



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXIX – The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

Publication History

29 of the 60 stories

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Part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

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McClure Phillip & Co., New York, 1905

British Illustrator – Sidney Paget

American Illustrator – Frederick Dorr Steele

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the dating of the story as Tuesday, August 20 to Wednesday, August 21, 1895 making it the 37th of the 60. This means that Holmes is 41 and Watson 43

Christopher Morley Says

“Holmes was able to retire all Lestrade’s theories and rescue “the unhappy John Hector McFarlane” from suspicion of having murdered the builder. Holmes spent an hour crawling about the lawn in a August sun, discovering only some trouser buttons; but the thumbprint on the wall was the clue that made his eyes shine.”



Dummies Short Summary

“Unrequited love and revenge drive this story of a retired builder who is murdered immediately upon making out his will.”

How Many Words

At 9,286 words NORW has the 42nd most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 2 where Holmes saves a person from a false murder charge. The other was THOR.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 35th of the 56 short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 27th of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1895)

- Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.
- U.S. intervenes in Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute, arbitration in Britain's favor.
- Construction of Uganda railway commenced.
- British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.
- Liberals defeated at general election, Salisbury again becomes prime minister.
- First automobile exhibition in London.
- Electrification of first mainline railway.
- Japan takes Formosa (Taiwan).
- Germany, France, and Russia unite to compel Japan to return Liaotung peninsula to China.
- Treaty of Simonoseki, end of Sino-Japanese war.
- Cuban rebellions begin, U.S. protests brutal suppression.
- Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.
- Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians.
- Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.
- Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, Wilde is imprisoned.
- H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.

- Wilhelm Konrad, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.
- Ramsey obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun, in 1868.
- Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.
- King Gillette (U.S.) invents safety razor.
- Wireless telegraphy is demonstrated.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Watson no longer married, probably a widower. (He mentioned his sad bereavement in *The Adventure of the Empty House* a few months previously, probably his wife's death.) He sold his practice and moved back to 221B with Holmes, at Holmes' request.

Dramatis Personae

- **Jonas Oldacre**, the Norwood builder
- **John Hector McFarlane**, accused of murdering Oldacre.
- **Mrs. Lexington**, Oldacre's accomplice and housekeeper.
- **Mr. Cornelius**, alias used by Oldacre.
- **Mrs. McFarlane**, mother of John and former fiancée of Oldacre.
- **Lestrade**
- **Graham & McFarlane**, the law firm where McFarlane was the junior partner.
- **Deep Dene**, the residence of Oldacre.
- **Hyams**, Oldacre's tailor.

Quotable Sherlock

- "From the point of view of the criminal expert," said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, "London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty."
- "You mentioned your name as if I should recognize it, but I assure you that, beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you."
- "There is no prospect of danger, or I should not dream of stirring out without you."
- "All my instincts are one way, and the facts are the other, and I must fear that British juries have not attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over Lestrade's facts."

- “You will find that your reputation has been enormously enhanced. Just make a few alterations in that report which you were writing, and they will understand how hard it is to throw dust in the eyes of Inspector Lestrade.” – SH, allowing Lestrade to take credit for solving the case.
- "But he had not that supreme gift of the artist, the knowledge of when to stop."

Unrecorded Cases

- The case of ex-president Murillo
- The case of the Dutch steamship *Friesland*, which so nearly cost us both our lives
- Bert Stevens, a very mild-mannered man who was a horrible murderer; he wanted Holmes to get him off in '87

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

- 1922 The Norwood Builder with Eille Norwood in one of his 47 short movies. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1986 The Norwood Builder with Jeremy Brett in one of his 43 BBC episodes

Fainting In The Canon

While there is no evidence that Sherlock Holmes faints in NORW, Watson writes, “I have known him [Holmes] presume upon his iron strength until he has fainted from pure inanition.”

Newspapers

- **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. Is considered the country's “other paper of record.”

Annotated Sherlock

We could find no words or terms used which with you shouldn't be familiar.

WEAPONS

- **Knife** - Which Jonas Oldacre used to mutilate the photograph of Mrs. MacFarlane.
- **Heavy Walking Stick** - Which Lestrade and Co. thought John Hector MacFarlane used to murder Jonas Oldacre.
- **Mutilated Photograph** - Of Mrs. MacFarlane, which Jonas Oldacre sent to her as a threat.
- **Fire** - Containing charred bones, thought by Lestrade and associates to have been used by John Hector McFarlane to burn the body of Jonas Oldacre.
- **Fire** - Set by Watson at Holmes' bidding to flush out Jonas Oldacre, very much alive, from his hiding place.

Frank Mentzel