

The Adventure of the Speckled Band

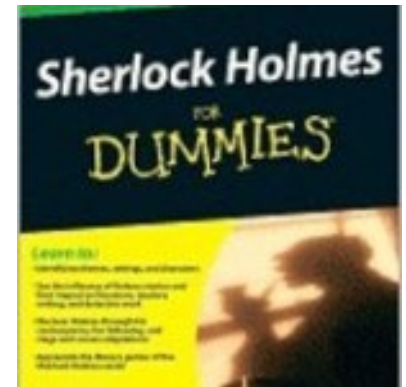


CHRISTOPHER MORLEY SAID . . .

The Copper Beeches was the name of the house in Hampshire where Mr. Rucastle paid high wages for a governess who would do unusual things – cut her hair short, wear an electric blue dress, and listen to comic stories. Behind these trivial demands was something much more sinister.

DUMMIES SHORT SUMMARY (From *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies* by Steven Doyle & David Crowder)

“Definitely a weird tale. Why must the new governess obey her employer’s strange rules, like wearing a blue dress and cutting her hair? And why must she never go into a certain wing of the house?”



PUBLISHING HISTORY

- This is the 14th of the 60 tales published.
- It was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in June, 1892.
- It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* collection published in book form in 1894.
- The British illustrator was the renowned Sidney Paget.

HOW MANY WORDS?

According to C. E. Lauderback, 1960 – – found on *SHERLOCKIAN.NET* website of Chris Redmond, at 9,948 words COPP has the 51th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 is NAVL – 12,701)

THE BEST OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (*How do Sherlockians rate this story?*)

The Adventure of the Copper Beeches is in the top 1/3 of the story ratings by:

- 1999 – BSI Invested Members – 17th of the 56 short stories
- 1999 – Sherlock Holmes Society of London – 17th of the 56 short stories

CLASSIFYING THE CASE (*From the Wandering Gipsies of Grimpen Mire of Decatur, Alabama*)

This case is one of 7 classified as fear of physical harm or public scandal. The other 6 cases are CREE, GLOR, TWIS, SUSS, SCAN, AND 3STU.

CHRONOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

Doyle was often very vague about stating WHEN the tale took place and included few contemporary references to help. Whether this was done intentionally or unthinkingly, the dating of events in the Canon is a very popular pastime pursued by several of our “scholars” researching and justifying their results to no end. We will again default to William Baring-Gould’s dating of Friday, April 5 to Saturday, April 20, 1889, making it the 21st in time. This means that Holmes is 35 and Watson is 37.

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED IN 1889?

It is always interesting to see what else is happening at the same time as the stories.

THE EMPIRE

- British South Africa Company Charter awarded.
- Transvaal claimed to be “encircled” by Rhodes’ concessions in East Africa. Rhodesia is established.

BRITAIN

- Great London Dock Strike
- March 30 – Early use of photographs in newspaper: *Illustrated London News* runs Cambridge and Oxford boat crews.
- Act to prevent cruelty to children.
- Establishment of the telephone company.

WORLD

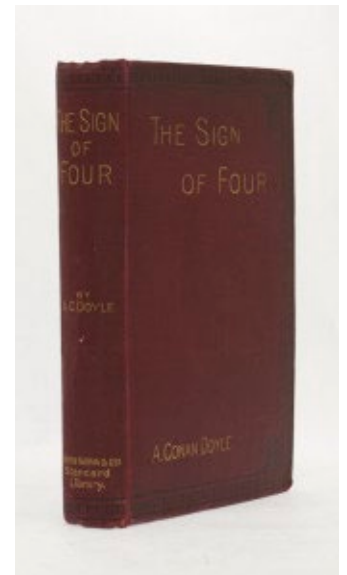
- October 6 – The Moulin Rouge first opens its doors.
- North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington admitted as U.S. states.
- Treaty of Acciali: Ethiopia was made Italian protectorate.
- End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed.
- Paris Exhibition: proof of industrial development in France.
- Work on Panama Canal stopped; French company bankrupt.
- Bismarck introduces Old Age Insurance in Germany.
- Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 storeys high.

ART

- Conan Doyle publishes *A Sign of Four*.
- Mark Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
- Robert Louis Stevenson publishes *Master of Ballantrae*.
- Renoir paints *Girls Picking Flowers*.
- Van Gogh paints *Man with a Pipe* (self-portrait).
- Tchaikovsky introduces *The Sleeping Princess* ballet music.
- Richard Strauss introduces *Tod und Verklrung*, tone poem.

SCIENCE

- Eiffel Tower completed, 985 feet high, taller than the Great Pyramid, become highest structure on earth.
- Hollerith’s punched-card system widely used in industry.
- Eastman’s Kodak camera comes into production, using photographic film.
- First linotype machine in use.
- Panhard and Levassor begin using Daimler’s engines in French cars, using modern layout.



HOLMES AND WATSON – PERSONAL INFO

Just as with the vast majority of the stories, Holmes and Watson are sharing bachelor quarters at 221B.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Of course, we have Holmes and Watson, but the rest of the cast is a mixed lot of memorable “characters.”

- **VIOLET HUNTER**, a governess who consults Holmes
- **JEPHRO RUECASTLE**, the “unusual” man who hired Violet
- **MRS. RUECASTLE**, second wife of Mr. Ruecastle
- **EDWARD RUECASTLE**, young son of Mr. and Mrs. Ruecastle whom Violet is to govern. A spoiled, ill-natured lad whose chief amusement is torturing small animals. His father finds this behavior quaint.
- **ALICE RUECASTLE**, daughter of Mr. Ruecastle by his first wife. Alice has an inheritance from her mother which is independent of her father.
- **TOLLER**, groom for the Ruecastles. A heavy drinker.
- **MRS. TOLLER**, his wife.
- **FOWLER**, a seaman. Beloved of Alice
- **CARLO**, a vicious mastiff
- **STOPER**, proprietor of “Westways,” an employment agency for governesses.
- **SPENCE MUNRO**, Violet worked for him until he was transferred to Halifax
- **LORD SOUTHERTON**, owns the land adjacent to Copper Beeches.

“QUOTABLE SHERLOCK”

This month’s tale contains several of the more popular Holmes quotes . . .

- “To the man who loves art for its own sake” it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived.”
 - “Crime is common. Logic is rare.”
 - “You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.”
 - “I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for.”
 - “They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon me experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than doe the smiling and beautiful countryside. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser.”
 - “I am glad of all details, whether they seem to you to be relevant or not.”
 - “My dear Watson, you as a medical man are continually gaining light as to the tendencies of a child by the study of the parents. Don’t you see that the converse is equally valid. I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children.”
- and, of course, the quote giving this column it name:
- “Data! Data! Data! I can not make bricks without clay!”

HOLMES’ FEE

Once again we don’t know how many pounds go into Sherlock’s bank account for this adventure, but the rescued Alice Rucastle has a good inheritance. Or, maybe “no fee” was a wedding gift?

SHERLOCK ON THE BIG SCREEN & THE LITTLE SCREEN

The Adventure of the Copper Beeches had 5 appearances on the screen:

- 1912 – Georges Treville, Holmes did *The Copper Beeches* in France. Copies survive.
- 1921 – Eille Norwood did *The Copper Beeches* as the 11th of his 47 movies based on the Canon. It, also has survived.
- 1965 – Douglas Wilmer was Holmes in this story in the BBC *Sherlock Holmes* series as one of the 13 Canonical episodes.
- 1967 – Eric Shellow played Holmes in *Das Haus bei den Blutbuchen*, one of six episodes in a German series. They are available only in German and the DVD area for Germany.
- 1985 – BBC/Granada had *The Copper Beeches* with Jeremy Brett as Holmes and David Burke as Watson. It was the 8th presented in the series of 41 episodes.



NEWSPAPERS (Real and Fictional)

Though included in only 20 tales some of our more obsessed Sherlockians love this one. This story includes the *Daily Telegraph (and Courier)* – Morning paper of London which was Liberal until the middle of the 1880's whereby it became Unionist. It became very popular for the middle classes. Established in 1855 it was considered the country's "other paper of record."

ANNOTATED SHERLOCK

The 60 Sherlock Holmes stories used English as spoken in England from the 1880's until the 1910's. Some words are foreign to us today and need a "contemporary translation." This month's list is short.

- "**brain-fever**" – Seven patients in the canon have this diagnosis. "...one which follows quickly on a severe emotional shock, which exhibits weight loss, weakness, pallor, and high fever which has a protracted course. A preponderance of this in literature of the day seems to validate the medical diagnosis. 21st century folk find it an amusing malady.
- "**locus standi**" – legal term meaning the right to be heard by a court, now expressed as "legal standing"

WEAPONS (from *A Compendium of Canonical Weaponry* by Dettman and Bedford)

So many things can be considered "weapons" that only 2 or 3 tales fail to have at least one. Since this column is running long, here is a list of "weapons" with very short explanations. See if you can find them in the story.

- **Service Revolver** – Dr. Watson's and is mentioned in 13 cases. To blow out the brains of Carlo, Jephro Rutcastle's guardian mastiff who had turned on his master.
- **Heavy Stick** – Which Joseph Rucastle most likely intended to use for dirty work against his daughter, and which he threatened Holmes and Watson with when he found them on the scene.
- **Mastiff** – Named Carlo, watchdog for Jephro Rucastle, which he intended to set on Holmes and Watson, but which turned on its master instead.

ODD STUFF

This is a varied and rambling section this month. Apologies for the lack of organization.

- Several Sherlockians are inclined to create limericks for the tales. From Isaac Asimov's *Sherlockian Limericks* published in 1978:

*On the ladies, long hair is admired;
So though Violet Hunter's inspired
By the remuneration
Of the new situation,
She tells Holmes — once a bob is required*

- A side comment from me – Holmes regularly berates Watson about how the stories are written for *The Strand Magazine*. I just can't figure out why Watson never punched him. No one can have the patience Watson displays. After all, Watson is a man who loves "action."
 - Violet again? What was Doyle's fascination with the name Violet? We have 60 stories and 4 Violets. In addition to our Violet Hunter we also have Violet Westbury in *The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans*, Violet DeMerville in *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client* and Violet Smith in *The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist*. Plus there were a few characters in the stories who had violet eyes.
 - Finally a last thought. Holmes accomplishes nothing in terms of solving the problem or bring the villain to legal justice. Doyle, in his infinite wisdom, has written his stories to have a wide variety of crimes (or sometime no crime at all). In spite of Holmes' abilities, it will be another 40 or 50 years before the birth of the "Super Hero" characters in literature.
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