



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans"

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"The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" first appeared in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1908 and in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on the same month and year. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

The case's chronology is a welcomed exception, because in this instance there is little room for speculation: "The third week of November in the year 1895" is Watson's opening

sentence. He then adds that the day was Thursday. If one consults the calendar for that year, it shows that the date had to be the 21st. So, incredibly so, little argument is possible. The chronology is shown on the table.

In 1895 Sherlock Holmes was 41 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 43.

Main Characters:

Mycroft Holmes, elder brother of Sherlock Holmes, and highly influential government official. Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard Inspector. Arthur Cadogan West, junior clerk at the Woolwich Arsenal. Violet Westbury, Arthur Cadogan West's fiancée. Sir James Walters, official in charge of secret and sensitive papers. Colonel Valentine Walter, Sir James' brother. Sidney Johnson, senior clerk at the Woolwich Arsenal. Hugo Oberstein, notorious German spy.

Notable Quotes:

"The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow. Look out the window, Watson, see how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim."

"It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal."

<i>The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>November 1895</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Monday, November 18, 1895</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 1895</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1895</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Thursday, November 21, 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.

“It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane. Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall—that is his cycle. Once, and only once, he has been here.”

“One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in thinking that he under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British government.”

“Why do you not solve it yourself, Mycroft? You can see as far as I.”

“Possibly, Sherlock. But it is a question of getting details. Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there, to cross-question railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye—it is not my *métier*. No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up.”

“I play the game for the game’s own sake.”

“I am going out now. It is only a reconnaissance. I will do nothing serious without my trusted comrade and biographer at my elbow. Do you stay here, and the odds are that you will see me again in an hour or two. If time hangs heavy get foolscap and a pen, and begin your narrative of how we saved the State.”

“We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

“We can’t do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes. No wonder you get results that are beyond us. But some of these days you’ll go too far, and you’ll find yourself and your friend in trouble.”

“How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension.”



Some weeks afterwards I learned incidentally that my friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin. When I asked him if he had bought it, he answered that it was a present from a certain gracious lady in whose interests he had once been fortunate enough to carry out a small commission. He said no more; but I fancy that I could guess at that lady’s august name, and I have little doubt that the emerald pin will forever recall to my friend’s memory the adventure of the Bruce-Partington plans.



That Remarkable Book of References

We are once more titillated by Watson when he tells us that in his boredom, Holmes had spent a day “cross-indexing his huge book of references.” Once again I raise a tattered banner found in a stricken field to wonder about the Great Detective’s impossibly mysterious indexing system.

The Canon is quite clear in that the reference material was in book form. This implies a sizeable book of blank pages on which material can be pasted as well information written. We are not considering loose-leaf notebooks or any other form of coding such as cards.

The problem is that try as I may, I cannot begin to fathom how our sleuth went about locating a specific piece of data residing in that resource’s contents.

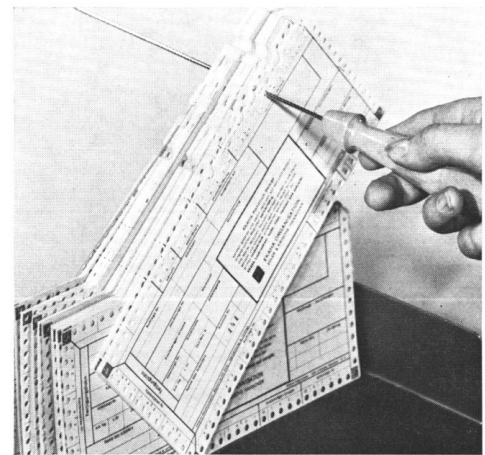


Cross-indexing is simple to understand. For example, in Irene Adler's case, he might have written at the bottom of her entry, "Q.v., King of Bohemia," with a similar entry referring to Irene in the entry about the King. But how would he find where in the book or, as far as that goes, in which volume and page of his collection of references could he find Irene Adler's entry? Or the King's? In *SCAN* Watson tells us that the reference to Irene Adler was "sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes"!

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that these entries could have been any sort of alphabetical order.

Once a hardbound notebook begins to be filled, it will not allow one to paste newspaper clippings and other references alphabetically; eventually, it would become impossible to keep track of exactly where the desired information resides, especially if there is more than one volume.

It has always struck me as peculiar that someone with such a logical turn of mind did not choose to store all this information in alphabetized index cards, or even better yet, punch cards. In 1804 Joseph Marie Jacquard demonstrated his mechanism of punched cards linked into a chain, which automated loom operation. Punched cards were soon used for informatics for information store and retrieve, and punch card technology was used for the 1890 U.S. census.



In pre-digital days, when I was in high school and later in college, I used cards that had knitting-needle-size perforations along their edges. I would write the information on one and code it by opening up a pattern of holes and leaving others intact. The card would then go into the stack in no particular order and later, when I wished to retrieve the information, I would insert a knitting needle through a hole of a stack and pull out the ones that had that hole intact. It did not take more than three or so passes to retrieve all the cards containing the desired information, regardless of their position in the stack. I understand that this system dated back to well before 1895.

Mycroft's Position



Holmes seems to have maintained his reservation about the full extent of his brother Mycroft's true position in the government, regardless of his telling Watson that he is talking about it because he now knows him better than he did at the time of *GREE*.

One cannot but wonder exactly what Mycroft's true position was. Although Holmes' comment that there were occasions when his brother *was* the government showed the man's importance, it did not reveal his true position. Considering the matter from today's perspective, a possibly accurate guess would perhaps be that he might have been a cross between the di-

rectors of the FBI, CIA, and MI6. He certainly was part—an important part—of the permanent government; i.e., different political parties or elections did not affect his position.

How highly placed he really was is partly revealed by his knowledge of how the Bruce-Partington project came to be: “Two years ago a very large sum was smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly of the invention. Every effort has been made to keep the secret.” This is very reminiscent of what in this day and age we would refer to as “black ops.” The elder Holmes’ description of how the Bruce-Partington project came to be is evocative of how the American government secretly appropriated funds to finance the Manhattan Project, which developed the first nuclear weapons.

Considering the zeitgeist of the time, it is quite possible that someone like Mycroft would “receive neither honour nor title, but [remain] the most indispensable man in the country.” It was not unusual back then to consider the opportunity to serve to be of greater importance than salary and position; and the Holmeses were descended from country esquires, very possibly once minor nobility.

Mycroft had to have been a man of independent means, otherwise he could not have maintained his gentlemanly lifestyle on a mere yearly £450 (≈\$170,000 today). It is patently absurd to accept that the unique services that only Mycroft could perform for his country were recompensed by a salary £50 less than that of a head clerk at the Bank of England! Surely, Mycroft’s services were somewhat more complicated and important than ensuring that the books at your cage balance at the end of the day.

According to Holmes, his brother’s habits did not depart from a routine that took him to the club



every day. On his presumed salary, just his club expenses alone would preclude this. The entrance fee alone for these utterly British refuges from daily life averaged £26 (≈\$10,000). Then there was the annual membership fee and the expense of drinks and meals, etc. His habits, as described by his younger brother, make it very likely that he took his meals, or at least dinner, there; again, not an inexpensive habit. Mycroft did not live as simply as our two friends.

Rents in London, as is the case in any other great metropolis, were high; for example, a set of furnished rooms at Pall Mall would have rented for about £570 (≈\$214,000) per year. Some estimates have placed the yearly rent at the much humbler 221-B at £312 (≈\$117,000).

Thus, lodgings at Pall Mall and a membership in an exclusive club would have been well-beyond his economic reach. On such an income he could not have lived on Baker Street, much less Pall Mall! One can conclude from all this that Holmes *père* could not have been destitute, and that Mycroft, being the eldest son would have inherited the bulk—or even the totality—of the estate.

The Bruce-Partington Submarine

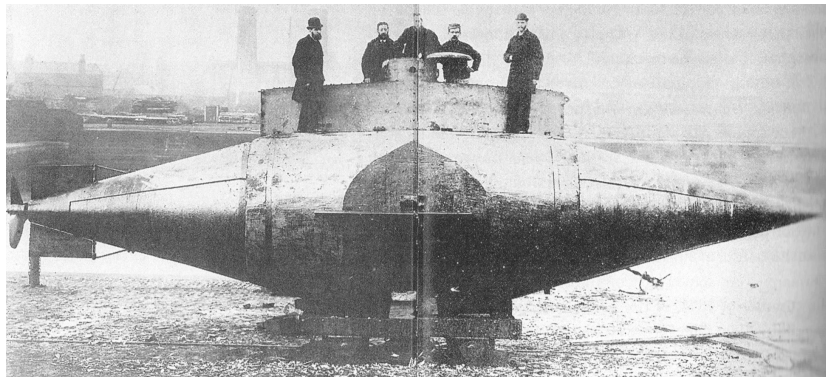
Considering the state-of-the-art of submarine warfare at the time (nil) it must wondered what was the submersible in question's real secret. In 1895, the only practical submarine was Captain Nemo's *Nautilus*. In those days, Holland was where various governments went to purchase their submarines. These were equipped with one bow torpedo tube, and featured what was unimaginatively called a "pneumatic dynamite gun," which was exactly what it sounds like: a tube activated by compressed air that spat out a charge of dynamite with a contact fuse attached to its business end.

After the pyrrhic success of the CSS *Hunley* during the American Civil War and the often-displayed inability to resurface of later submarines, submersibles were not exactly on the wish-list of naval powers who viewed coal-fired dreadnoughts with increasingly larger calibre cannon as the Ultimate Weapon. Therefore, it would seem



logical that the sub in question would have been more along the lines of a smaller, more modest version of the *Nautilus*, ramming ships to the bottom rather than operating as a torpedo-launching platform. The submarine was a weapon of so little importance that the only mention to submerged weapons my copy of the 1911 Edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* makes is of "Submerged Mines." There is nothing in it about submarines as vessels of war, even though the Great War is but three years in the future.

The abysmal quality of the tin fish used over a decade later during WWI, whose accuracy was more a matter of the crew's skill in aiming the boat than the torpedo's technology confirmed this. Few submarines were produced during the



Great War because until that time they were considered only fit for coastal defense due to their limited range, capabilities, and armament. As the war progressed, Germany quickly proved this to be wrong. It is interesting to note, however, that until well-after the beginning of the Second World War, regardless of the experience gathered during

the First World War, while the Battle of the Atlantic was raging, and U-boats were sinking American ships off the coast of New York, Annapolis midshipmen were still being taught this.

In our case, the stolen plans appear to have been involved with a device capable of maintaining adequate air and ventilation. Naturally, this would have been of vital importance because it would have allowed the craft to remain submerged longer—or at least until its very short-lived battery required surfacing for recharging.

It is interesting to note that at the time the British Admiralty was of the opinion that the submarine “is only the weapon of a weaker nation.”

The Tragic Villain

It is next to impossible not to feel at the very least a tinge of compassion for the would-be villain of this case, Colonel Valentine Walter. If ever someone found himself trapped on all sides, it was him. A poor choice in the Stock Exchange leaves him with a crushing £5,000 (≈\$1,900,000) debt which, like losing at a game of cards, is considered an unavoidable debt of honor which, if left unfulfilled, in addition to destroying his reputation may land him in jail. In the depths of his desperation he is then approached by Oberstein with a solution which he grasps desperately without fully considering the possible consequences.

In the end, he is still horribly disgraced, becomes the cause of his brother’s death, and ends up in jail anyway, where he dies.



To the last of his days, Holmes’ damning denunciation, “How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension,” must have echoed bitterly in his ears.

A Peculiar Conjecture

Holmes’ theory about Cadogan West’s reaction when he left his fiancée without an explanation to go after the thief is extremely odd: “Let us suppose, for example, that he had been approached by some foreign agent. It might have been done under such pledges as would have prevented him from speaking of it, and yet would have affected his thoughts in the direction indicated by his remarks to his fiancée.”

It almost seems as if Holmes is saying that if a spy had privately approached West with a proposal to get the plans and become a traitor to his country, a previous promise to keep the exchange private would have prevented him from telling his superiors what had happened?

Puzzling Punishment

How could it be that Hugo Oberstein received a sentence of only 15 years? Added to the fact that he was a spy (and therefore an enemy of the Realm) who almost obtained and passed some of the Empire’s most important secrets crucial to its security to enemies, he cold-bloodedly murdered an English subject while the latter was trying to prevent him from carrying such a potentially damaging action. There is, of course, the possibility that he decided to cooperate with the authorities and pass on information on other spies, but it still seems an outrageously lenient sentence.

Doubtless Mycroft would have known what brought all that about.

The Telegraph Operator

I cannot but smile when I consider just what the telegraph employee must have thought of the (unencoded!) telegram our detective sent to Mycroft:

See some light in the darkness, but it may possibly flicker out. Meanwhile, please send by messenger, to await return at Baker Street, a complete list of all foreign spies or international agents known to be in England, with full address.

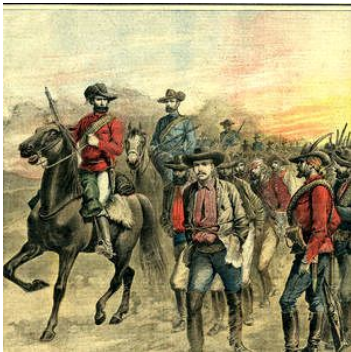
One of Holmes' Best Triumphs

“Splendid” falls far short from describing Holmes’ performance in this case. We are pleased to see him at his best. His deduction in the subway tunnel, based on the points and curve of the tracks that Cadogan West had to have fallen from the roof of the carriage was everything one cherishes about our sleuth. Then his conclusion of from which residence the body could have been place on the carriage roof was equally as outstanding—pure vintage Holmes. Bravo, sir!



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.

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

Construction of Uganda railway commenced.

British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.

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.

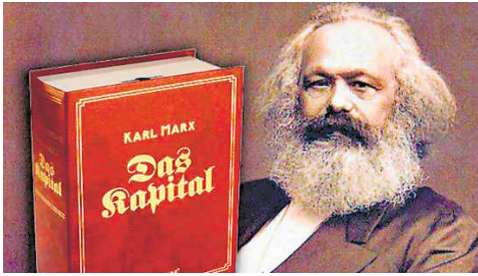
Cardinal Vaughan lays foundation stone of Westminster Cathedral.

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.

◀ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*.

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.

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

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

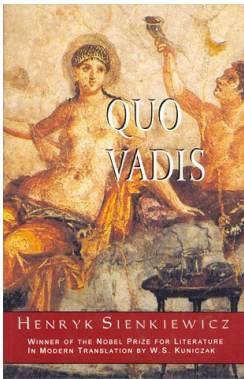
Queen of Korea is assassinated; the King is imprisoned, all under Japanese encouragement.

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

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

Sigmund Freud

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

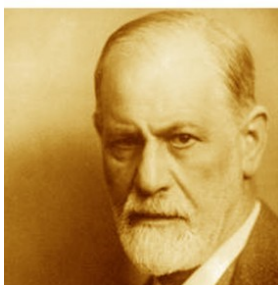
Pasteur dies.

Konstantin Tsiolkovski formulates the principle of rocket reaction propulsion.

◀ Sigmund Freud, *Studien über Hysterie*.

On December 28th, in the Hôtel Scribe, in Paris, the first public cinema show takes place.

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: DEVI.

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.

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