

# *Sherlock Holmes Walk in Convent Garden & Charing Cross*

## **MC Black**

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to a walk that will trace the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson in Coven Garden and Charing Cross.

Although Holmes and Watson are most often depicted sitting in their lodgings at 221B Baker Street, the stories reveal that Holmes knew the streets of London very well – the obscure byways of Covent Garden as well as the principal thoroughfares of the West End. There are many references in the canon to the streets traversed during the course of various investigations, but Holmes and Watson also strolled for pleasure. In “The Resident Patient” Holmes says, “...the evening has brought a breeze with it. What do you say to a ramble through London?” Watson agrees, “I was weary of our little sitting-room, and gladly acquiesced. For three hours we strolled about together watching the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life...”

We have met in The Shakespeare’s Head Public House just south of Holborn Underground Station. You have bought hot drinks to fortify yourselves for the afternoon’s activities and taken advantage of the facilities.

This JD Wetherspoon pub lies opposite the site of the Holborn Restaurant which was opened as a restaurant in 1874 and extended in 1896; it housed a ‘Grand Restaurant’ with Dancing and Cabaret, Grill Room, private dining rooms, and 14 smaller restaurants. It was demolished in 1955.



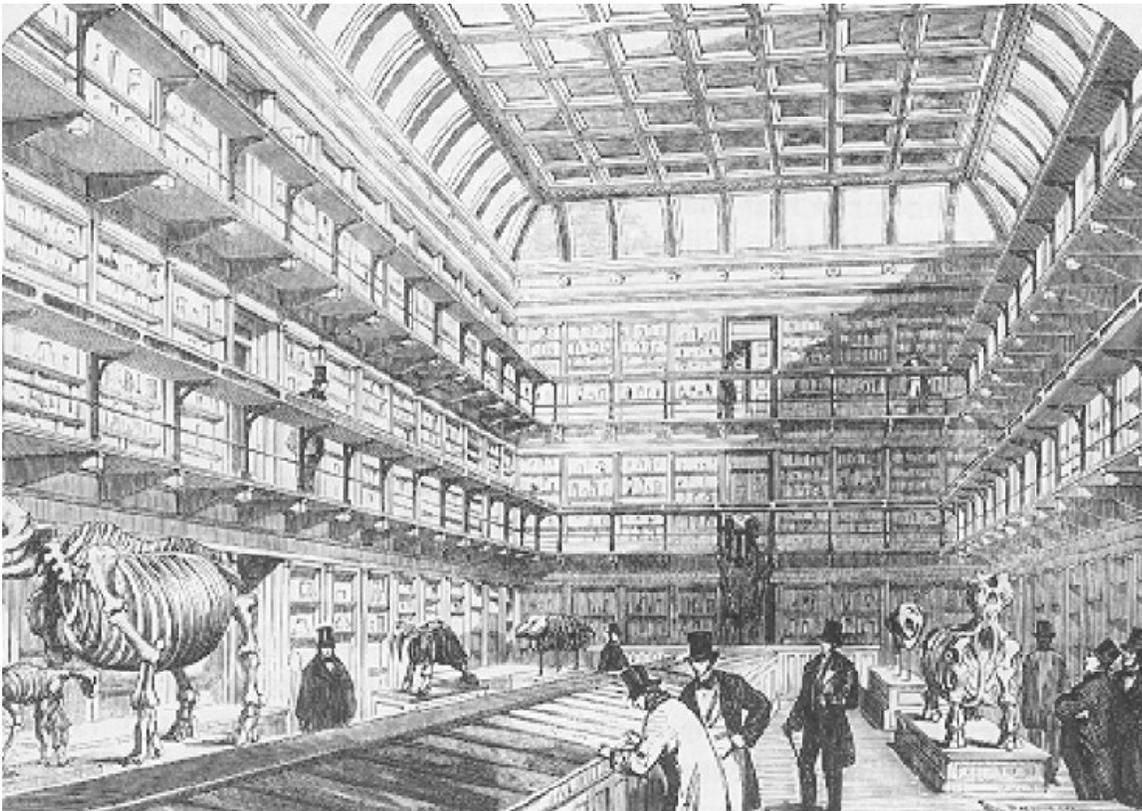
In *STUD*, Watson writes:

On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Bart's. The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

*Leave the pub, turn left and immediately left again into Twyford Place; turn right at the end into Gate Street and forward into Lincoln's Inn Fields. Walk through the park to the south side where you will face The Royal College of Surgeons.*

Holmes is talking to Dr. Mortimer in *HOUN*, just before Watson, Sir Henry Baskerville and Dr Mortimer leave on the 10:30 from Paddington.

I usually give up one day to pure amusement when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of Surgeons.



*Walk west along the south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, forward into Sardinia Street, turn right into Kingsway, cross at the crossing and second left into Wild Court. Stop at junction with Wild Street.*

You are now standing at the south-west corner of Freemasons' Hall.

ACD was a Freemason; the evidence in the stories suggests that Sherlock Holmes was not.

In *REDH*, Holmes tells Watson:

"Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour? It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed."

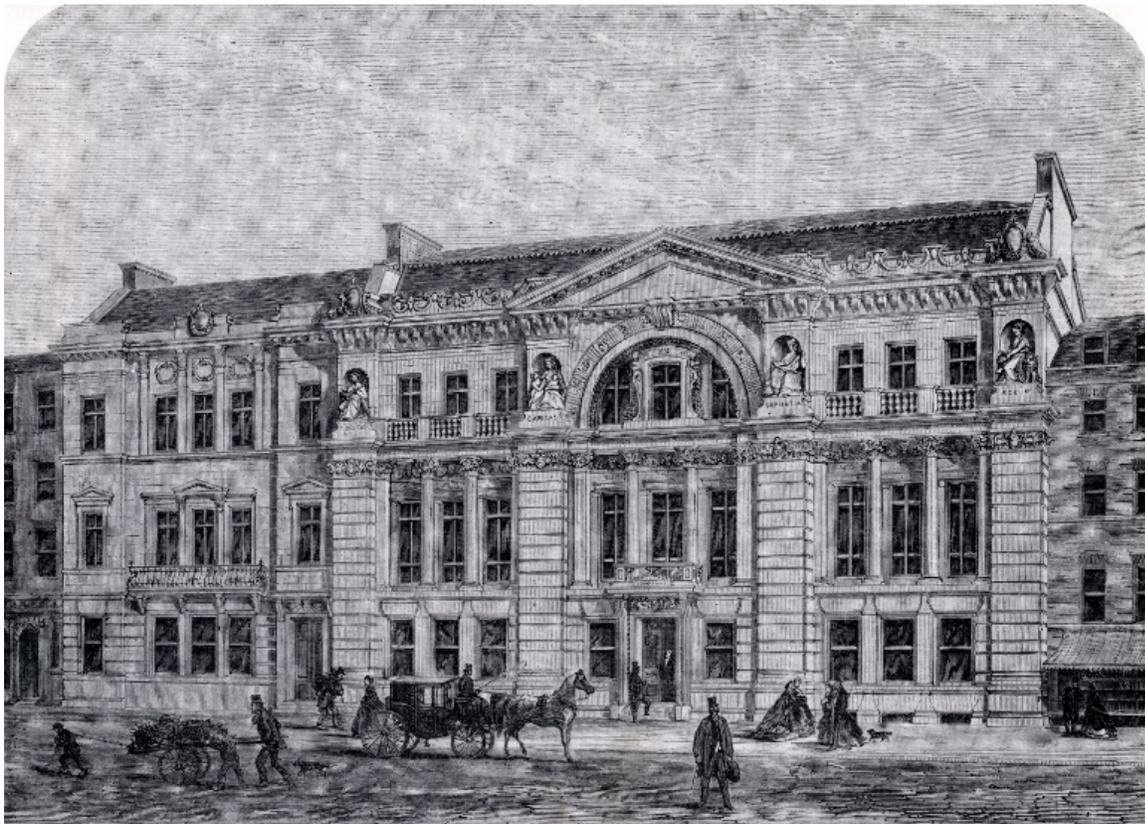
"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin."

There are also references to Masonic emblems on Drebber's ring in STUD and Barker's tie pin in RETI.

On the sconces to either side of the door, you can see the Arc & Compass symbol.

The Freemasons' Hall building of the late Victorian period was demolished after the Great War to build the existing building, known as the "Masonic Peace Memorial" until 1939!



*Walk forward along Wild Street and pause at the Junction of Drury Lane/Great Queen street/Long Acre. Notice Stanford's map shop south-west Long Acre.*



*Cross Drury Lane, walk back a few yards and turn right into Broad Court (notice five original telephone boxes) into Bow Street. Stop by first entrance to Bow Street Police.*



This is where Holmes unmasked Hugh Boone in TWIS.

“He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive

ugliness. A broad weal from an old scar ran across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead”.

*Look across Bow Street at the Royal Opera House.*



Holmes’ love of music included the opera. At the conclusion of “The Red Circle,” Holmes urges Watson:

“...it is not eight o’clock, and a Wagner night at Covent Garden! If we hurry, we might be in time for the second act”.

*Walk through Royal Opera House arcade to Covent Garden Piazza and forward to 43 King Street.*



ACD was a member of the National Sporting Club that occupied this building from 1891 to 1922. (The NSC was the “MCC of Boxing” – the Marquess of Queensbury was a member). During the period that Covent Garden housed a fruit and vegetable market, this building was converted to a Warehouse



but it has now been restored.

*Walk to the south-east corner of the Covent Garden Piazza passing the Apple Shop (appropriately located in a former Fruit Market!).*

Breckenridge’s stall selling Poultry was located in Covent Garden too See BLUE

*Walk past the London Transport Museum and turn right into Tavistock Court.*

*The Public Conveniences (Toilets) may be open for those in need.*

*Cross Tavistock Street and into Burleigh Street.*

No. 12 Burleigh Street (and 359 Strand) are given as the first address of The Strand Magazine, in which the Sherlock Holmes stories were published.



The George H. Haite cover drawing of Vol. 2, No. 7, in which appeared “A Scandal in Bohemia,” shows both ‘359’ and ‘Burleigh Street’. However, 12 Burleigh Street is generally acknowledged as the first outpost of George Newnes’ publishing empire and the birthplace of the Sherlock Holmes tales.

*Walk east along Exeter Street; turn right into Wellington Street. Pause by Lyceum Theatre portico.*



In SIGN, Miss Mary Morston received a letter from an unknown friend promising her justice as a “wronged woman” and instructing her to wait at the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre at 7 o’clock. Having been cautioned not to bring police, she keeps the rendezvous accompanied by Holmes and Watson.

*Forward to junction then turn right into The Strand. On the opposite side of the road:*

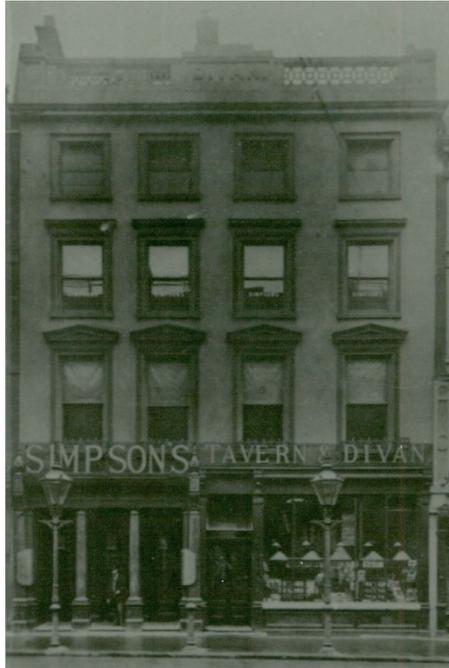
**Simpson’s In The Strand** – Simpson’s restaurant is mentioned more than once in the canon. In “The Dying Detective” Holmes remarks,

“When we have finished at the police-station, I think that something nutritious at Simpson’s would not be out of place”.

Holmes and Watson dine twice at Simpson’s in “The Illustrious Client,”

“I met Holmes at Simpson’s that evening and we looked down on the rushing stream of life in the Strand from a small table near the front window”.

Simpson’s was originally a Chess Divan – somewhere to go and play chess. Notice the chess board and pieces design around the arch of the current entrance – a nod to the history.



*Continue along Strand, turn right at Southampton Street*

The *Strand Magazine* was moved to 8-11 Southampton Street early in 1892 and listed in the 1892 edition of the Post Office Directory.

Both editorial and printing took place in this building. On the day of publication, there was a queue of carriages waiting to take the finished magazines to retailers – to the many station bookstalls in the WH Smith empire

Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Operas provide rich source material for the historian of Victorian Britain. They parody several of the leading figures and most of the dominant institutions of the age and are rich in contemporary allusion. One of the best known characters in the Savoy Operas, for example, is Sir Joseph Porter, KCB, the First Lord of the Admiralty in H.M.S. Pinafore. What is not so well known, however, is that Gilbert modelled Sir Joseph on William Henry Smith, the Conservative politician whom Disraeli had made First Lord of the Admiralty in 1877, the year before Pinafore opened.

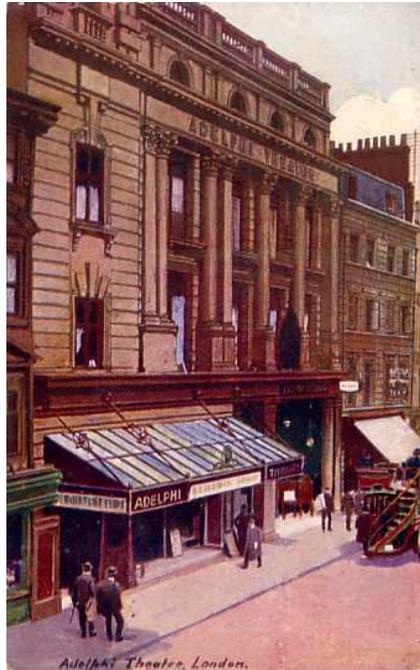


Continue along Southampton Street and turn left into Maiden Lane. Now take the second entry on the left into a narrow passage.

**Bull Inn Court** – This is one of the few places in London still lit by gas.

“It was a September evening and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement.”

Forward to The Strand and turn right. Pause outside the Adelphi Theatre.



In 1910, ACD took out a six-month lease on the Adelphi Theatre and oversaw all aspects of the preparations for *The House of Temperley*, running up great expenses. Starting out as a love story but ending with a climactic boxing match, the play opened on 11th February, 1910, to applause and good reviews. Doyle's hopes faded as the play continued on to a run of half-empty houses, and the brutality of the boxing match scared away prudish Victorian-valued women. Boxing was illegal in England at the time, so it's unclear why he thought such a play would be well accepted.

Doyle added a curtain raiser on April 19, *A Pot of Caviare*, based on one of his own short stories of the same title. It didn't help. A sense of desperation must have been setting in, and then the death knell sounded. King Edward VII died on May 6 and all London theatres closed for mourning. *The House of Temperley* made a few unnoticed performances after the theatres reopened, but it closed for good in June.

Even before the final ending, Doyle knew that the play would not recoup its costs, and he still had to pay for the remainder of the Adelphi lease. Financial necessity is one of mankind's greatest motivators. In three weeks, Doyle went from a blank page to a fully produced play, starring Sherlock Holmes!

In 1927 (before the publication of the *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*), as part of a contest in *The Strand*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle listed his twelve favourite Holmes stories, excluding the novels. His number one choice was *The Speckled Band*. So, it should come as no surprise that back in 1910, with financial disaster looming over him, he took this story, transformed it into a play and enjoyed one of his biggest successes.

On 4th June, 1910, less than a month after *The House of Temperley* closed, *The Speckled Band* opened at the Adelphi Theatre. After a successful run, the Adelphi lease expired, and the play was moved to The Globe. There would be 169 performances of the hit play in its initial run, and two productions toured the English provinces. There was even a brief staging in New York City at the Garrick Theatre. Doyle recovered all of the money he had lost on *Temperley* and had also created a valuable property that would generate future royalties. The play would be revived many times for the rest of the century and is still irregularly performed in England and America.

*Continue along The Strand, passing Heathcock Court, Exchange Court and Bedford Street.*

In the angle formed by Agar Street and William IV Street stands the Charing Cross Police Station, formerly the Charing Cross Hospital. In HOUN Dr. Hugh Mortimer was presented with a Penang Lawyer (stout stick) by his colleagues at Charing Cross Hospital when he left to take a medical appointment on Dartmoor. When Holmes was attacked by two of Baron Gruner's men outside the Cafe Royal in Regent Street, he was taken to the Charing Cross Hospital for treatment in "The Illustrious Client".



*Continue along The Strand to where the footway widens.*

**Lowther Arcade** – The Lowther Arcade was originally built in 1831 to provide a centre of fashionable shops in the Strand and became a toy bazaar and a mecca for children at Christmas time. It was demolished in 1902 and the site is now occupied by Coutts & Co., the banking firm. In FINA Watson is instructed to drive to the Lowther Arcade, then run through it to the Adelaide Street entrance, and take a brougham there driven by a man in a black cloak with a red-trimmed collar.



*Continue along The Strand*

At the corner of Duncannon and Adelaide Streets, the West Strand Telegraph Office (aka Charing Cross telegraph office) was located. No. 448, now Coutts Bank, was mentioned in ABBE when Holmes drove round to the office and sent off a message to Captain Croker, inviting him to call at 221B Baker Street. And in WIST he receives a telegram from John Scott Eccles sent from the Post Office, Charing Cross:

“Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. May I consult you?”.

In fact when Inspector Gregson traces Scott Eccles to Baker Street, he says,

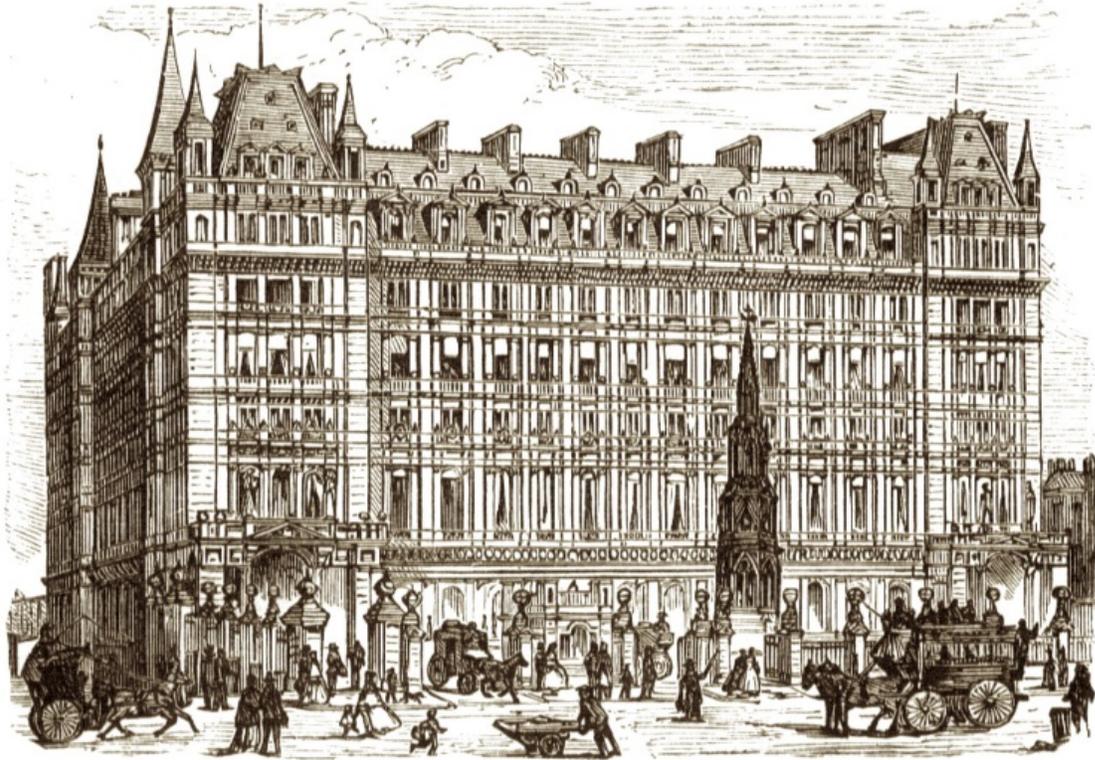
“We picked up the scent at the Charing Cross Post Office and came on here”.

According to maps from 1861 and 1862, the post office and the telegraph offices were separated. The post office occupied what is now the southern tip of South Africa House as late as the 1920’s. From this post office Beryl Stapleton mailed her cryptic warning to Sir Henry Baskerville in HOUN.

*Cross The Strand (by the pedestrian crossing).*

The **Charing Cross Station** appears in EMPT as the site of an unpleasant episode in Holmes’ career when Mathews knocked out his left canine in the waiting room. In SCAN, Irene Adler and her husband, Godfrey Norton, fled to the continent by the 5:15 train from Charing Cross.

In BRUC the spy Hugo Oberstein is lured by a false message from Holmes to the smoking room of the Charing Cross Hotel, following which the plans are recovered. Holmes is summoned to Windsor and returns with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin as a reward for his services to Queen and Country.



*Walk down Villiers Street (to the east of the station) and turn right through the arches into Craven Street passing the Ship and Shovell Public House (the only pub in London consisting of two separate buildings on either side of a street, connected underground by a shared cellar.)*

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Jack Stapleton and his wife Beryl stayed at the Mexborough Hotel in Craven Street. The Craven Hotel was located at Nos. 43-46 and the Waldor Hotel was at No. 37.

*Then forward into Craven Passage.*

Holmes and Watson frequented the Turkish Baths at Nevill's situated at the corner of Craven Passage and Northumberland Avenue. The disused ladies entrance still survives. In "The Illustrious Client," Watson comments:

"Both Holmes and I had a weakness for the Turkish Bath. It was over a smoke in the pleasant lassitude of the drying-room that I had found him less reticent and more human than anywhere else. On the upper floor of the Northumberland Avenue establishment there is an isolated corner where two couches lie side by side".



*Walk to junction of Northumberland Street and Northumberland Avenue.*

**Sherlock Holmes Tavern** contains a number of exhibits of Sherlockian interest, such as the reproduction of 221B Baker consulting rooms on the first floor. Originally the site of the Northumberland Hotel at which Sir Henry Baskerville lost one of his boots while staying there in HOUN, and known for some time as the Northumberland Arms, in 1957 it reopened as The Sherlock Holmes Pub.

*You may now like to enter the pub for a well-earned pint of English beer (which is NOT warm and flat – it's served at cellar temperature and NOT artificially gassy) and buy one for your guide.*

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