



*An Inquiry into:  
"The Musgrave Ritual"*

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"The Musgrave Ritual" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in May 1893. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

As the table shows, the majority of our chronologists estimate 1878 as the year of this adventure. That being the

case, then at the time Sherlock Holmes would have been 24 and Doctor John H. Watson 26.

**Main Characters:**

Reginald Musgrave, old acquaintance of Holmes and owner of the Hurlstone estate. Brunton, butler at Hurlstone, a widower and womanizer. Rachel Howells, second maid at Hurlstone and Brunton's ex-fiancée.

**Notable Quotes:**

"Yes, my boy; these were all done prematurely, before my biographer had come to glorify me."

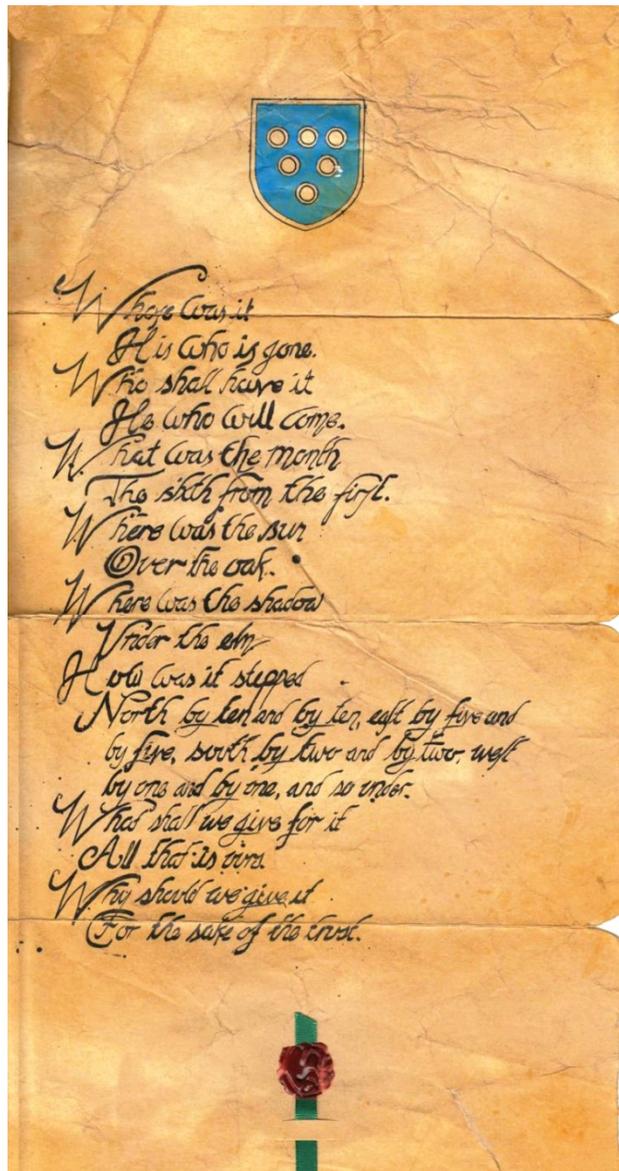
"Here is the record of the Tarleton murders, and the case of Vamberry, the wine merchant, and the adventure of the old Russian woman, and the singular affair of the aluminium crutch, as well as a full account of Ricoletti of the club foot and his abominable wife."

"I am generally recognized both by the public and by the official force as being a final court of appeal in doubtful cases."

"I have taken to living by my wits."

<i>The Musgrave Ritual</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>A Thursday</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, October 2, 1879</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, September 26, 1878</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>1878</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>1878</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Thursday, June 24, 1880</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Thursday, October 2, 1879</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>A Thursday in the summer of 1878</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Probably the summer of 1879</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday, June 23, 1881</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1879</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Thursday, October 2, 1879</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.*



Who was it  
He is who is gone.  
Who shall have it  
He who will come.  
What was the month  
The sixth from the first.  
Where was the sun  
Over the oak.  
Where was the shadow  
Under the elm.  
How was it stepped  
North by ten and by ten, east by five and  
by five, south by two and by two, west  
by one and by one, and so on.  
What shall we give for it  
All that is ours.  
Who shall we give it  
For the sake of the deed.

### *The Distracted Watson*



One is perennially amused at the way (when it was convenient) Holmes could play Watson like his Stradivarius! The Great Detective did not want to bother putting his papers in order so what does he do? He mucks about in the tin box where he keeps records of his past cases. And poor Watson gravitates towards it like the moth to the flame!

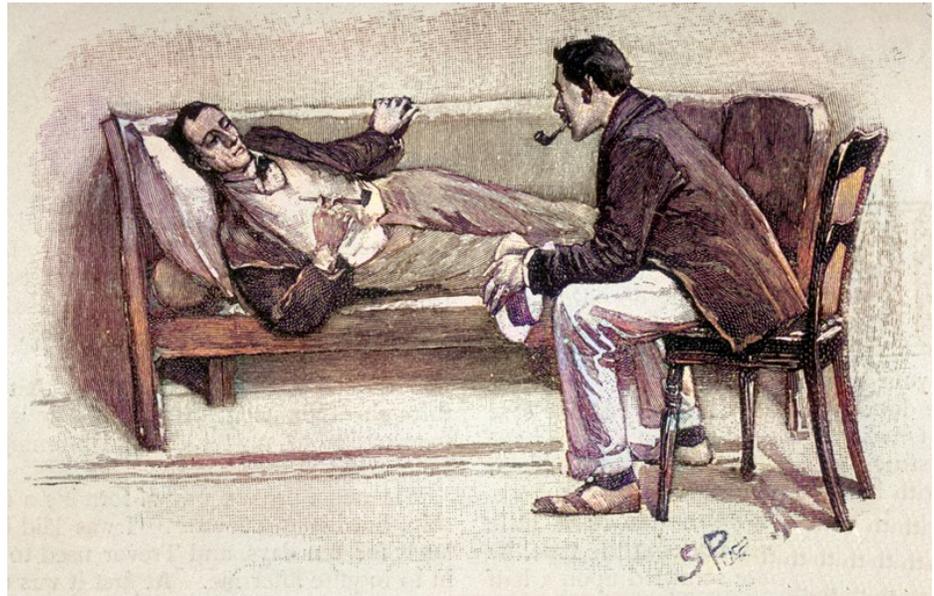
Then, again, is there any one of us who would not gladly choose untidiness over a chance to dig about the contents of that fabulous receptacle?

### *The University Conundrum*

It appears Holmes may not have been too clear regarding the facts when he wrote told Watson about his experiences in GLOR, because there appear to be contradictions regarding Holmes' university attendance and his acquaintances there.

Holmes seems quite definite in *GLOR* that he had no friends at college. He seems quite clear about it: “[Victor Trevor] *was the only friend I made during the two years that I was at college,* [italics added].” Later he expanded on this by stating that “. . . my line of study was quite distinct from that of the other fellows, so that we had no points of contact at all. Trevor was the only man I knew.”

The matter seems to be more entangled when he now tells Watson that at the beginning of his career in London he had rooms in Montague Street. He then adds that “Now and again cases came in my way, principally through the introduction of old fellow-students, *for during my last years at the University* [italics added] there was a good



deal of talk there about myself and my methods.” His “last years at the University”? Would this not imply that Holmes’ stint at the university lasted more than the two years that he mentioned to Watson in *GLOR*?

If Trevor had been his only friend, how is it that Musgrave—obviously as a friend—came to consult him? According to Holmes while still at university he had two cases after *GLOR*, and that, “The third of these cases was that of the Musgrave Ritual.” He expands on this telling Watson that Musgrave “more than once [had] expressed a keen interest in my methods of observation and inference.” It appears that Holmes had at least two friends—why, then would he want to give the impression he had no social life at university?

### *The Mystifying Brunton*



Courtesy of ITV Granada

It is certain that I am not the only Canon student to be baffled by the butler of the Hurlstone estate. Although nowhere in Watson’s description about the man, there is nonetheless something mysterious about him.

This begins with, and is reinforced by, Reginald Musgrave’s description of the man: “Of these servants the one who had been longest in our service was Brunton, the butler. He was a young schoolmaster out of place when he was first taken up by my father, but he was a man of great energy and character, and he soon became quite invaluable in the household. He was a well-grown, handsome man, with a splendid forehead, and though he has been with us for twenty years he cannot be more than forty now. With his personal advantages

and his extraordinary gifts—for he can speak several languages and play nearly every musical instrument—it is wonderful that he should have been satisfied so long—20 years—in such a position, but I suppose that he was comfortable and lacked energy to make any change. The butler of Hurlstone is always a thing that is remembered by all who visit us.”

With all due respect to our biographer and Reginald Musgrave, that description makes little sense; in fact, it is contradictory. Musgrave refers to him as “a man of great energy and character,” only to almost immediately after put him down as lacking in energy to better his servant status. I have always been a follower of the dictum that contradictions do not exist and that if something seems contradictory this is due to insufficient facts or misinformation.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

So the question begs, what was Brunton was doing there? According to Musgrave he had been hired as a butler by his father when he was “a young schoolmaster out of place.” What did that mean, “out of place”? Reginald informs us that with all his talents, with very little effort on his part he could have comfortably occupied a middle-class position. Why, then would he not have been willing to improve his social and economic situation; particularly his financial

condition? At the time, a butler’s yearly wages averaged £40 (≈\$15,000). Just for the sake of discussion, let us posit that Musgrave considered him so valuable a servant that he paid him double the wages—£80. He still would have earned less than a skilled milliner in a factory.

It is unlikely that Brunton remained at Hurlstone all those years only because of the supposed Musgrave treasure. It seems logical that had he known it existed, he would have started hunting for the treasure many years before, prior to Holmes meeting Reginald at university. This would indicate that he did not realize its existence until relatively recently, most likely when the senior Musgrave died, and Reginald had to go through the ritual.

His remaining for so many years in a position that clearly was beneath him might be explained were he to be hiding from something very dark in his past, possibly something that the authorities might be very pleased to question him about.

Regardless of all this, one must consider the possibility that Musgrave was correct after all when he opined that Brunton was content with being a butler because due to this lack of energy he did not want to bother to make a change.

However, I resist to fully accept this. Mastering several languages and musical instruments is not something someone lacking in energy is able to do—it requires considerable effort and dedication, regardless of how talented one happens to be. The possibility that he might have been hiding from something in his past life seems more plausible. He once taught school and then went into butlering.

Why the precipitously long step downhill in the social scale? Could it be that he found his position as Hurlstone's butler gave him an excellent hiding place? Was he wanted by the authorities? Was Brunton even his real name?

### *The Obvious Insight*

Holmes very correctly observed that once he had learned about the ritual, Brunton had shown "a clearer insight than ten generations of his masters." With all due respect to the Great Detective, it is absolutely impossible that there could have been such a level of inbreeding that ten generations of Musgraves did not realize the meaning of a ritual that obviously provides directions to locate something hidden.

It is clear that the producers and writers of the Granada version were as unable as I am to believe that, and they had Musgrave comment that as a child he had unsuccessfully attempted to follow the directions to the treasure.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

### *What else happened in 1878:*

#### *Empire*



Cyprus gained.

Order of the British Empire is established by Queen Victoria.

◀ Act defines the Imperial Standard Yard, which was established in 1856, as a certain distance between two marks on a bar of Baily's metal.

Second Afghan War (1878-1880).

#### *Britain*

Electric street lighting begins in London, replacing the old gas lamps, which had to be hand-lit every evening.



◀ Salvation Army established.

Music Hall entertainment with comedians and singers had been popular since 1837. Safety laws, introduced in 1878, close many small halls, but the bigger ones survived and performers became big stars.

*Princess Alice* steamboat disaster.

American painter A.M. Whistler's libel suit, brought in London against John Ruskin for the latter's negative comments on one of Whistler's paintings at an exhibition, is settled in favor of Whistler who is awarded one farthing damages and no costs.

Red Flag Act: mechanical road vehicles not to exceed 4 mph and to be preceded by a man with a red flag.

Clerkenwell Road opens.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) established in Scotland Yard.

English wheat prices start a decline.

Foundation of Lady Margaret Hall, for Women in Oxford.

Act is passed, requiring dentists to be fully qualified.

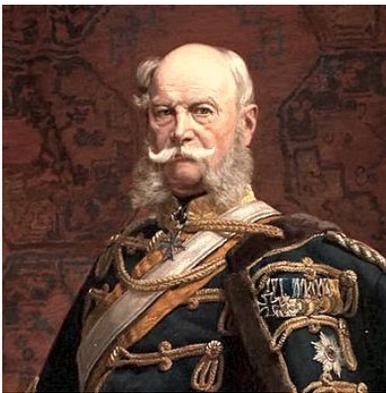
Cleopatra's Needle erected on the Embankment.

Fulham football team formed.

## *World*

Russo-Turkish conflict threatens Gallipoli and the Dardanelles, and advanced to within 30 miles of Constantinople. English Liberals withdraw opposition to vote for £6,000,000 demanded by government, and the Royal Navy enters the Sea of Marmora. After weeks of suspense, the Congress of Berlin settles the crisis. Disraeli announces "peace with honor."

Victor Emmanuel, first King of Italy dies. His son, the Prince of Piedmont succeeds him as King Humbert IV.



Ex-King of Hanover, George V, Prince Royal of Great Britain and Ireland, Duke of Cumberland, dies in Paris. He succeeded his father, King Augustus of Hanover in 1851, but was ousted by Prussia in 1866.

◀ There is an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Emperor William I of Germany. A state of siege is declared and laws against socialists passed.

End of a series of revolts in Spanish Cuba.

Belgian school laws attempt to complete the secularization of education.

William Cullen Bryant, American poet and journalist, dies in New York.

In Japan, the era of absolute government draws to a close. The Mikado's promise, made in 1868, is partly fulfilled by an imperial edict convoking provincial assemblies to sit once a year in each ken.



The American government remonetizes silver. In 1878 the production of gold yielded 80 tons, while that of silver was 770 tons. Silver's value crashed until a silver dollar was worth only 90 cents in gold. To prevent payment of debts in silver, the Congress demonetized it, declaring that all debts were payable in gold. This was referred to as the "Crime of 1878."

◀ General Grant makes a tour around the world, visiting England and the Continent, Egypt, China, and Japan, returning to San Francisco the following year. He is well received by Queen Victoria, the Emperor of Russia, and leaders of India, China, and Japan.

Pope Pius IX dies at the Vatican. Cardinal Pecci is proclaimed Pope under the name of Leo XIII.

Garnier builds the Monte Carlo Casino.

## *Art*

Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore*.

Cézanne paints *The Quayside at Bercy*, *The Pool at the Jas de Bouffan*.

Degas paints *The Ballet Dancer with Bouquet*, *Café singer wearing a Glove*.

Sir Henry M. Stanley publishes *Through the Dark Continent*.

Manet paints *Blonde Half-Nude*.

Renoir paints *Mme. Charpentier and her Children*.

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

Channel tunnel attempted.

Barthelot writes *Mécanique chimique*, relating chemistry to the laws of mechanics.



Karl Benz builds a motorized tricycle which reaches 7 mph.

Mannlicher produces a repeater rifle.

◀ Dr. Sédillot names minute organisms "microbes."

Sewing machines are used for book-binding.

Gelignite invented.

Dr. Claude Bernard, French physiologist who discovered the liver's glycogenic function dies in Paris.

First use of iodine as an antiseptic.

Dr. Jean Martin Charcot expounds the phenomenon of hypnotism, showing that mental states can be influenced and somnambulism induced with beneficial results in some conditions. His investigations are followed by

Dr. Rudolph Heidenhain of Breslau.

***Next week's case: REIG.***

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

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