



**The Hounds of the Internet**

"A singular set of people, Watson."

*An Inquiry into:*  
**"The Adventure of Black Peter"**

Vol. XIV No. 33 • May 9, 2024

“The Adventure of Black Peter” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on February 27, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in March 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

As displayed on the table, once again, our chronologists are in agreement as to the year in which this case took place. In 1895, Sherlock Holmes was 41 years old and Doc-

tor John H. Watson 43.

**Main Characters:**

Captain Peter Carey (“Black Peter”), a retired whaling captain, notorious for his dark temper. John Hopley Neligan, son of a disgraced banker. Patrick Cairns, skilled harpooner who once sailed under Carey. Stanley Hopkins, a promising young police inspector.

**Notable Quotes:**

I should be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who crossed our humble threshold in Baker Street. Holmes, however,

like all great artists, lived for his art’s sake, and, save in the case of the Duke of Holderness, I have seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services. So unworldly was he—or so capricious—that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.

Holmes was working somewhere under one of the numerous disguises and names with which he concealed his own formidable identity. He had at least five small refuges in different parts of London in which he was able to change his personality.

<i>The Adventure of Black Peter</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Wednesday of the first week of July 1895</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 3, 1895</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 3, 1895</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 3, 1895</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>July 1895</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 3, 1895</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 10, 1895</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 10, 1895</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>July 2, 1895</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 10, 1895</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1895</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Wednesday, July 10, 1895</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.

“I have investigated many crimes, but I have never yet seen one which was committed by a flying creature. As long as the criminal remains upon two legs so long must there be some indentation, some abrasion, some trifling displacement which can be detected by the scientific searcher.”

“One should always look for a possible alternative and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation.”

“I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master.”



### *The Small Five Refuges*

Sometimes Watson’s short, casual remarks can be extremely irritating. In this instance, he mentions very much in passing that Holmes “had at least five small refuges in different parts of London in which he was able to change his personality.” What our biographer means by “refuge” could be interpreted in today’s lingo to mean “safe houses.” While these out-of-the-way safe havens could have indeed been used by our sleuth as places where he could assume different disguises and changes of personalities, it also makes sense that he would have had secret places to hide, not just himself, but people who might have needed protection as well.



Perhaps he established these places after the painful lesson he received in 1887

when he sent out poor John Openshaw (FIVE) into the hands of his murderous pursuers.

### *Concerning Men, Pigs, Beetles, Whales, and Harpoons*

One of the many pleasures of the Canon devotee certainly lies in concentrating upon some trifling part of one of the Great Detective’s cases and following one’s own deductions and conclusions to the end. As Holmes himself put it, “You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”

In this instance there is the perhaps not-so-trifling matter of the murder weapon: the harpoon.

More than once, the Good Doctor has remarked that Holmes, regardless of his slender physique, possessed unusual strength. He clearly demonstrated that in SPEC when he straightened out the metal poker bent by the choleric Dr. Roylott; an action requiring considerably more strength than simply curving it. Regardless of all this, however, Holmes confessed his inability to transfix the hanging pig at Allardyce’s butcher shop.

This, of course, leads us to the matter of the weapon itself.

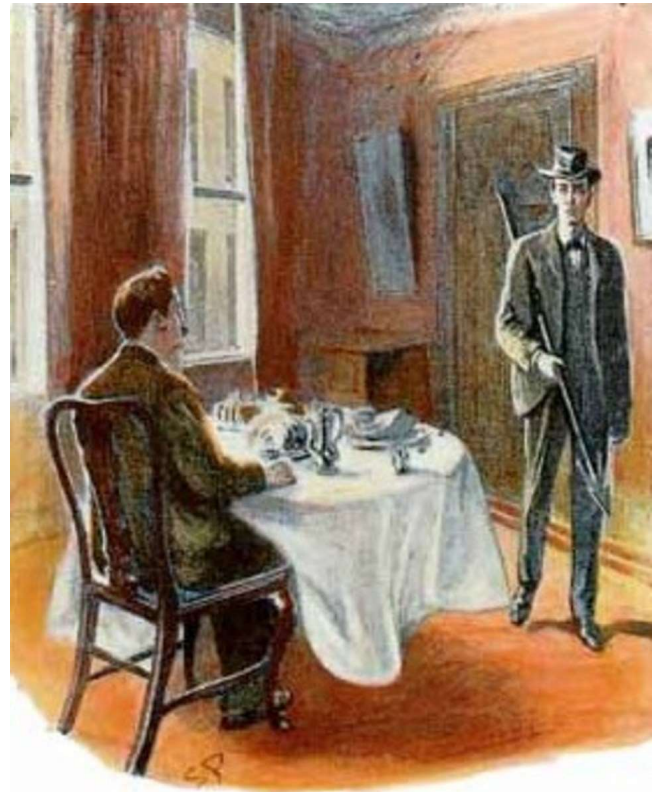
Holmes—ahead of his time as usual—was engaging in what later would come to be known as forensics: he was trying to determine the use and effects of a murder weapon. Harpoons vary in length,

however, from the case illustrations both canonical and not, the spear appears to have been some six feet ( $\approx 90$  cm) in length.

None of these details serves us much when we consider how he was using the harpoon. Unfortunately, Holmes himself is not too clear on this: “If you could have looked into Allardyce’s back shop you would have seen a dead pig swung from a hook in the ceiling, and a gentleman in his shirtsleeves furiously stabbing at it with this weapon. I was that energetic person, and I have satisfied myself that by no exertion of my strength can I transfix the pig with a single blow.”

Our sleuth’s description seems to be self-contradictory. Although he speaks of transfixing the deceased porcine, it does not seem that he was attempting this by hurling the harpoon (“furiously stabbing” and “transfix the pig with a single blow” appear to be opposites). From what he tells us, it seems that he was attempting to penetrate the carcass by holding the harpoon and pushing it in with force, or charging at it while holding it in front of him like Sir Lancelot’s lance. Although it is true that Captain Ahab stabbed, rather than hurled his harpoon at Moby Dick it was because he was tied to the whale: “. . . to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee.” (Powerful stuff!)

Aside from all this, Holmes should have been able to hurl the harpoon at the pig with enough force for it to penetrate through skin and muscle and remain jammed there; particularly considering that a throwing harpoon head has barbs similar to those of a fishhook, designed to prevent it from easily dropping out.



Regardless of all this, the piggish test was flawed. Neither Holmes nor Queequeg could have fully transfixed the porker’s body. Although the Great Detective was typically ahead of his time in using a swine as a human analog for his test, it is puzzling that he did not realize that it was practically impossible—even for a professional harpooner—to transfix the creature under the parameters he was using. Unlike Black Peter, the target pig

hanged freely from a hook and because it did not have one side solidly pressed against a wall, it swung on impact, absorbing much of the hurled spear’s kinetic energy.

It may be logically argued that whales do not conveniently have their backs against a wall when they are successfully harpooned. However, this is a matter of mass and inertia. A killer whale, for example, tips the scales at 8,000 (3,630 kg) to 12,000 pounds (5,440 kg), and it is floating or swimming in a

non-compressive medium. Regardless of how powerfully hurled a harpoon's impact could not sufficiently push a large, massive body like that to dissipate any of the impact's force.

Even if Holmes had hurled the harpoon, we do not have enough information about how he did it. Did he do it like an Olympian throwing a javelin or like a true harpoonman? In either case, force alone would not have been sufficient. Both would have required much more than simply a modicum

of practice to be done efficiently and effectively. Regardless of how he tried it, it did not transfix the pig.

As a professional harpooner, Cairns would have done it differently and would have succeeded where Holmes failed.

Under normal circumstances, that is.

I am always troubled when I consider the scene of the crime. It seems unlikely to me that Cairns could have been hurled the weapon with such devastating effect inside a small room. If Watson described it correctly, Carey's "cabin" was a ten-by-sixteen feet room. Even assuming that both men were facing each other along the cabin's long axis, there still was a table and chairs between them occupying reducing already limited maneuvering space

After having done measurements and scale drawings over the years, I am convinced that there would have been insufficient room for Cairns to hold a six-foot harpoon at shoulder level and reach back far enough to then be able to hurl it forwards with sufficient force to penetrate Carey in one side and out the other, affixing him on the opposite wall like a beetle on a card.

It could be argued, of course, that the realization that his life was in dire danger imbued Cairns with that adrenalin-powered reservoir of extra strength that

most people are capable of tapping in dire life-and-death situations. Black Peter was no shrinking violet—those who knew him were acquainted with his vicious and violent temper. This might be a probable explanation that would answer all these questions.

### *Regarding the Securities*

Of all the aspects in this case that Watson left hanging is the matter of the securities that John Neligan's father was supposed to have absconded with.

Although we are told that Neligan senior's intentions were 100% honorable, it is somewhat unclear whether he had a right to take them.

According to Neligan Jr., when the bank failed for a million, ruining half the county families of Cornwall, Neligan Sr. took the securities and left, ostensibly to convert them into cash to benefit those who were harmed by the bank's failure.

As his son put it, "It has always been said that my father stole all the securities and fled. It is not true. It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realize them all would be well and every creditor paid in full. He started in his little yacht for Norway just before the warrant was issued for his arrest."



The only way in which this would make any sense is if the securities were, indeed, his. In that case, his decision to cash them in order to pay all the creditors in full could only be interpreted as the action of an honorable man. However, if they were his to begin with, why did the authorities try to arrest him? He could have shown that he had been as much a victim as the creditors, and that he was in the process of making it all good from his own private resources. Had this been the case, it is doubtful that he would have been arrested; instead, he would have become the creditors' hero.

However, this did not happen. The facts clearly show that he assured his family that everything would be fine, took the securities, and left for Norway on his yacht without even penning a note, leaving his family to face the music and, worst of all, the disgrace.

Nonetheless, two aspects of this could have used some clarification. First, who did those securities belong to? If they belonged to the banker, he had a perfect right to do with them as he wished. In that case, of course, turning over the remainder to his son would have been the right thing to do. However, Junior revealed that, "It has always been said that my father *stole* [my italics] all the securities and fled. It is not true. It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realize them all would be well and every creditor paid in full." If the securities had belonged to his father, nobody would have accused him of stealing them. So to whom did those securities belong?



We're not considering a pittance here; £1,000,000 is the equivalent of about \$400,000,000 today.

Another perplexing matter is why Norway? Unquestionably, such valuable securities would not have been redeemable in only one country—Switzerland one might understand, but Norway? After all, Black Peter had no problems in turning them into cash. On the other hand, Cairns was incredibly obtuse about the whole matter. Even though he knew that the securities he took from Carey were valuable and easily converted to cash, he did not even attempt to do it.

But the man was not born yesterday. He had to have been familiar with port cities and some of their shadier denizens. There should have been no problem in finding someone willing to fence them for a good percentage of the securities' value. Even if Cairns had gotten 30% or less of the total value he would have still been ahead. If Carey could cash some of the securities why would Cairns think that he couldn't do it?

It would have been relatively simple for him to find out how to do it, cash them in, and leave the country before the authorities even detected their reappearance. The law already seemed to have been blatantly ignorant that the stolen securities had reemerged when Black Peter began cashing them—it was a businessman who was a friend of Neligan senior's son who told him that they were back into circulation, not the authorities.

Finally, what was Holmes and Watson's purpose in going to Norway? It could not have been to retrieve the securities, because neither Neligan senior nor the securities made it to Norway. Some Canon scholars have argued that the trip was probably connected with some business with the King of Scandinavia; however, this seems unlikely, considering that preceded SCAN in 1889.



## *What else happened in 1895:*

### ***Empire***

Freetown, Sierra Leone, granted municipal status and privileges.

Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.

U.S.A. 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.

Jameson Raid in South Africa in 1895—failed attempt to overthrow the Afrikaans government.

### ***Britain***

Liberals defeated at general election, Salisbury forms his third Unionist ministry.

Compulsory retirement of aged Duke of Cambridge as C-in-C of British Army.

London School of Economics and Political Science founded.

First automobile exhibition in London.

Electrification of first mainline railway.

Cardinal Vaughan lays foundation stone of Westminster Cathedral.

### ***World***

Chinese defeated by Japanese at Wei-hai-Wei; end of the Chinese-Japanese war. Formosa (now Taiwan) and Port Arthur ceded to Japan, but returned to China in exchange for indemnity.

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.A. protests brutal suppression.

Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.

National League founded in Poland; aimed at autonomy under Russian suzerainty.

Nyssens Law extended to Belgian provinces and communes.

Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians by order of the government. Britain sends squadron to Dardanelles, Austria recommends international naval action against Turkey, Russia prepares plans to seize Istanbul, but France's unwillingness to risk a general war hold back military action. Sultan Abdul Hamid II promises reforms in Turkey.

Frontiers of Pamirs fixed by commission of Russians, Afghans, and British.

Jack Dempsey, future U.S. boxing champion, is born.

Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*.

Completion of Kiel Canal (61 miles) makes Germany North Sea power.

In France, socialist Léon Bourgeois defeats Alexandre Ribot and forms a cabinet.

Queen of Korea is assassinated; the King is imprisoned, all under Japanese encouragement.

Volleyball invented.

French troops capture Antananarivo in Madagascar.

Abyssinia defeats Italy in the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1885-1896).

### *Art*

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, he unsuccessfully sues the Marquis of Queensbury for libel and is imprisoned.

Tchaikovsky, first complete performance of *Swan Lake*.

Joseph Conrad, *Alayer's Folly*.

Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*.

W.B. Yeats, *Poems*.

Corelli publishes *The Sorrows of Satan*.

H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.

### *Science and Technology*

Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.

Ramsay obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun in 1868.

Louis Pasteur dies.

Konstantin Tsiolkovski formulates the principle of rocket reaction propulsion.

Sigmund Freud, *Studien über Hysterie*.

Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.

King Gillette (U.S.A.) invents safety razor.

C. von Linde devices apparatus to liquefy air.

Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian electrical engineer, transmits the first wireless signal.

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

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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