



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure VI -- The Boscombe Valley Mystery

“Cooee”

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, October 1891

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Began with a murder on June 3rd, stated. Most likely in 1889.

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Watson married and in practice, living with his wife.

Opening scene:

At breakfast, Watson received a telegram from Holmes requesting his assistance, asking Watson to meet him at Paddington. After getting permission from his wife, Watson complied. Holmes outlined the case on the 4-hour train ride to the the pretty little country-town of Ross, in Herefordshire in the West of England.

Crime or concern:

Murder of Charles McCarthy, a neighbor of John Turner, an old acquaintance from Australia. Turner was the richer of the two.



Client:

Inspector Lestrade, who being rather puzzled, referred the case to Holmes. Lestrade, in turn, had been retained by Miss Alice Turner, the daughter of Turner. Turner's daughter believed in the innocence of the accused, James McCarthy, son of the murder victim. James was not a very quick-witted youth, but was comely to look at and sound at heart. Alice had apparently urged Lestrade to call in Holmes.

Villain:

Old Turner killed McCarthy by bashing his head with a stone.

Motive:

McCarthy had been blackmailing Turner for support, over long-ago criminality in Australia. When the blackmail extended to McCarthy wanting his son to marry Turner's daughter, it had gone too far. Turner had a disease at the time and knew he was dying anyway, so he was something of a free agent, legally if not morally.

Logic used to solve:

Two crucial points upon which the case depended were that McCarthy had an appointment at the murder scene with someone who could not have been his son, and the murdered man was heard to cry "Cooee!" before he knew that his son had returned (a singularly Australian signal).

Holmes carefully examined the crime scene, the grassy area by the Boscombe pool, and then announced "It has been a case of considerable interest," implying he had solved it. Dying man's reported reference to a rat was actually Ballarat, an Australian city in the area Turner and McCarthy came from. Holmes checked this on a map.

Policemen:

Lestrade of Scotland Yard, who apparently had been hired as an independent consultant by Alice.

Holmes' fees:

No mention.

Transport:

When summoned by Holmes, Watson was soon in a cab with his valise, rattling away to Paddington Station from which they travelled to Ross. On the train, Holmes read Petrarch (a 14th-century Renaissance humanist).

Holmes & Watson drove with Lestrade to the Hereford Arms in Ross.

After a night in the hotel, Holmes & Watson with Lestrade set off by carriage for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool, which was the scene of the crime.

Holmes and Lestrade took train to Hereford from Ross to interview the accused (Young James McCarthy) in gaol.

After visiting the crime scene, Holmes & Watson and Lestrade took a cab back to Ross.

Food:

On the ride to Herefordshire, Holmes & Watson stopped at Swindon for lunch. After dropping Lestrade off, Holmes & Watson had lunch in their hotel in Ross.

Drink:

No mention

Vices:

Holmes felt no urgency to visit the scene of the crime. "I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination."

After lunch in Ross, Holmes instructed Watson to sit down and light a cigar while Holmes expounded.

Other cases mentioned:

A Study in Scarlet

Notable Quotables:

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

"It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "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." – Holmes to Watson.

“I cudgelled my brains” – Watson. Note: Watson also cudgelled his brains in *The Naval Treaty*.

“You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.” – Holmes

Other interestings:

When on the job in Ross, Lestrade wore a light brown dustcoat and leather-leggings in deference to his rustic surroundings.

Tracks near the crime scene were obscured like a herd of buffalo had wallowed all over it, possibly the same herd that caused similar difficulties in *A Study in Scarlet*.

In this case, Holmes and Lestrade take quite a few verbal jabs at each other. Holmes prevails.

When all was said and done:

Turner had been a highwayman and murderer in Australia; McCarthy had been one of his victims. Turner was a successful criminal, became wealthy, and moved back to England. McCarthy found him and threatened exposure. Holmes had a talk with Turner at the end and agreed not to expose him as long as McCarthy's son was not punished for the murder. The son's lawyer got him acquitted with Holmes' help. Old Turner died shortly after as expected. The son and daughter were getting together and never knew of their parents' secrets of sin and shame.

McMurdo's Camp