



An Inquiry into:
“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle”

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“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on January 1892 and in *The Strand Magazine* on the same date. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

As shown on the table, the chronology for this case varies, depending on the Canon expert. If the case took

place in 1889, as the majority of our chronologists state, then Holmes was 35 years old and Watson 37.

Main Characters:

Henry Baker, former academic, British Museum frequenter, partial to spirits. Peterson, a commissioner known to Holmes. The Countess of Morcar, the wealthy owner of the fabled blue carbuncle. Catherine Cussack, lady-in-waiting to Countess Morcar. Breckinridge, a poultry merchant at the Covent Garden market. John Horner, plumber framed with the robbery of the blue carbuncle. James Ryder, felonious head-attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan.

Notable Quotes:

“Only one of those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles.”

“You know my methods.”

“On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences.”

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>December 27</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Tuesday, December 27, 1887</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Friday, December 27, 1889</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Christmas 1889</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>December 1889</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Saturday, December 27, 1890</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Friday, December 27, 1889</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, December 27, 1889</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>December 27, 1889</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Friday, December 27, 1889</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1889</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, December 27, 1889</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.

“My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don’t know.”

“After all, Watson, I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies.”

“I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul.”

“Besides, it is the season of forgiveness.”

The Carbuncle—an Ongoing Debate

Although the gem around which this case centers is clearly referred to as a “carbuncle,” there is considerable dispute as to what it actually was. “Carbuncle” is a somewhat ambiguous term that is mostly used when referring to a variety of garnet. If this were the case, we are considering one of the silicon compounds. However, Holmes himself, who can fairly be described as having passion for exactitude, refers to the bauble in question as being composed of crystallized charcoal. When one adds to this Peterson’s statement that it cuts into glass, all these facts appear to firmly point in the direction of it having been a diamond.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

According to the Great Detective the carbuncle was “absolutely unique, and its value can only be conjectured, but the reward offered of one thousand pounds is certainly not within a twentieth part of the market price.” On top of which there were “sentimental consideration in the background which would induce the countess to part with half of her fortune if she could but recover the gem.”

Henry Baker

Of the several tragic figures inhabiting the Canon it may be said that Henry Baker (although he appears but briefly and only one time) ranges near the top. Watson writes that he was “a man of learning and letters who had had ill usage at the hands of fortune.”

From his vestiges of better times, such as the famed hat, it clearly appears that there once was a time in which he was a very respectable member of society. He might have been a headmaster like Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable in *PRIO*, or perhaps even a university professor. We really do not know what brought him to such a sorry low level. Holmes deduces signs of personal downfall.

Did his lamentable descent begin as a result of his taking to the bottle? I rather tend to think that his addiction to the demon rum came as a result of his downfall, rather than it



Courtesy of ITV Granada

being the cause of it. Something must have happened that led him to lose his place in society. It

probably was something extremely serious—possibly even of a scandalous nature—which made him unwelcome in the academic world. The fact that, as Holmes deduced, Baker’s wife had ceased to love him might—might—point to what the nature of the scandal might have been.

Whatever it was, it made him an academic pariah who, it would seem, managed to eke out a precarious, penurious existence probably by doing research for others (probably students) and ghostwriting their school papers.

Plentiful Shillings?

Henry Baker’s guarded remark that “Shillings have not been so plentiful with me as they once were,”



Courtesy of ITV Granada

speaks volumes about his sad decline. However, on the receiving end one must admit that the one sovereign Holmes invested in Breckinridge, the goose dealer, to obtain the information that he was after regarding the origin of the goose paid off handsomely.

There can be no doubt that Holmes was entitled to—and claimed—the £1,000 reward offered by the Countess of Morcar for the return of the gem. It is impossible to believe that a consummate gentleman like our detective would have kept the whole amount. He would have surely shared a decent percentage of it with Peterson, and one would hope that there would have been a goodly number of shillings for Mr. Henry Baker.

This beneficence extended even to the low-down thief, Ryder, the real culprit in this whole affair, who Holmes allowed to escape unpunished. The Great Detective’s comment, “I am not employed by the police to supply their deficiencies,” is very

revealing of the man (and is a neat cover for his sentiments). Our sleuth’s felonious decision resulted in something that regular justice rarely provides—mercy and compassion.

As he put it, “it is just possible that I am saving a soul.”

A Brief Aside

Holmes’ very casual deductions about Baker’s heartrending personal life, all derived from a simple examination of his hat, surely must stand as one of the top examples of the Great Detective’s deductive and observational abilities.

Save for the accurate and painful conclusions that he derived from the elder Watson’s watch in SIGN I do not believe that anywhere else in the Canon is there an occasion in which so much was derived from so little.

Certainly, one of the main reasons why we continue to visit 221B Baker Street.



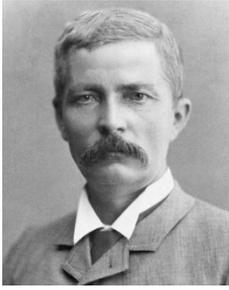
Courtesy of ITV Granada



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 use 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.

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.

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

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.

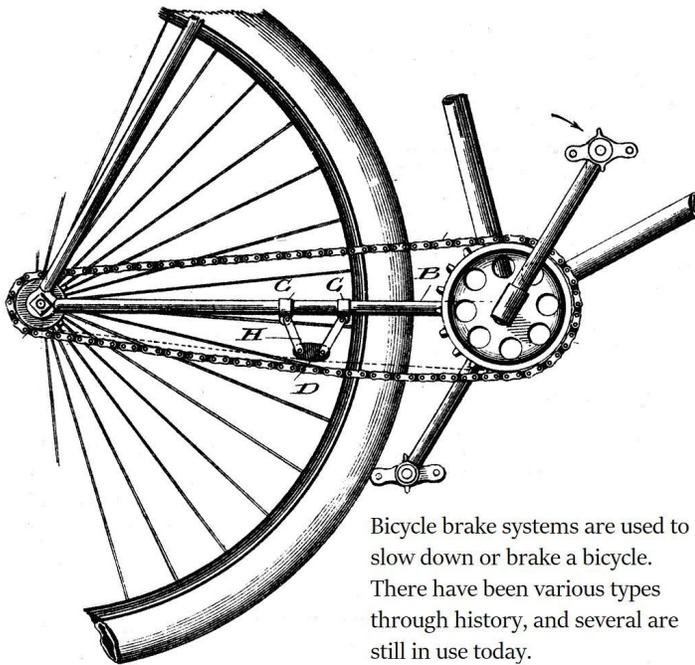
◀ Daniel Stover and William Hance patent bicycle with back pedal brake.

William Gray patents coin-operated telephone.

First linotype machine in use.

Thomas Edison shows his first motion picture.

Aspirin patented in Germany by Bayer Laborato-



Bicycle brake systems are used to slow down or brake a bicycle. There have been various types through history, and several are still in use today.

ries, first introduced in powder form.

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

Next week's case: MISS

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..."

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

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