

Adventure XXIX – The Adventure of the Norwood Builder



Paul Churchill once quipped he had a hard time studying for Sherlockian quizzes, so inspired by Simon Goodenough's *A Study in Scarlet – A Sherlock Holmes Murder Dossier*, Paul began collecting Canonical artifacts around 1990 to help him remember each story. Over 1,500 artifacts later, Paul's 'Evidence Boxes' became legendary in the Sherlockian world as he displayed them at numerous Scion meetings.

What Paul could not find, he made. He became known as a master forger, and 'created' numerous 'genuine faux' objects, such as letters, documents, and telegrams. Paul was invested in the Baker Street Irregulars in 2006 as "Corot." After Paul's passing, the Evidence Boxes were bequeathed to Watson's Tin Box Scion Society, a Society Paul co-founded in 1989. Debbie Clark has maintained the Boxes and continues the practice of displaying the items from one of the Boxes at each society meeting.

Beth Austin assisted in this effort by photographing, annotating the items, and finding the quotes for many of the items, while Denny Dobry and Rusty Mason supported Paul's efforts by photographing each of the items, as well as developing a comprehensive inventory with notations of item's mentioned in the story. Each of the Boxes is posted with permission of Debbie Clark and Jacquelynn Morris.



Pictured is the Masonic coins which would have been issued to McFarlane after becoming a Mason.

From the story:

‘You mentioned your name as if I should recognize it, but I assure you that, beyond obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.’



Pictured is the watch chain McFarlane wore as a symbol of him being a Mason.

From the story:

Familiar as I was with my friend's methods, it was not difficult for me to follow his deductions, and to observe the untidiness of attire, the sheaf of legal papers, the watch-charm, and the breathing which had prompted them.

MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR
AT LOWER NORWOOD.

DIAPPEARANCE OF A
WELL-KNOWN BUILDER

Suspicion of
Murder and Arson

A Clue to the Criminal

Late last night, or early this morning, an incident occurred at Lower Norwood which points, it is feared, to a serious crime. Mr. Jonas Oldacre is a well-known resident of that suburb, where he has carried on his business as a builder for many years. Mr. Oldacre is a bachelor, fifty-two years of age, and lives in Deep Dene House, at the Sydenham end of the road of that name. He has had the reputation of being a man of eccentric habits, secretive and retiring. For some years he has practically withdrawn from the business, in which he is said to have amassed considerable wealth. A small timber-yard still exists, however, at the back of the house, and last night, about twelve o'clock, an alarm was given that one of the stacks was on fire. The engines were soon upon the spot, but the dry wood burned with great fury, and it was impossible to arrest the conflagration until the stack had been entirely consumed. Up to this point the incident bore the appearance of an ordinary accident, but fresh indications seem to point to serious crime. Surprise was expressed at the absence of the master of the establishment from the scene of the fire, and an inquiry followed which showed that he had disappeared from the house. An examination of his room revealed that the bed had not been slept in, that a safe which stood in it was open, that a number of important papers were scattered about the room, and, finally, that there were signs of a murderous struggle, slight traces of blood being found within the room,

and an oaken walking-stick which also showed stains of blood upon the handle. It is known that Mr. Jonas Oldacre had received a late visitor in his bedroom upon that night, and the stick found has been identified as the property of this person, who is a young London solicitor named John Hector McFarlane, junior partner of Graham & McFarlane, of 426 Gresham Buildings, E.C. The police believe that they have evidence in their possession which supplies a very convincing motive for the crime, and altogether it cannot be doubted that sensational developments will follow.

LATER.—It is rumoured as we go to press that Mr. John Hector McFarlane has actually been arrested on the charge of the murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. It is at least certain that a warrant has been issued. There have been further and sinister developments in the investigation at Norwood. Besides the signs of a struggle in the room of the unfortunate builder, it is now known that the French windows of his bedroom (which is on the ground floor) were found to be open, that there were marks as if some bulky object had been dragged across to the wood-pile, and, finally, it is asserted that charred remains have been found among the charcoal ashes of the fire. The police theory is that a most sensational crime has been committed, that the victim was clubbed to death in his own bedroom, his papers rifled, and his dead body dragged across to the wood-stack, which was then ignited so as to hide all traces of the crime. The conduct of the criminal investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Les-trade, of Scotland Yard, who is following up the clues with his accustomed energy and sagacity.

Pictured is the newspaper clipping from the *Daily Telegraph*, detailing the disappearance of Jonas Oldacre, as well as arson and a potential murder..

From the story:

Our visitor stretched forward a quivering hand and picked up the *Daily Telegraph*, which still lay upon Holmes's knee.

'If you had looked at it, sir, you would have seen at a glance what the errand is on which I have come to you this morning. I feel as if my name and my misfortune must be in every man's mouth.'



Pictured is the cap badge for the London Fire Brigade, who responded to the fire at Oldacre's residence.

From the story:

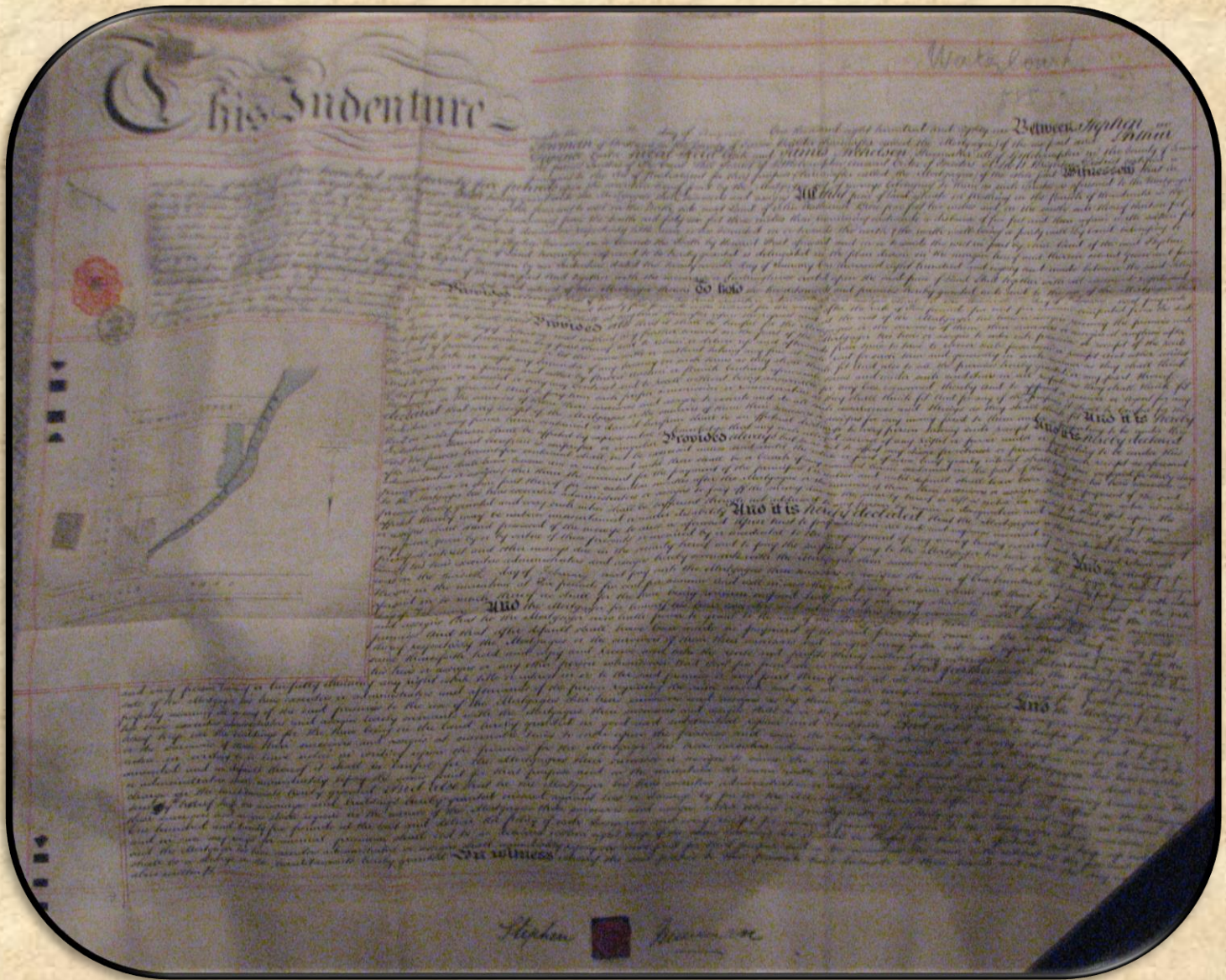
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Pictured is a small die-cast matchbook miniature London Fire Brigade fire engine.

From the story:

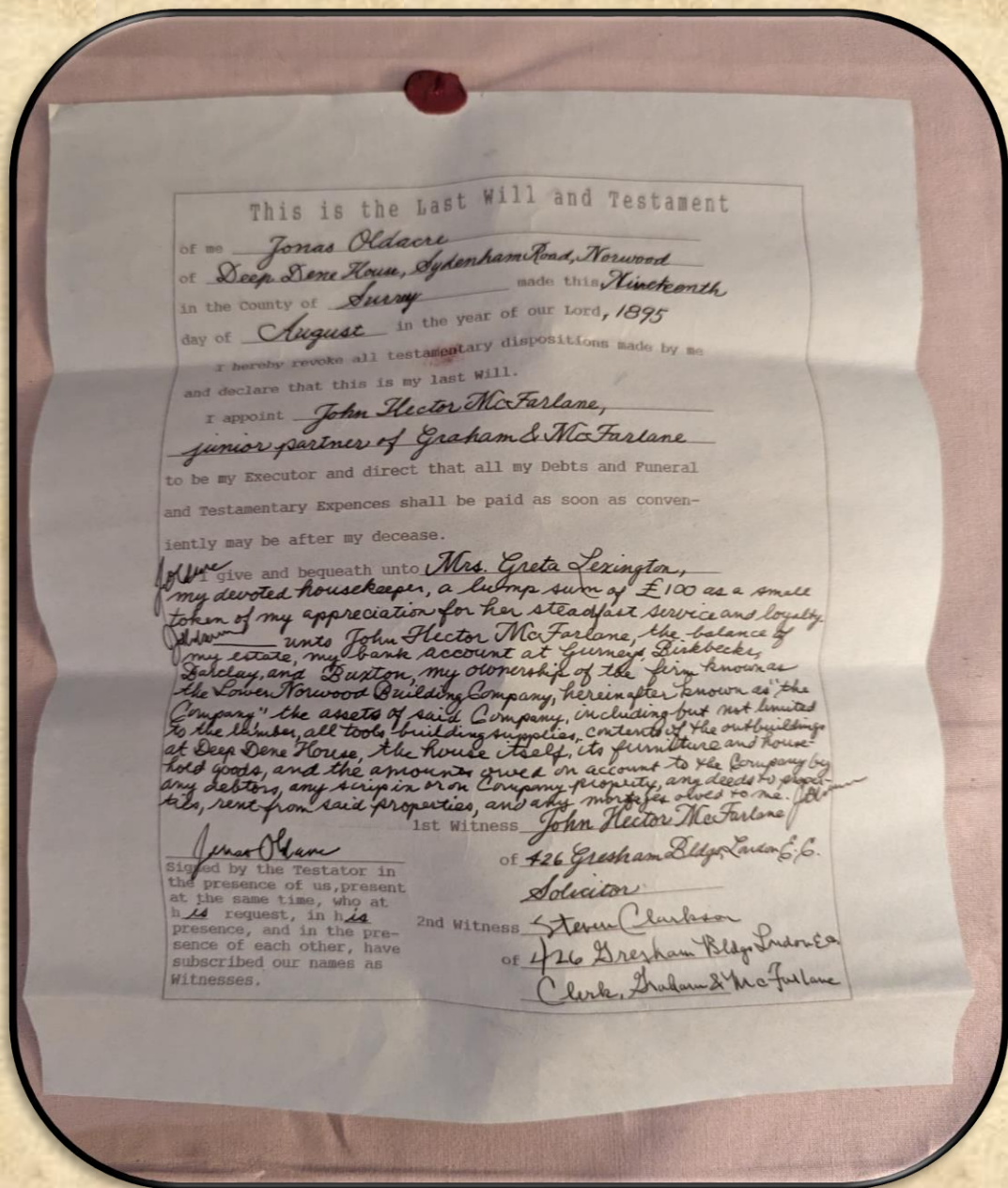
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Pictured is the mortgage to Deep Dene which Oldacre believed McFarlane should see to understand better his financial situation.

From the story:

‘Mr Jonas Oldacre then informed me that there were a number of documents - building leases, title - deeds, mortgages, scrip, and so forth - which it was necessary that I should see and understand.’

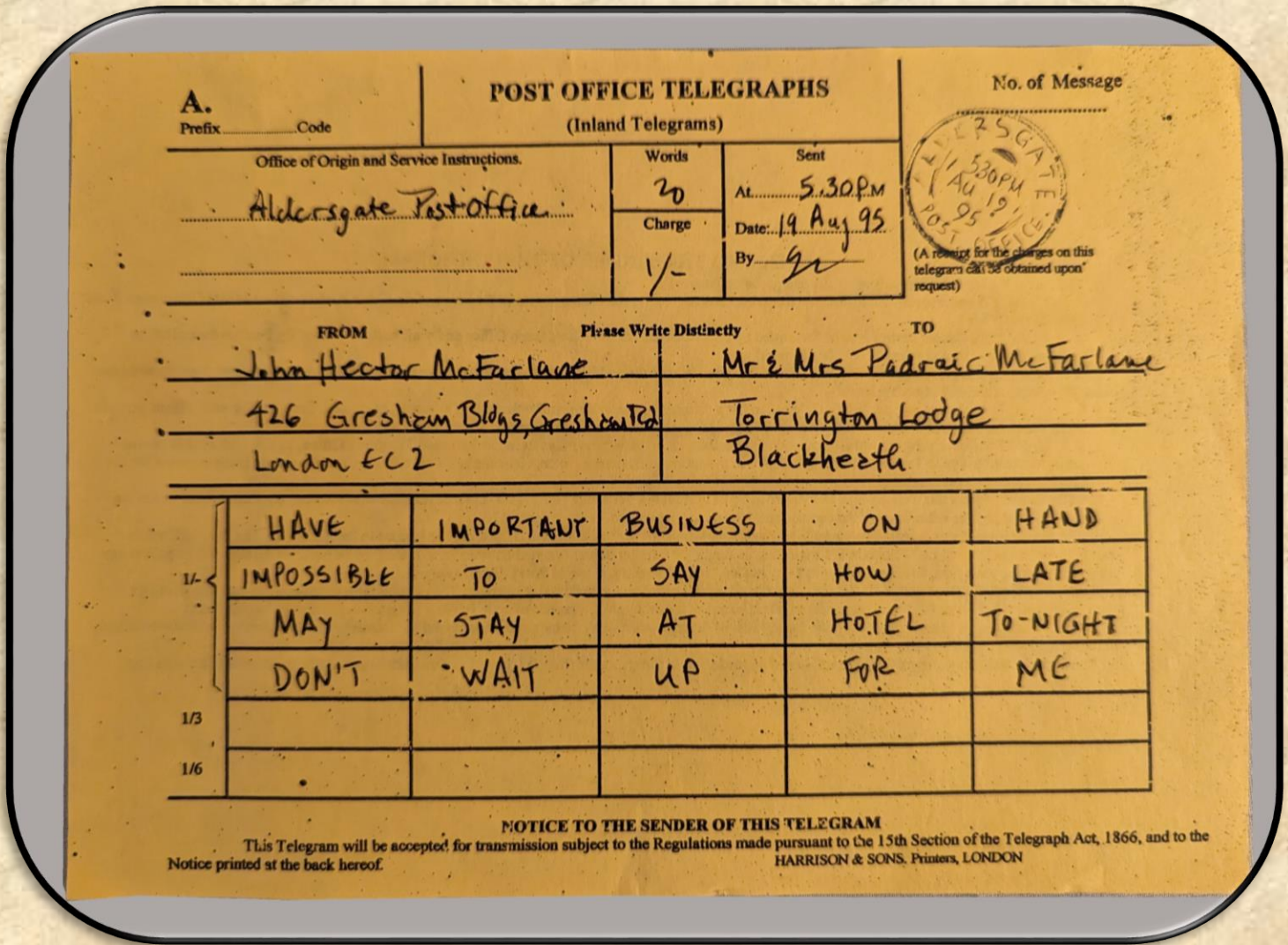


Pictured is the final will for Jonas Oldacre, prepared by Hector McFarlane the day before Oldacre disappeared. McFarlane was listed as the sole heir in the will.

From the story:

‘Here is my will,’ said he. ‘I want you, Mr McFarlane, to cast it into proper legal shape. I will sit here while you do so.’

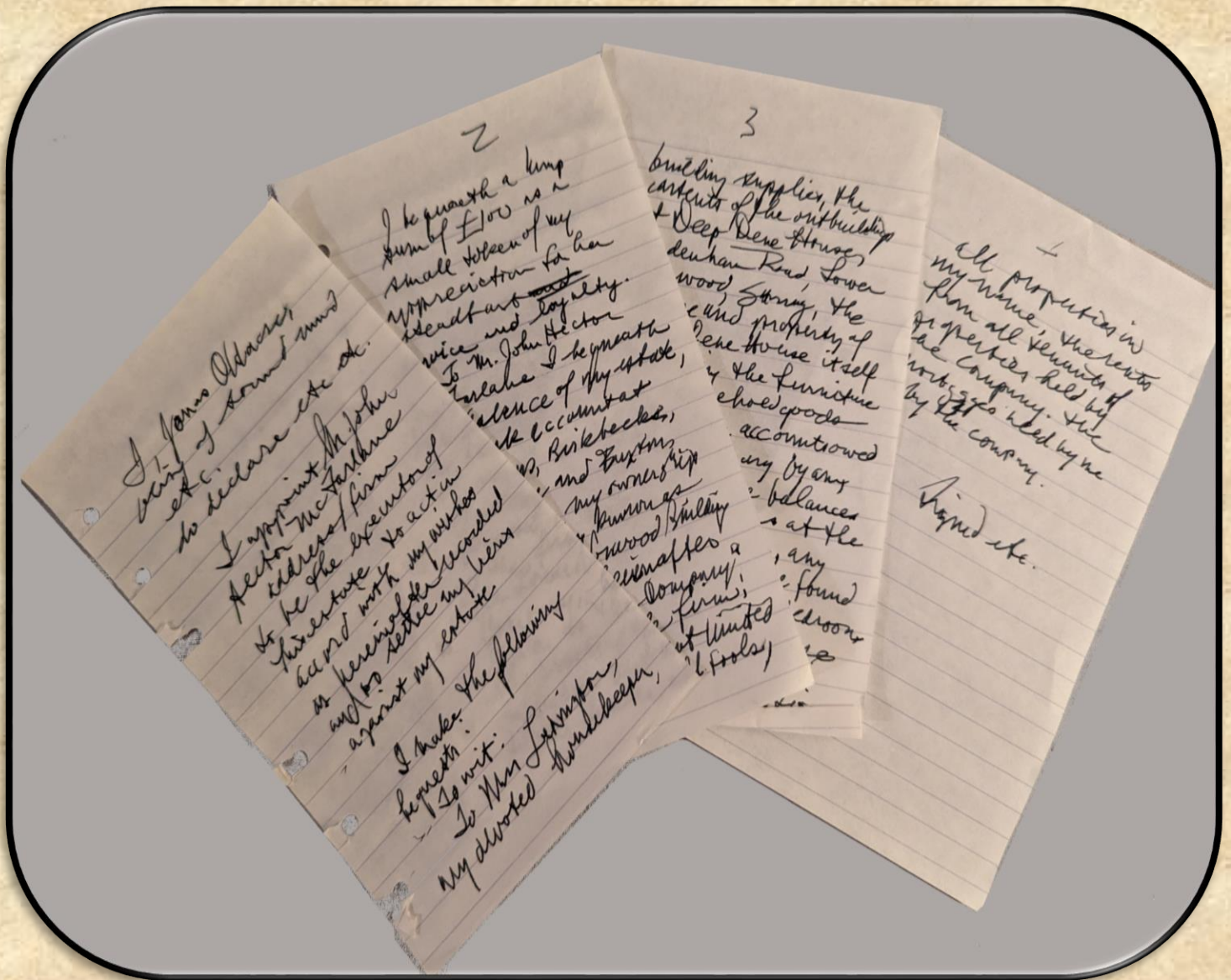
‘I set myself to copy it, and you can imagine my astonishment when I found that, with some reservations, he had left all his property to me.’



Pictured is the telegram from John Hector McFarlane to his parents, stating he will be staying in a hotel that night.

From the story:

'I sent a telegram home, therefore, to say that I had important business on hand, and that it was impossible for me to say how late I might be.'



Pictured are the notes, or rough draft, which are the basis of Jonas Oldacre's will. Holmes deduced the notes were written on the train ride to London.

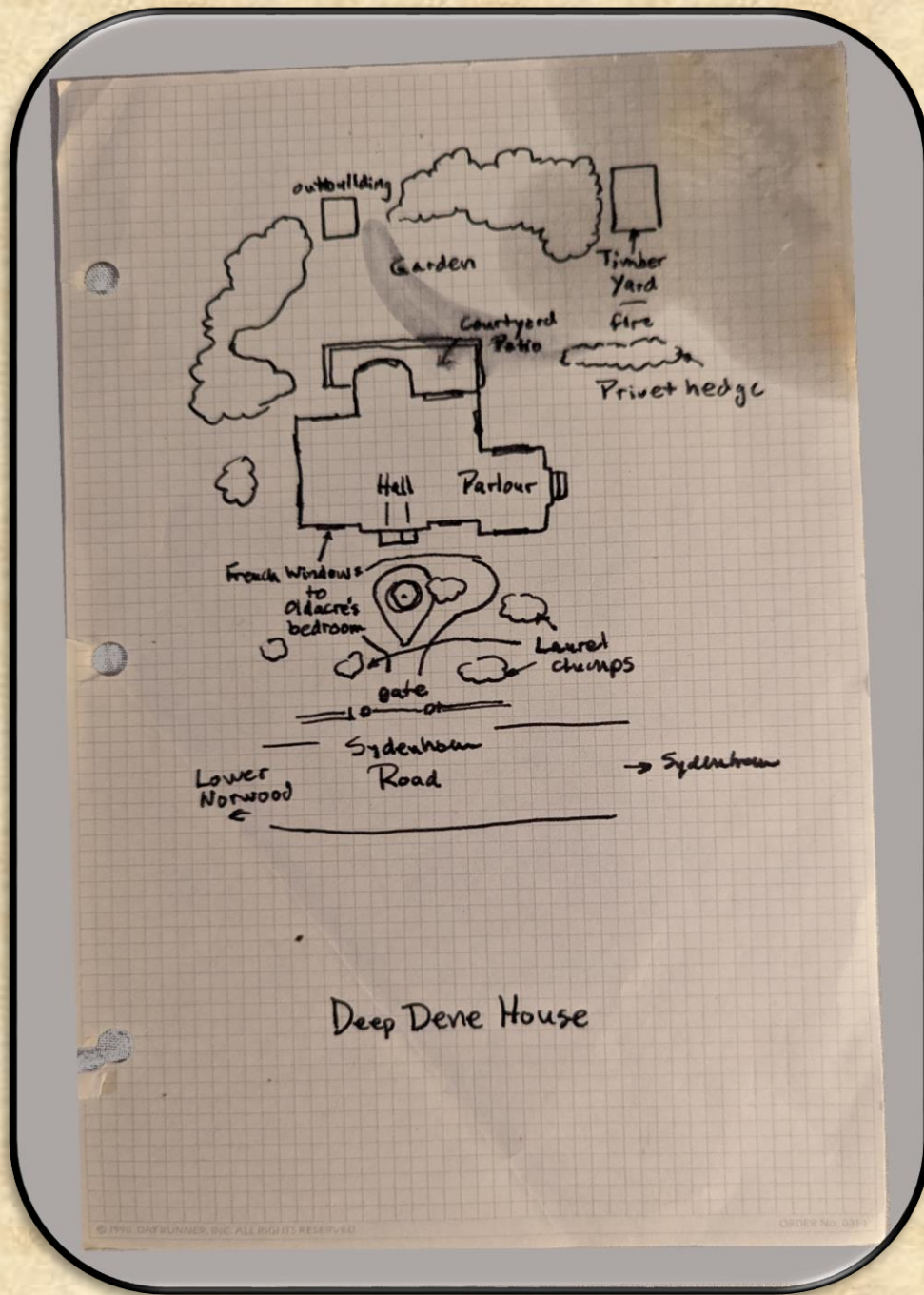
From the story:
 Holmes had picked up the pages which formed the rough draft of the will, and was looking at them with the keenest interest upon his face.
 'That it was written in a train; the good writing represents stations, the bad writing, movement, and the very bad writing, passing over points.'



Pictured is the button found among the ashes of the burned wood-pile behind Oldacre's house. One was marked with 'Hyams'.

From the story:

'They had spent the morning raking among the ashes of the burned wood-pile and besides the charred organic remains they had secured several discoloured metal discs. I examined them with care, and there was no doubt that they were trouser buttons. I even distinguished that one of them was marked with the name of 'Hyams', who was Oldacre's tailor.'



Pictured is a hand-drawn sketch of the crime scene, completed by Holmes.

From the story:

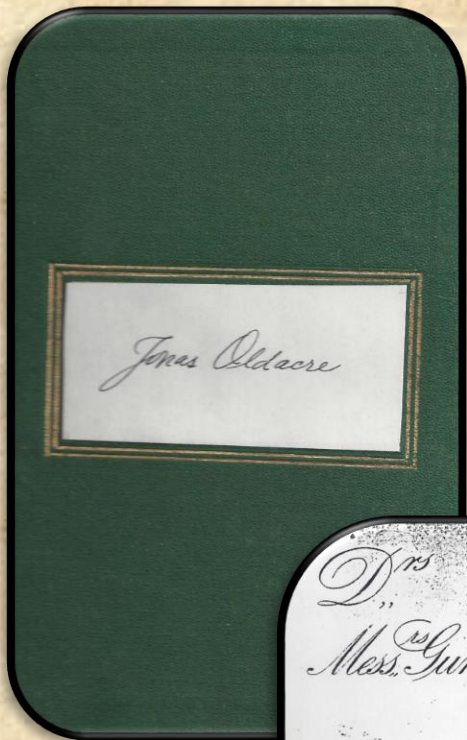
‘Here's a rough plan on a leaf of my note-book. This window on the left is the one which opens into Oldacre's room.’



Pictured is the cabinet photograph of a beautiful young woman, slashed by a sharp instrument. Oldacre had ruined the photo and sent to Mrs McFarlane after she spurned him.

From the story:

She rummaged in a bureau, and presently she produced a photograph of a woman, shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife. 'That is my own photograph,' said she. 'He sent it to me in that state, with his curse, upon my wedding morning.'



1844	Mar 11	To Balance	342	1844	Jan 12	Mr Cornelius	1575
1844	Apr 29	Cash	2188	1844	Mar 18	Mr Cornelius	554 5
1844	Mar 12	Interest	1075	1844	Apr	Mr Cornelius	4710
			575155			Balance	100
1844	Mar 18	Recd of	1614				
	19	Interest	21010				
			£ 679.3				
1844	Mar 19	To Balance	100	1844	Apr 17	By Cash	372
1844	Apr 15	Cash	257116				
	17	Interest	49				
		Cash	439				
			£ 372.				
1844	Mar 2	Cash	250				
1844	Mar 2	Interest	17.4				
1844	31	Cash	100				
1844	Mar 19	Interest	12142				
			£ 679/96				

NO MONEY WILL BE RECEIVED WITHOUT PRODUCTION OF THE BOOK.

OR PAID ON THIS ACCOUNT OF THE BOOK.

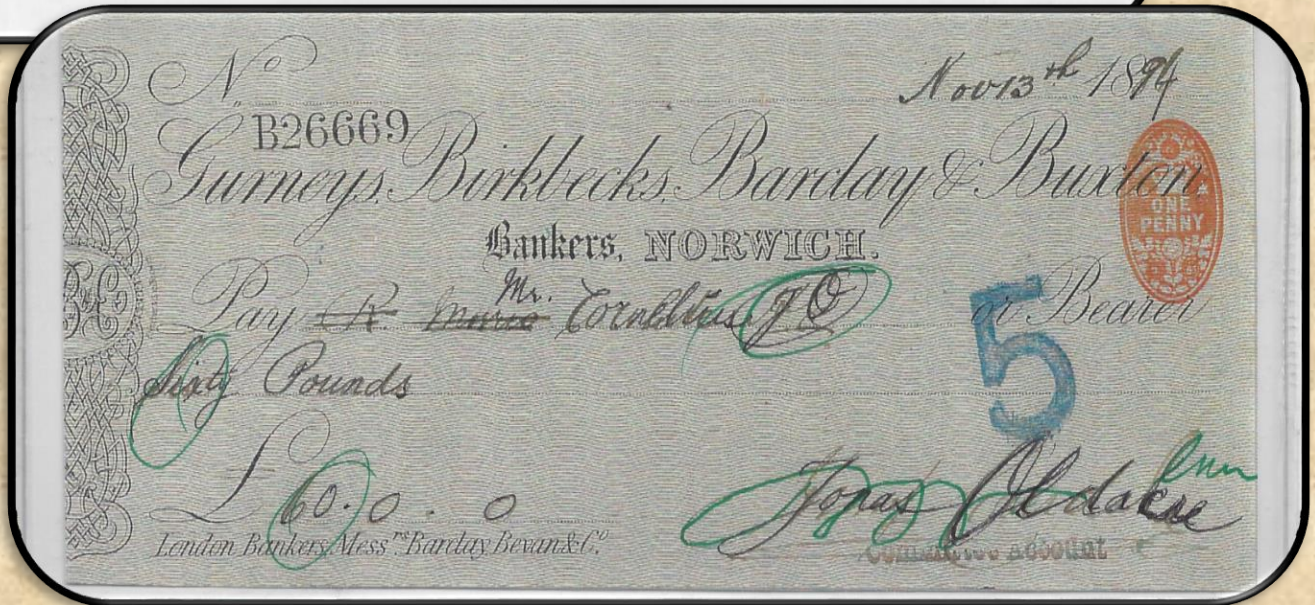
Mass. Gurneys, Birkbecks in account with Barclay & Buxton

Jonas Oldacre - 74 DAYS NOTICE

1844	Aug 11	Cash	700	1844	Oct 28	By Cash	558
1844	Aug 12	Interest	6109	1844	Aug 12	Balance	148109
			706109				706109
1844	Aug 12	To Balance	148109	1844	Mar 9	Cash	6109
1844	Oct 28	Cash	200	1844	Mar 11	Int	5735
1844	Mar 11	Interest	5735			Balance	342
			£ 35442				£ 35442

Pictured is Jonas Oldacre's bank passbook, with notes included concerning Cornelius.

From the story:
 'On looking over the bank book I found that the low state of the balance was principally due to large cheques which have been made out during the last year to Mr Cornelius. I confess that I should be interested to know who this Mr Cornelius may be with whom a retired builder has such very large transactions.'



Pictured are two cheques written to Mr. Cornelius from Oldacre's account. Holmes correctly deduced Cornelius was simply an alias for Oldacre.

From the story:

'On looking over the bank book I found that the low state of the balance was principally due to large cheques which have been made out during the last year to Mr Cornelius. I confess that I should be interested to know who this Mr Cornelius may be with whom a retired builder has such very large transactions.'

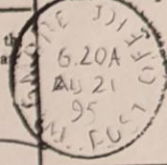
POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.



2, Brompton Road, London.

If the Receiver of an Inland Telegram doubts its accuracy, he may have it repeated on payment of half the amount originally paid for its transmission, any fraction of 1d. less than 1/2d. being reckoned as 1/2d.; and if it be found that there was an error of accuracy, the amount paid for repetition will be refunded. Special conditions are applicable to the repetition of Foreign Telegrams.

Office Stamp.



784

Charges }
to pay }

£ s. d.

from } NORWOOD

at 6.05 p.m. Received here at 6.10 A.M.

TO } MR SHERLOCK HOLMES, 221B BAKER STREET, LONDON NW1

IMPORTANT FRESH EVIDENCE TO HAND. MCFARLANE'S GUILT DEFINITELY ESTABLISHED. ADVISE YOU TO ABANDON CASE.

— LESTRADE

N.B.—This Form must accompany any inquiry made respecting this Telegram.

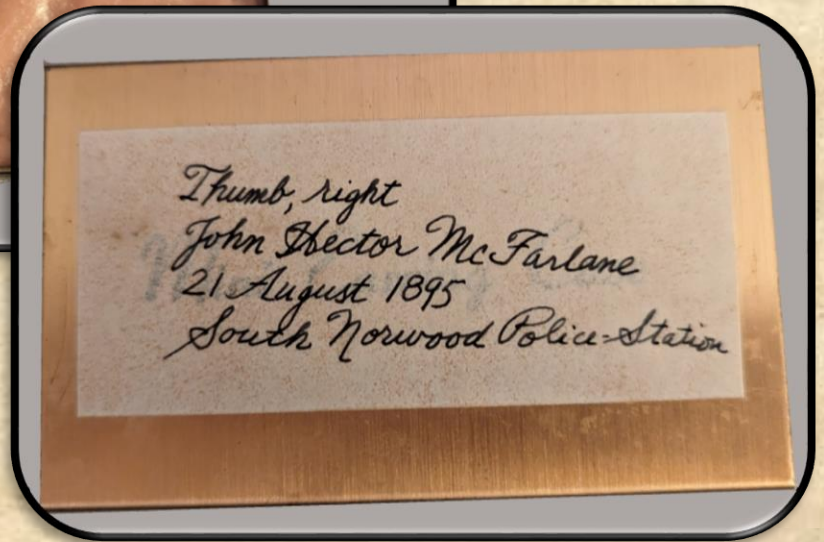
Pictured is the telegram sent by Inspector Lestrade to Holmes, explaining there have been developments in the case.

From the story:

An open telegram lay upon the table.

It was from Norwood, and ran as follows:

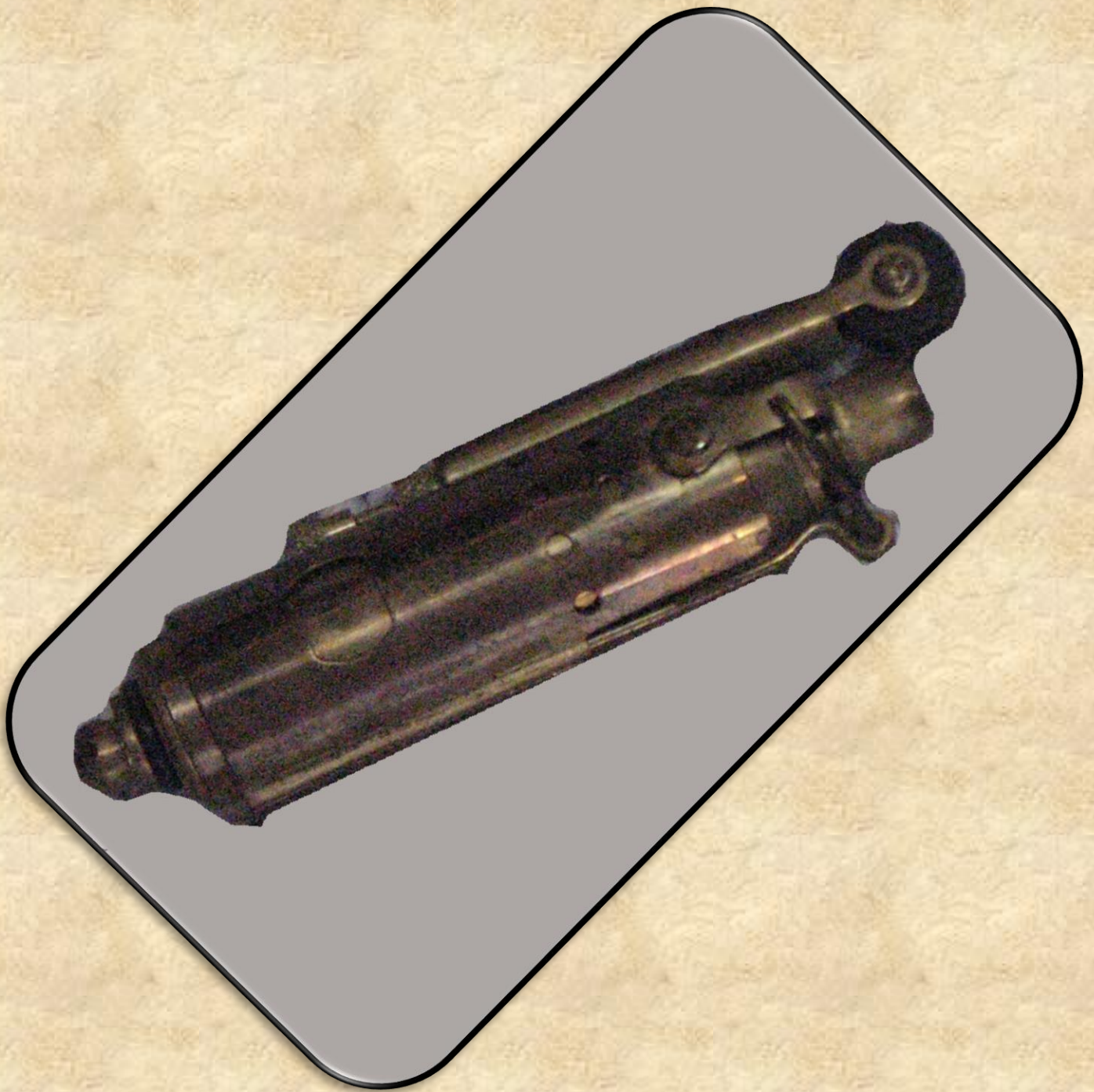
IMPORTANT FRESH EVIDENCE TO HAND. MCFARLANE'S GUILT DEFINITELY ESTABLISHED. ADVISE YOU TO ABANDON CASE. LESTRADE.



Pictured is small metal box containing wax and a thumbprint impression, labeled 'Thumb, right, John Hector McFarlane, 21 August 1895, South Norwood Police Station'.

From the story:

'Well, then, will you please compare that print with this wax impression of young McFarlane's right thumb, taken by my orders this morning?'

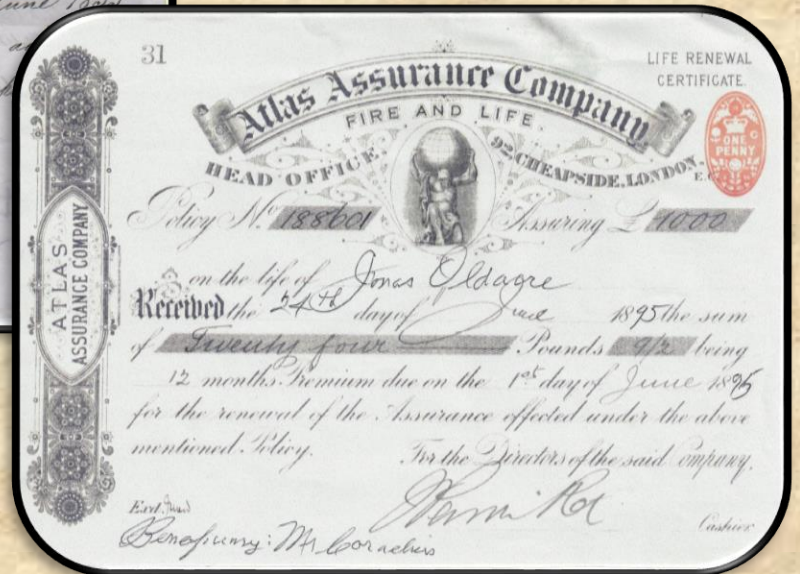
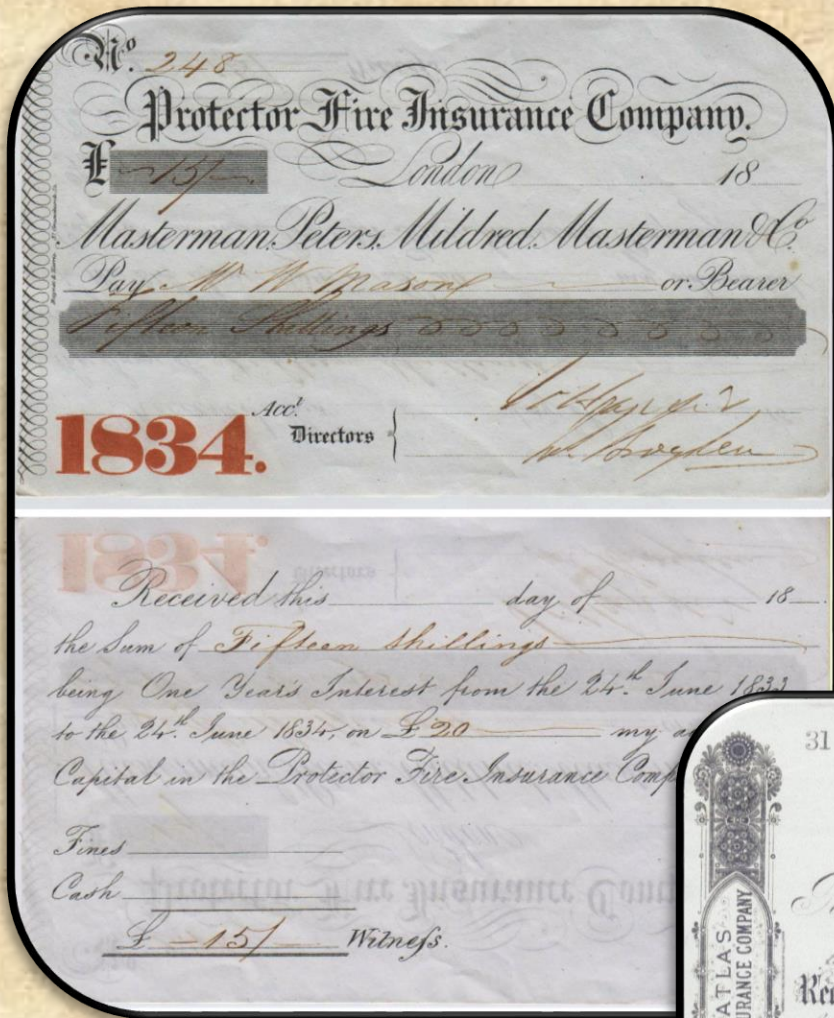


Pictured is a Victorian lighter, which Watson would have used to light the straw if he did not have matches accessible.

From the story:

‘I believe you have some matches in your pocket, Watson.’

‘Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a match to the edge of the straw?’



Pictured is an actual 1833 Fire Insurance Interest receipt, as well as a Life Renewal Certificate receipt for annual Insurance policy. Oldacre's fire policy would have paid off, he would collect the money, and go away.

From the story:

'He intended to change his name altogether, draw this money, and vanish, starting life again elsewhere.'

Additional items of interest
in “The Adventure of the
Norwood Builder” not
included in the original
Evidence Box.



Pictured is a postal card for the steamship Friesland. The incident involving the Friesland almost cost Holmes and Watson their lives.

From the story:

Our months of partnership had not been so uneventful as he had stated, for I find, on looking over my notes, that this period includes the case of the papers of ex-President Murillo, and also the shocking affair of the Dutch steamship *Friesland*, which so nearly cost us both our lives.

London Sheet 136

OLD ORDNANCE SURVEY MAPS

Lower Norwood
1870



THE GODFREY EDITION

Pictured is the Old Ordnance Survey Map for Lower Norwood, 1870, which Holmes and Watson would have used to better understand the area where Oldacre disappeared.

From the story:

The headlines are: MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT LOWER NORWOOD. DISAPPEARANCE OF A WELL-KNOWN BUILDER. SUSPICION OF MURDER AND ARSON. A CLUE TO THE CRIMINAL.



Pictured is the oaken walking stick, owned by Hector McFarlane, which was found at Oldacre's residence with a small amount of blood on it.

From the story:

...an oaken walking-stick which also showed stains of blood upon the handle... and the stick found has been identified as the property of... John Hector McFarlane, junior partner of Graham & McFarlane.



Pictured is a postal card for the Anerley Arms Hotel, where McFarlane stayed after leaving Oldacre's residence on the night Oldacre disappeared.

From the story:

'It was so late that I could not get back to Blackheath, so I spent the night at the Anerley Arms, and I knew nothing more until I read of this horrible affair in the morning.'

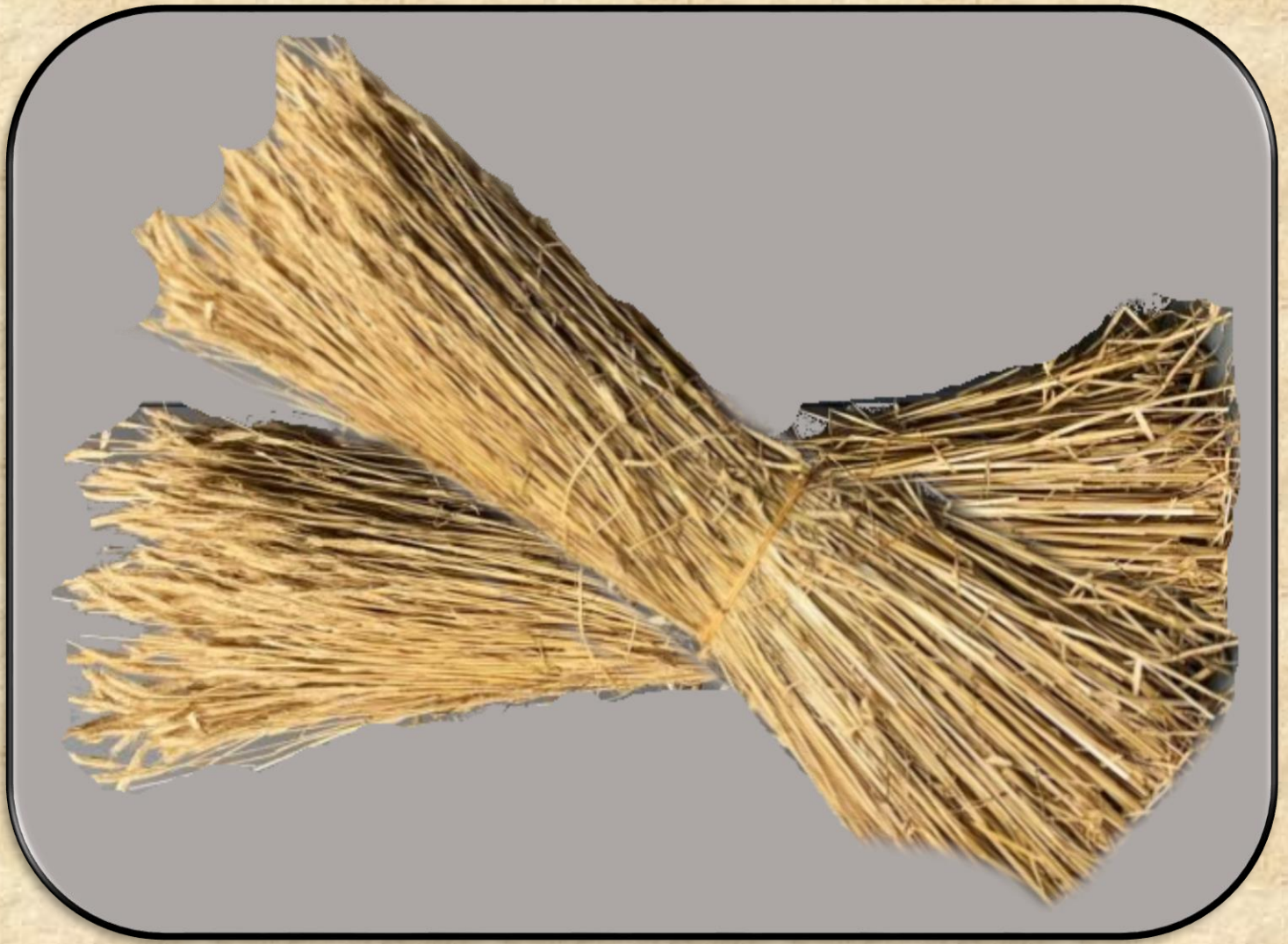


Pictured is the hat McFarlane was wearing the night Oldacre disappeared. Lestrade believed McFarlane left the bloody thumbprint when he went back to gather up his hat.

From the story:

‘Mr McFarlane had left his hat, and to the best of her belief his stick, in the hall.’

‘This is where young McFarlane must have come out to get his hat after the crime was done,’ said he.



Pictured are the two bundles of straw used to start a fire in the Oldacre residence to flush out the owner from his hiding spot.

From the story:

‘In the outhouse you will find a considerable quantity of straw,’ said Holmes. ‘I will ask you to carry in two bundles of it. I think it will be of the greatest assistance in producing the witness whom I require.’

‘Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a match to the edge of the straw?’



Pictured are the matches which Watson used to light the straw bundles which had been placed on the floor of Oldacre's residence.

From the story:

'I believe you have some matches in your pocket, Watson.'

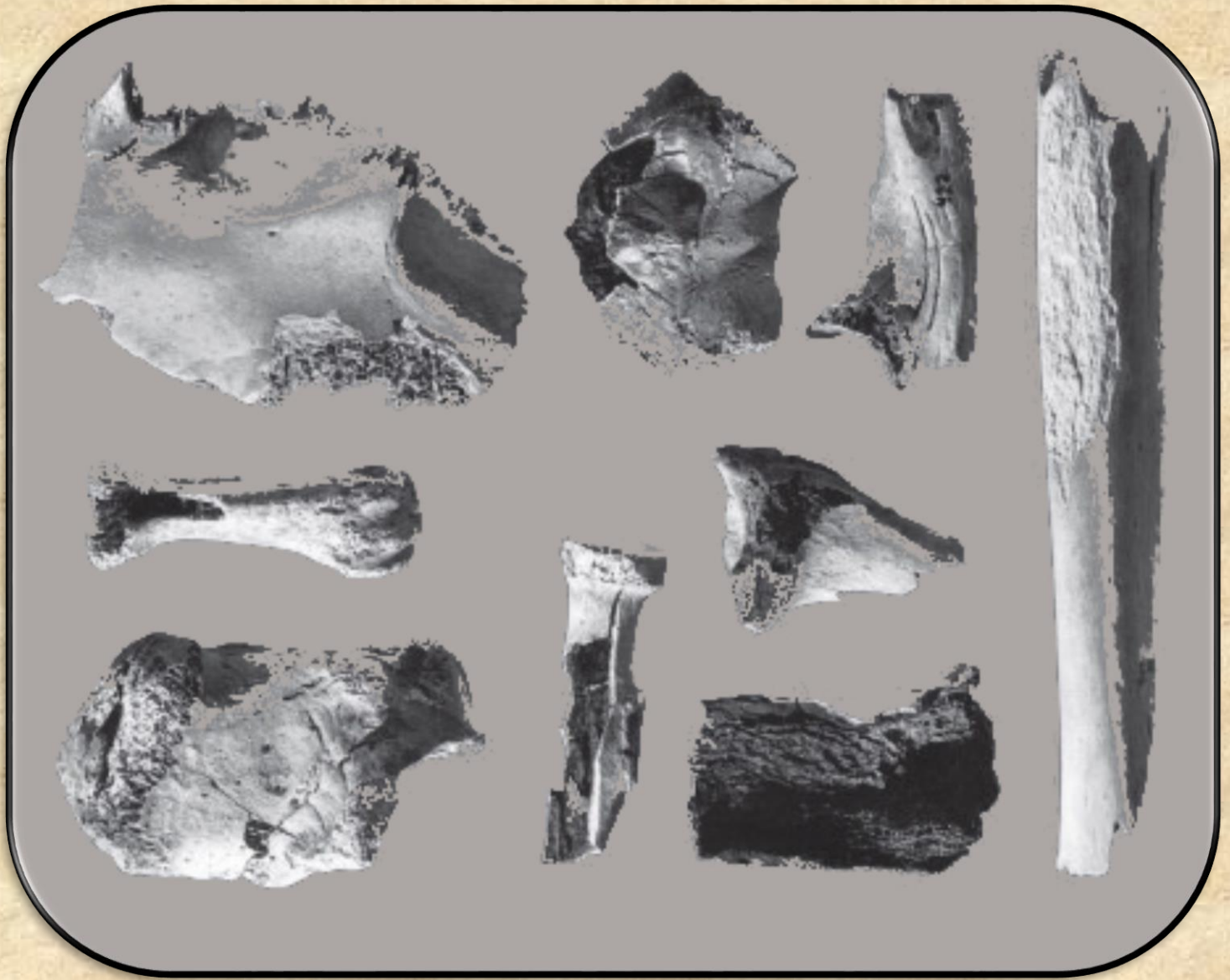
'Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a match to the edge of the straw?'



Pictured is the envelope holding Oldacre's will. The seal contained the thumbprint of McFarlane, which Oldacre used to form a wax impression of the thumbprint.

From the story:

'When those packets were sealed up, Jonas Oldacre got McFarlane to secure one of the seals by putting his thumb upon the soft wax.'



Pictured are part of the bones found charred on the wood pile outside Oldacre's residence. The police assumed they were the remains of Oldacre after he had been murdered, but Holmes believes it to be a couple of dead animals, such as rabbits.

From the story:

'By the way, what was it you put into the wood-pile besides your old trousers? A dead dog, or rabbits, or what? You won't tell? Dear me, how very unkind of you! Well, well, I dare say that a couple of rabbits would account both for the blood and for the charred ashes. If ever you write an account, Watson, you can make rabbits serve your turn.'