



## An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches"

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"The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in June 1892. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

This case completes *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, the first volume of Canonical cases.

Even though our chronologists have not arrived at a unanimous conclusion regarding the year in which this case took place as the table shows there is a majority.

If the majority of our Canon scholars are correct regarding which year this adventure took place in, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 36 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 38.

### ***Main Characters:***

Violet Hunter, a young governess who appeals to Holmes for advice and protection when offered a position with unusual requirements. Jephro Rucastle, middle-aged landowner who ostensibly wants Violet as governess for his only son, but asks her to perform duties beyond those of a governess. Mrs. Rucastle, Jethro's submissive second wife. Alice Rucastle, Jethro's daughter by his first wife. Mr. and Mrs. Toller, the Rucastles' servants. Little Edward, the disgusting young son of Mr. Rucastle. Mr. Fowler, Alice's fiancé. Carlo the mastiff.

### ***Notable 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."

### *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Early Spring</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Friday, April 5, 1889</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Late April 1890</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Early Spring 1896 to 1903</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>March 1890</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Sunday, April 19, 1891</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>April 1885</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Late March 1890</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Early Spring 1890</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 18, 1890</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1890</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Monday, April 7, 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.

“You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.”

“What do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction?”

“Data! data! data! I can’t make bricks without clay.”

“It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful country-side.”

“I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children.”

### *The Familiar Argument*

Whenever Sherlock Holmes is in a bad mood—especially when haunted by inactivity—it seems as if he finds some sort of infuriating relief by criticizing Watson’s documentation of some of his cases.

I tend to think that once Watson got over his distress the first time this happened, although he was occasionally irritated by the Great Detective’s massive ego, the sleuth’s criticisms no longer disturbed him as much. It soon must have become obvious to our biographer that had his friend truly despised his literary efforts he would not have sought him out for company and support in the cases that he investigated.

GLOR is very revealing in this aspect, where we witness Holmes telling Watson about his early detecting activities before—as he put it—his biographer came along to glorify him.

### *The Governess’ Hapless Existence*

The High Victorian Period did not offer a wealth of opportunities for a woman. If a young lady of the time found herself in the urgent need of finding a situation that would allow her to honorably earn her daily bread, few options were available; principal among these was becoming a governess.

Sadly, this was practically the only occupation that a well-brought-up lady could respectably engage in if circumstances obligated her to earn her way in the world.

Regrettably, by taking up that position the lady would find herself in situation akin to that of an indentured servant.

A governess existed in a limbo in which she was not quite a servant, but not quite a full member of the household either. She was ensnared in the landing existing between Upstairs and Downstairs. The lady would find herself trapped by a lonely destiny often leading to spinsterhood, on top of which, if she was mildly attractive it would not have been rare for her to be the recipient of unwanted attentions by one of the males of the household.

Governessing was far from being a sinecure, and it often led to a penurious old age; with few exceptions, governesses were hired or let go with about as much

difficulty as a scullery maid. Willingly or unwillingly, most governesses entered this state of subjugation, which allowed them to barely cling to their position in society. Becoming a seamstress, for example, would have resulted in a fall from grace in a class system that was almost as rigid as India’s. Par-



ticularly for a woman, it would have been practically impossible to be able to climb back to her former position in society. Because of all this, for many women this became the only way of preserving at least a semblance of well-bred living, which forced them to endure the indignities their positions so often entailed.

A governess' earnings were proportionate to the position's social importance. At the time, the salary range fell within the £30 to £40 (≈\$11,250 to ≈\$15,000) range. Violet Hunter's wages in her last position were at the higher end: £48 (≈\$18,000). This was comparable to the income of a house steward or valet. Members of the middle class, such as clerks, head teachers, journalists, and shopkeepers earned £300 to £800 (≈\$112,500 ≈\$300,000). Rucastle's offer of £100 and then £120 (≈\$37,500 and ≈\$45,000 per annum) had to have seem to Violet like as manna from heaven, particularly considering her critically diminished resources. As Holmes observed—he could have had his pick of candidates for £40 (≈\$15,000), which was top salary for a footman. While it is true that food and lodging were included, still the need to keep up appearances and other minor expenses, regardless of how frugal she may have been, a governess would not have been able to save enough to eventually free herself from this genteel slavery.

### *Violet Hunter's Accomplishments*

Violet Hunter's past history and her true calling are intriguing. She tells Rucastle (apparently sincerely) that, "My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine. A little French, a little German, music and drawing." By this metric, these seemingly meager accomplishments leave much to be desired, because a governess was also expected to instruct her charge in reading, writing, arithmetic, history, natural philosophy (science), geography, and so on.



Yet, at the end of the case we are told by Watson that "she is now the *head of a private school* [*italics mine*] at Walsall, where I believe she has met with considerable success."

Even if one assumes, prompted by the zeitgeist of the time, that the school in question was one for young ladies—signifying educational requirements not as demanding as they would have otherwise been for a boys' establishment—to occupy this position she still would have had to offer a considerably more ample educational background. From Watson's phrasing it seems as if she took this post fairly soon after the case, which seems even more peculiar because Watson described her as "a young lady," and such an important position would not have been available to someone young and inexperienced.

Either the lady was far more accomplished than what we were led to believe which is unlikely considering that she had been satisfied to work for an annual salary of £48 (≈\$18,000) for five years. The other even more unlikely possibility is that she was able to obtain sufficient funds to start her own school, which would make one wonder why she was so desperate to go to work for Rucastle if her financial condition was not as desperate as she made it out to be.

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### *Rucastle's Peculiar Requirements*

Particularly in a one-child household, it would not have been unusual for a governess to have other duties. However, Rucastle's requirements that she wear a certain dress, sit where she was told, and cut off her hair are not just unusual—they go well beyond the pale, with the last of these more than just bordering with the outrageous.

Even today it is true that an employer is entitled to ask an employee in his household to wear a certain piece of apparel, this applies to a uniform of some sort, such as the traditional get-up of a chambermaid; however, this would not have applied to Miss Hunter. The demand that she cut her hair

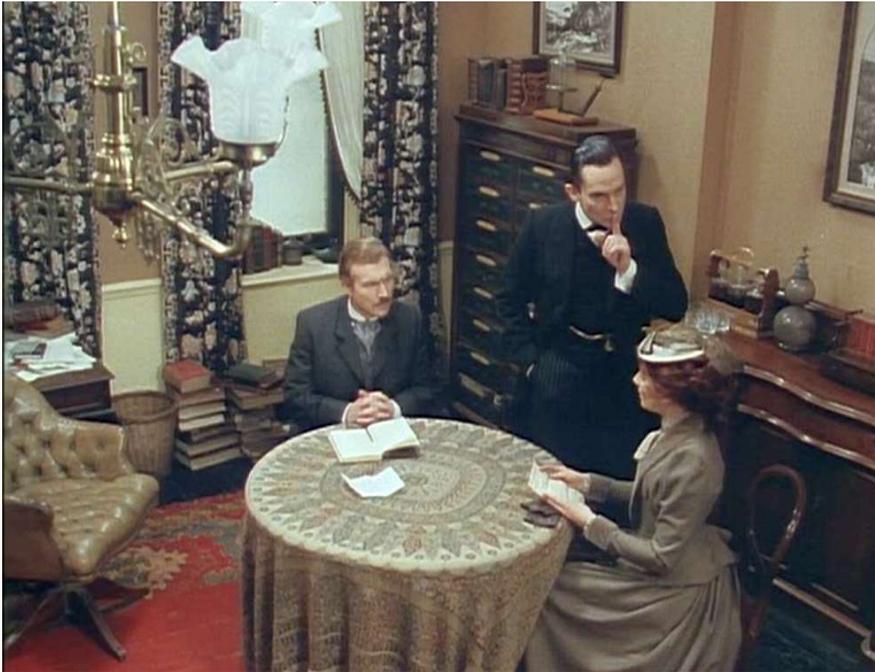


was even stranger. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ladies habitually wore their hair long, with the exceptions being those created by disease or accident. Violet would have been very hesitant to show herself in society until her crowning glory regrew to the desired length.

In fact, it is highly peculiar that the redoubtable Miss Stoper herself did not object to such demands; after all, her mission was supposed to provide respectable young ladies for equally as respectable households. With such dubious requirements, it should not have been up to Violet to initially decline Rucastle's insistence for shorter hair. The head of the recruitment firm herself should have vigorously objected to such demands; these, added to the outrageously high salary that Rucastle offered should have alarmed Miss Stoper; after all, she would not want her agency to acquire a notorious reputation for providing more than just governesses!

### *A Futile Consultation, Unwise Decision*

In view of all the above, it is not odd that Violet would have consulted Holmes about the position being offered by Rucastle. Being on her own, the assurance that she had someone (especially as formidable) like Holmes to rely upon had to be a source of comfort; however, it should be noted that at this point in the case even Holmes had qualms: “I confess that it is not a situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for.”



Regardless, she accepts a very dodgy position that requires her to wear a dress that belonged to someone else yet fits her perfectly, she must sit at a certain spot, and cut her hair. Common sense appears to be completely absent.

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Violet Hunter, like Victor Hatherley (note the identical initials!), was prompted by a

shaky bank account to accept dubious work. Perhaps she and our hydraulic engineer were somehow related. However, what surpasses understanding is that while Hatherley was only warned to leave for the sake of his life, Violet was actually threatened with serious or even deadly bodily harm. Her reaction? “Of course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was almost as strong as my fears,” she declared as a justification for remaining in the power of a man who has threatened her,

Paradoxically enough, Holmes does not seem to be doing any better in the sound reasoning department when, after listening to Violet’s tale of foolish risk-taking, he says, “You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter. Do you think that you could perform one more feat? I

should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman,” he says, urging her to once more place herself in what could very well have been mortal danger.



### *A Questionable Legal Position*

Watson does not mention the point; however, one may safely assume that Alice Rucastle was not yet of age. Were that the case if she was forbidden by her father to marry and he kept her in the house against her will to avoid such an occurrence, while his actions might have been viewed as perhaps somewhat extreme, they would not have been at all that unusual or illegal. As the girl’s father, he would have been within his right to do so. His real reason—forcing her to sign over control of her

money—would not have mattered much, unless after signing she could later establish before a court that it was done while under duress.

By 1890 laws had freed women from the dependence and dominance that men could legally impose upon the women of their household. This, too, was the last year in which Rucastle could have kept his daughter locked up under the pretense that she was *non compos mentis*.

Repugnant as it may appear Jephro Rucastle probably did not violate any law. Holmes himself pointed out that the situation was reversed: “I think, Watson, that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our *locus standi* now is rather a questionable one.” Holmes, Watson, and Hunter, would have been open to charges of assault and battery, breaking and entering, attempted burglary, and kidnapping (locking up Mrs. Toller). A court might even have agreed that they were the proximate cause of Rucastle’s injuries because the latter released the dog with the intention of protecting himself and his property from intruders. If the mastiff had attacked Holmes and Watson as Rucastle intended, they would not have had any legal recourse, because the homeowner would have been perfectly within his rights.

### *What else happened in 1890:*

#### *Empire*

Helgoland ceded to Germans.

Work of Rhodes Pioneers begun in Southern Rhodesia.

Britain annexes Uganda.

Britain recognizes French Protectorate over Madagascar.

Treaty of Busah: improved Franco-British relations in West Africa.

Zanzibar Settlement: Tanganyika becomes Imperial Germany Colony; Germany excluded from Upper Nile; British Protectorate over Zanzibar.

#### *Britain*

Parnell vindicated of Phoenix Park murder charges; ruined by O’Shea divorce petition; rejected as leader of Irish Nationalists in Commons, resigns.



Omnibus strike in London settled on basis of 12-hour day.

◀ Cardinal John Henry Newman dies. He was one of the founders of the Oxford movement, leading the propaganda effort for High Church doctrines.

January 4, *Daily Graphic* launched, first daily illustrated paper. Merged with *Daily Sketch* in 1926.

Horniman Museum opens.

First part of Rosebery Avenue opened.

Dulwich Park, gifted by Dulwich College, opens.

Vauxhall Park opens.

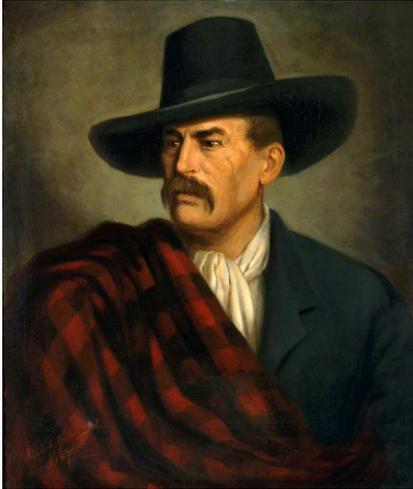
City and South London Railway from Stockwell to William Street, first deep level tube railway.

London-Paris telephone line opened.

Financial panic in London and in Paris.

Lunacy Act gives management of asylums to visiting committees.

## Housing of Working Classes Act.



Sir B. Baker and Sir J. Fowler complete cantilever Forth Bridge (for railway) at Queensferry, near Edinburgh; length 1.3 miles.

Charles Booth writes, *In Darkest England*.

◀ Sir Richard Burton dies at Trieste. Famous for his visits to Mecca and Medina disguised as a Muslim pilgrim, the explorer served in the Crimean War and, with Captain Speke, discovered Lake Tanganyika. Renowned also for his books of travel and magnificent *History of the Sword*. He is best remembered as the translator of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Caine writes, *Bondman*, a novel.

Sir James George Frazer writes, *The Golden Bough*.

Morris writes *News from Nowhere*.

Sir William Watson writes, *Wordsworth's Grave*.

## World

Africa is repartitioned among the European powers. England receives the sultanate of Zanzibar and an extensive strip of territory to the north of the German West Africa possessions. France is placated by dominion over all the oases of the Sahara and the northwest portion of the Sudan extending as far as Lake Tschad. In return for German concessions, Heligoland is ceded to that country.

Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota. Last battle in the American Indian Wars. This event represents the end of the American Old West.



German Dowager Empress Augusta dies at the Royal Palace at Berlin. The Queen, later Empress, devoted her time and energies to the reorganization of guilds of women under the Red Cross. Under her guidance, 677 general hospitals, 286 private lazarettos were established.

North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington are admitted into the Union.

◀ Fall of Bismarck; the Prussian Prime Minister is made to resign. General von Caprivi de Caprera de Montecuculi is appointed as successor to Prince Bismarck. This event marks the beginning of William II's disastrous personal rule.

The five republics of Central America unite under one president with a five-member cabinet and diet of 15.

Workmen in France allowed compensation for contracts broken by employers.

William III of Holland dies; Luxembourg passes to Duke of Nassau.

Zemstva Law in Russia; limited franchise in local govern-

ment; excluded intellectual professions.

Revolution in Argentina, President Celman ousted.

Russia attempts to limit Finnish Control over customs and money.

First meeting of Japanese Legislature under new Constitution. First great national election to the new Parliament in Japan and the provincial assemblies are held. Nearly 85% of eligible voters cast ballots. Results show that almost all the candidates that received some sort of government employment had been repudiated by the people.

Italy annexes Eritrea.

French miners to elect delegates to supervise safety while working.

Numerous arrests made at Paris in anticipation of expected Socialist demonstrations. Among them, the Marquis de Mores, a French Royalist of American cowboy fame on charge of inciting soldiers to revolt and of furnishing funds to Socialist organs. In May several labor riots occur.

Workers' agitation in London, as result of the goings-on in Paris. More than 20,000 workmen attend a mass meeting in Hyde Park.

In Chicago, the first entirely steel-framed building erected. The city is chosen as the site of the 1892 World's Fair.



U.S. signs extradition treaty with Great Britain.

Cholera again strikes pilgrims at Mecca.

◀ French Explorer Monteil's journey Niger-Kano-Tchad-Tripoli; completed 1892.

First Chinese cotton mill constructed.

Students of the University of St. Petersburg University and the Academy of Agriculture demand the reestablishment of the more liberal regulations of 1863. Five hundred are imprisoned. This results in the police closing of the University and Technological Institute of St. Petersburg.

The Tsar issues imperial edicts against the Jews. They are forbidden to hold land, are directed to reside in towns, and are excluded from certain cities where until then they had been unmolested.

Olderbank Clubs in Italy suppressed.

Political revolts in Switzerland over the government's refusal to submit to the people the question of a revision of the constitution.

Turkish outrages reported from Armenia. Atrocities committed by the Kurd against the Armenians, half of Salonica burned down.

Heinrich Schliemann German archaeologist, discoverer of Troy, died at Naples.

### *Art*

Franck, Belgian organ composer dies.

Cézanne paints *Mme. Cézanne in the Conservatory*.

Degas paints *Dancers in Blue*.

Gilbert writes, *Original Comic Operas*.

Barry writes, *My Lady Nicotine*.

Pietro Mascagni writes *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Van Gogh paints *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, *Street in Anvers*, dies.

*Prince Igor*, commenced by Borodin (dies 1887), completed by Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Tschaikovsky composes *Queen of Spades*.

Whistler writes, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

Paul Claudel presents *Tête d'Or*.

Stefan George writes, *Hymnen*.

Arno Holtz writes, *Die Familie Selicke*.

Ibsen writes, *Hedda Gabler*.

Zola writes, *La Bête humaine*.

### ***Science and Technology***

Bertillon publishes *La photographie judiciaire*, in which he explains his anthropometry.

Emil von Behring, German bacteriologist, discovers immunity to tetanus can be given by use of serum; introduces name "antitoxin."

Halstead, at John Hopkins Hospital, first to use rubber gloves in surgery.

Moving-picture films, precursor of cinematography shown in New York.

Cyanide process of preparation of gold from crude ore developed in South Africa.

Lockyer's theory of stellar evolution.

Application of pneumatic tires to bicycles makes popular craze of that sport.

P. Rudolph's anastigmatic camera lens.

Discovery of Cleopatra's tomb.

First use of the electric chair as a method of execution.

The cardboard box is invented.

### ***Next week's case: SILV.***

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 photos 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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