



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXII -- The Adventure of the Priory School

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, February 1904, *Collier's*, January 30, 1904

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Date stated, year easily deduced. Thursday, May 16, 1901

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Holmes & Watson sharing quarters at 221B.

Opening scene:

Thornycroft Huxtable, master of the exclusive Priory School, made a dramatic entrance to Holmes & Watson's quarters. He was dirty and disheveled, exhausted and sorely stricken. He collapsed, but was revived with the universal palliative (brandy) and then requested milk and biscuits (cookies, in modern American lingo).



Client:

Huxtable hired Holmes because he was worried for Lord Saltire, the Duke of Holderness's 10 year-old son and heir, and also for the reputation of his school. Later the Duke signed on as the client, although he was initially hesitant to bring in an outsider.

Crime or concern:

Disappearance and likely kidnapping of Lord Saltire. Later discovery that Saltire had sneaked out of the school at night, and been followed by Heidegger, the German master, who got his head bashed in out on the moor.

Villain:

The Duke's secretary and illegitimate son, James Wilder. Also the Duke of Holderness himself who was a little too protective of Wilder and covered up for him. Wilder was assisted by Reuben Hayes, garrulous landlord of the Fighting Cock Inn, a former coachman for the Duke who had been fired.

Motive:

Wilder was intensely jealous of the legitimate heir, and wanted him out of the way, or at least to extort the Duke into including Wilder in some claim to the estate.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes made correct deductions about the flight of Lord

Saltire and the German master. Found lots of cow tracks, but no cows, even tracks of a remarkable cow which walked, cantered, and galloped. Found a horse at the inn that had a recent shoeing, but with old shoes and new nails. Later found special horseshoes in the Duke's museum. Reuben Hayes shod his horses with these shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. These strange shoes had last been used by marauding Barons of Holderness in the Middle Ages.

Policemen:

A county constable was on duty at a nearby crossroads from midnight until six, conveniently showing no one had fled in that direction.

Holmes' fees:

£6000. For this sum, the Duke not only got his son back and the mystery solved, but he benefited from Holmes' silence about the matter.

Transport:

After being consulted and hearing about the reward, Holmes & Watson and took a four-wheeler to the station and a train to Euston, in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, arriving after dark.

Food:

Their first morning on the case, Holmes & Watson had cocoa at breakfast. In the evening they ate at the Fighting Cock.

Drink:

No mention

Vices:

While looking at a map of the area, Holmes began to smoke over it, and occasionally pointing out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

Other cases mentioned:

The case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder which was coming up for trial.

Notable Quotables:

“Perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it.” – Holmes, upon taking up the case.

“I must take the view that when a man embarks upon a crime, he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it.” – Holmes, admonishing the Duke, once he had the upper hand.

Other interestings:

The location of this story, Mackleton, is a fictional name. It is believed the name is a combination of two real places, Matlock and Castleton. Conan Doyle had spent some time in this part of Derbyshire, and the following link contains an interesting article regarding many locations in the story.

Holmes makes a faulty conclusion regarding bicycle tracks. He states “The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. It may or may not be connected with our inquiry, but we will follow it backwards

before we go any farther.” Think it over for a minute. The rear wheel track will cover the front wheel track no matter what is the direction of travel. Holmes’ correct deduction that the bicycle was heading away from the school was just luck or instinct. Either a northbound bike or a southbound bike would demonstrate the same thing.

When all was said and done:

Holmes got the enormous reward. The Duke kept the scandal quiet. It was settled right off that Wilder would leave forever, and go to seek his fortune in Australia. The Duke most likely got his Duchess back. She had been in the South of France as a result of the friction in the household caused by Wilder. The Duke immediately wrote her after whole business was resolved.

McMurdo’s Camp