletter, the news came that Queen Elizabeth II died at Balmoral Castle.

She ascended the throne in 1952 when she was only 25 years old. In her first address as queen to her subjects, she promised to devote her entire life, long or short, to their service. It was a pledge well kept.

When she celebrated her Platinum Jubilee this year, she marked the longest reign of any monarch in British history surpassing, in 2015, the record held by her great-great-grandmother Queen Victoria, who spent 62 years on the throne.

During those 70 years, Queen Elizabeth II oversaw 15 prime ministers, including Winston Churchill, and Margaret Thatcher (Britain's first female prime minister), was contemporary to seven popes, and met with 12 of the 13 American presidents who were elected during her reign. Over those seven decades she lived through several historic moments including the Second World War (she was the last surviving head of state to have served in the war) titularly ruled 15 nations and presided over the independence from the United Kingdom many of them in Africa and the Caribbean.

The words "dignity" and "duty" immediately come to mind whenever her name is heard. She lent her realm continuity and unity, sparing no sacrifice in her personal life. Over almost three generations she was a source of pride, comfort, and a steadying presence to her subjects. Her lifelong reign bequeaths her successor a nation with an almost 80% approval of the monarchy.

One of the few positive symbols of this sorry century we have been condemned to live in has vanished.

When Queen Victoria celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, she returned to the palace with a smile on her face. One of her ladies in waiting asked her for the reason and she explained, "As my coach was returning, a very rough man began running next to it. He yelled at me, 'Go on, then, you've done good Old Girl!'"

Yes, indeed, you've done good, Old Girl...



## *What else happened in 1889:*

### *Empire*

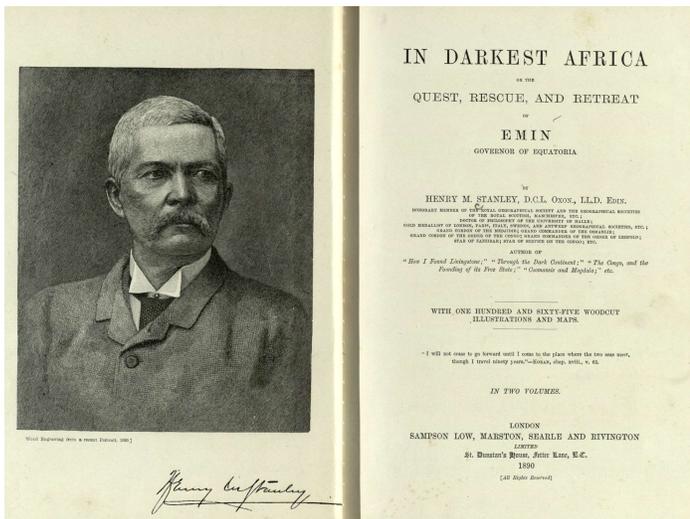
Great Seal of the United Kingdom is affixed to the charter of the British South Africa Company.

Company is assigned trading and other rights over a vast territory, with the express reservation to the Crown to take over at any time the works and buildings of the Company.

Transvaal claimed to be "encircled" by Rhodes' concessions in East Africa. Rhodesia established.

◀ At Cairo, Henry Stanley ends his three-year African expedition. He is knighted upon his return to England. Writes *In Darkest Africa*.

Colonel Woodehouse defeats Dervish horde in Sudan. General Grenfell, commanding British troops on the Nile attacks and defeats Dervish troops, with 500 killed and wounded, and as many taken prisoner.



The Canadian Pacific Railway is completed from coast to coast.

### *Britain*

Great London Dockers' Strike; the "Dockers' Tanner"; growth of unskilled workers' unions; New Unionism; Gasworkers' Union formed. Strike is finally arbitrated in the workers' favor by the popular Catholic Cardinal Henry Manning.

Parnell vindicated as all charges are revealed as false. *The London Times* apologizes.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

Technical Education Act: County Councils to levy 1d for technical and manual education.

Establishment of the telephone company.

John Bright, orator and politician, leading spirit in the Anti-Corn Law League, dies.

Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

Metropolitan Board of Works replaced by London County Council.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

General Booth publishes *Survey of London Life and Labour*.

Early used of photographs in newspaper: *Illustrated London News* runs Cambridge and Oxford boat crews competition.

Woolwich Ferry starts.

White Hart Inn, Borough High Street, one of the last coaching inns, demolished.

Act to prevent cruelty to children.

Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

## *World*

Japan's Meiji constitution. Arinori Mori, minister of education assassinated by Shinto fanatic.

*Wall Street Journal* begins publishing.

Italy takes Somalia and Ethiopia. Yohannes IV (Kasa) Emperor of Ethiopia dies in battle.

Moulin Rouge opens in Paris.

North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington admitted as U.S.A. states.

U.S.A. Senate, in secret session, passes resolution declaring against European control of the Panama Canal.

Congress of French Revolutionary Labor Party at Bordeaux.

President Harrison, of the U.S.A., closes Bering Sea to all nations; issues proclamation prohibiting the killing of fur animals within Alaska without a special government permit.



◀ Crown Prince Archduke Rudolph of Austria-Hungary and Baroness Maria Vetsera are found dead at the hunting lodge of Mayerling, outside Vienna, allegedly a murder-suicide. (In 1983, former Austrian empress Zita claimed it was an assassination by two conspirators when Rudolf refused to take part in a plot to oust his father Emperor Franz Josef.)

Treaty of Acciali: Ethiopia made Italian protectorate.

Ivory Coast is declared a protectorate of France.

Part of Oklahoma Indian lands open to homesteading.

Portuguese under Pinto try to extend influence in Zambesi Valley; Anglo-Portuguese dispute.

End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed and Dom Pedro, the emperor, exiled.

Abdication of King Milan of Serbia; accession of Alexander.

Uprising in the island of Crete. Turkish authorities expelled and public archives destroyed. Turkey calls up 80,000 reservists, but promises to inquire into legitimate grievances.

Russian jurors to be nominated by government.

King Ferdinand II of Portugal dies at age 73.

Stanley's expedition reaches Bagamoyo in Indian Ocean.

Aristocratic "Land Captains" replace elected JPs in Russia.

Father Damien, worker among lepers in Molokai, Hawaii, dies of the disease.

Influenza reaches Europe and America from Siberia.

General Boulanger, former French War Minister leaves country, addresses manifesto to his party that he left the country to avoid arrest, French Chambers authorize the Senate to try Boulanger and others in absentia, for high treason. The general and his staff are found guilty and condemned to life imprisonment.

Jefferson Davis dies in Mississippi.

Paris Exhibition: proof of industrial development in France. Continental monarchies abstain from all official representation. English and American ambassadors attend. Eiffel Tower built for the event is dedicated in a ceremony presided over by Gustave Eiffel, the designer, and attended by French Prime Minister Pierre Tirard. At 985 feet high, taller than the Great Pyramid, the Eiffel Tower becomes highest structure on Earth.

Lectures at Dorpat University to be in Russian; German forbidden in schools.



Brunner-Mond Salt Union formed; combine of 64 firms.

Private tolls abolished on French Canals.

New York World's Nellie Bly (Liz Cochrane) begins world trip to beat Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg (*Around the World in 80 Days*). Takes 72 days.

◀ Mirza Ghulam Ahmad establishes the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a reform sect of Islam.

The Pemberton Medicine Company (later the Coca-Cola Company), is incorporated in Atlanta, Georgia.

Work on Panama Canal stopped; French company bankrupt, U.S.A. takes over, finishes canal.

Johnstown flood kills more than 6,000, losses climb to \$40,000,000.

Civil war in Haiti ends. General Légitime defeated by General Hippolyte, who becomes president.

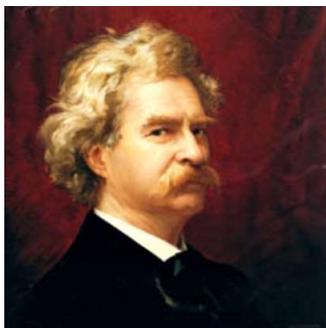
Bismarck introduces Old Age Insurance in Germany.

Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 storeys high.

Conference at Berlin guarantees an autonomous government to the Samoan Islands under the joint control of the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.

### *Art*

Sir James Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, sketches of Scottish village life.



Robert Browning publishes *Asolando*, a poem. Dies later in the year.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle publishes *A Sign of Four*.

Jerome K. Jerome publishes stories, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, *Three Men in a Boat*.

◀ Mark Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Robert Louis Stevenson publishes *Master of Ballantrae*.

William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

Paul Bourget publishes *Le Disciple*, a psychological novel.

Gerhart J. Hauptmann publishes *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, German realistic play.



Sudermann publishes *Die Ehre*, a German play.

Dvorak presents *Symphony No. 4 in G Major*.

Gilbert and Sullivan present *The Gondoliers*.

Renoir paints *Girls Picking Flowers*.

Seurat paints *The Side Show*.

◀ Van Gogh paints *Man with a Pipe* (self-portrait), *The Olive Grove*, and *Starry Night*.

Cézanne paints *Harlequin*.

Tchaikovsky introduces *The Sleeping Princess* ballet.

Richard Strauss introduces *Tod und Verklärung*, tone poem.

### *Science and Technology*

Hollerith's punched-card system widely used in industry.

First ship-to-shore wireless message is received in the U.S., at San Francisco.

The first General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) defines the length of a meter as the distance between two lines on a standard bar of an alloy of platinum with ten percent iridium, measured at the melting point of ice.

Eastman's Kodak camera comes into production, using photographic film.

Astronomical Society of Pacific holds first meeting in San Francisco, California.



◀ Ferdinand von Zeppelin patents his "Navigable Balloon."

The first jukebox makes its debut at the Palais Royale Saloon in San Francisco, California. For a nickel, one can listen to a few minutes of music through a tube of an Edison tinfoil phonograph.

In Potsdam, Germany, Ernst von Rebeur-

Paschwitz makes the first known recordings of a distant earthquake, taken place in Tokyo, Japan, an hour earlier.

The brassiere is invented.

First dishwashing machine marketed in Chicago.

Mering and Minkowski show that the pancreas prevents diabetes.

Daniel Stover and William Hance patent bicycle with back pedal brake.

William Gray patents coin-operated telephone.

First linotype machine in use.

Thomas Edison shows his first motion picture.

Aspirin patented in Germany by Bayer Laboratories, first introduced in powder form.

Panhard and Levassor begin using Daimler's engines in French cars, using modern layout.

*Next week's case: FIVE.*

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](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**

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