

## The Adventure of the Seafarer's Grave...

...with a Sherlockian twist of sorts at the conclusion

by Craig Calvert

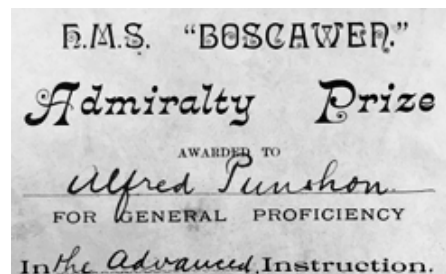
In 2015, whilst idling away some time on eBay, I came across a 'Buy-It-Now' auction for a second edition copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* published in 1893 by George Newnes of London. Judging by images of the book, it had seen better days, which perhaps was not surprising considering it had been printed more than a hundred and twenty years earlier. Under normal circumstances (and trying to keep my eBay purchases under control!), I would not have considered buying the book. However, as I was soon to discover, the circumstances were anything but "normal".

Additional photographs of the edition were available to peruse, one of which indicated that a book-plate was adhered to the inside of the front cover. The book-plate revealed that this edition had been awarded to a student "for general proficiency in the advanced instruction". The name of the student - Alfred Punshon. At the top of the book-plate were inscribed the words "HMS BOSCAWEN" – a reference to a ship of some kind? Further information provided by the book-plate (which I shall reveal later) piqued my curiosity!

Based on what I had seen in the photographs, I conducted a series of rather hurried Google searches the results of which suggested that this edition might have something of a story behind it. Throwing caution to the wind, I purchased the book – sensing, at the very least, it would make an interesting addition to my modest Sherlockian collection.



The edition arrived by mail some weeks later, having made its way from the United Kingdom to my home in Queensland, Australia. Pictured left is a photograph of the book as well as some of the information contained on the book-plate.



With the book safely in my possession, I wondered if it might be possible to unravel a little of its history. Who was Alfred Punshon? What was his association with the *HMS Boscawen*?

My investigation did not require me to search through dusty almanacs and tomes, however romantic that mental picture might be. As with many aspects of our modern world the internet was my saviour. My research was able to ascertain the following:

Alfred Douglas Punshon was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1877 in Brighton, Sussex. This information was gleaned from his record of service at the National Archives,<sup>1</sup> for which I paid the diminutive amount of £3.50.

In December 1893, at the age of sixteen, Alfred found himself enrolled at a naval training school on the Isle of Portland in Dorset, on the south coast of England. This establishment was known as *HMS Boscawen* and was one of half a dozen Admiralty-run boy seaman training schools in operation at the time.<sup>2</sup> Many of these naval schools utilised the hulks of old warships to accommodate and teach the students. Once they completed their education, many of the boys would find themselves signing up for full-time employment in the Royal Navy. Should the reader desire to learn more about these naval training establishments, I can heartily recommend David Perkin's short essay, which can be found at the web-page contained in footnote 2. Below is a drawing from 1883 by C.W. Cole & W. Ralston illustrating some of the activities that Alfred may have participated in whilst attached to *HMS Boscawen*.

Alfred spent approximately two years at *HMS Boscawen* between 1893 and 1895, initially holding the rank of 'Boy Seaman Second Class' before being promoted to 'Boy Seaman First Class' on graduation. When he turned eighteen, he gained the rating of 'Ordinary Seaman'. He would then have been required to enlist in the Royal Navy for a period of twelve years, otherwise known as 'Continuous Service'.



With the above in mind, we can say with certainty that Alfred was awarded with the second edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* some time between 1893 and 1895. The book would have been virtually brand-new, having come hot off the press in 1893. Was Alfred a fan of Arthur Conan Doyle? Did he have any say in choosing the book as his prize “for general proficiency”? I imagine these questions will remain unanswered. Nevertheless, it would be nice to think that young Alfred was a fan of Sherlock Holmes, as no doubt many of his contemporaries were.

Alfred Punshon went on to have a distinguished career in the Royal Navy, serving on numerous ships and rising to the rank of 'Chief Signal Boatswain'.<sup>3</sup> Here is where the story develops somewhat. In 1923, at the age of forty five, with thirty years of naval experience

<sup>1</sup> <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D7570711>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gwpda.org/naval/rnboyest.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.hmshood.com/crew/memorial/roh\\_others.htm](http://www.hmshood.com/crew/memorial/roh_others.htm)



behind him, Alfred found himself serving on the decks of the celebrated *HMS Hood*, the largest and most powerful warship of its day.<sup>4</sup>

As many readers will be aware, *HMS Hood* was first commissioned in 1920 and was the flagship of the Royal Navy. It was colloquially known as ‘The Mighty Hood’. The battle-cruiser had a complement of approximately 1,400 personnel and sailed the seas for over twenty years. Sadly, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 1941, during the Battle of the Denmark Strait, *HMS Hood* was struck by German shells and sank within minutes. All but three of her crew perished.

However, back in the 1920s ‘The Mighty Hood’ still represented the very best of British naval supremacy. So much so that between 1923 and 1924 the battle-cruiser circumnavigated the world in a peaceful display of patriotic pride. Alfred Punshon, as a Chief Signal Boatswain, found himself actively involved in this global endeavour. However, during the voyage and whilst en route to Australia, Alfred fell ill and suffered a heart attack. On arrival in Victoria, he was conveyed to a Melbourne hospital in a serious condition. Sadly, Alfred never returned to the old country and died in Melbourne on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1924. He was laid to rest at the Melbourne General Cemetery (Independent Section B – grave 521).

As an aside, my research indicates that in 1913 (eleven years prior to his death), Alfred married one Mary E. Featherstone.<sup>5</sup> At this time there is no evidence to suggest Alfred and Mary had children. Sadly, information with regard to Mary is scant. I also cannot confirm whether Mary was ever able to travel to Australia and visit her husband’s final resting place.

But the story doesn’t quite end there. After coming into possession of Alfred’s book in 2015, I felt I should, at the very least, make the effort to visit Alfred’s grave in Melbourne. And so in September 2016 I flew from the Gold Coast to Melbourne, my first visit to Victoria since I was a child.

Nothing prepared me for the *size* of the Melbourne General Cemetery, which opened in 1852 and covers approximately forty three acres. It may sound a bit strange, but it was a fascinating experience to walk through the cemetery and to stop and read many of the headstone inscriptions. Likewise, it was genuinely pleasant to spend time in such a still and silent place without the incessant background noise that pervades much of our modern life.

It soon became apparent that I would struggle to locate Alfred’s gravesite. Consequently I attended the front office of the cemetery and was assisted by a helpful staff member. A short time later I stood before the final resting place of Alfred Punshon. Below is a photograph of his gravestone, which was kindly donated by the Royal Australian Navy. It was rather a

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Hood](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Hood)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/83886047/person/44494334250/facts>



humbling experience to stand in front of Alfred's grave holding in my hands the book he had been awarded 120 years earlier as a naval cadet. The inscription on Alfred's gravestone reads:

*Sacred to the memory of Alfred Douglas Punshon, Commissioned Signal Boatswain R.N. of HMS HOOD who died on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1924 during the visit to Melbourne of the Special Service Squadron. Erected by officers and men of the Royal Australian Navy and kindred naval associations. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away.*

After spending some time in quiet contemplation beside Alfred's grave (and giving it a quick tidy-up), I made my way back to Tullamarine Airport and returned to Queensland. Overall, it had been a memorable and worthwhile journey, and one that I am glad I undertook.

But...once again, the story doesn't quite finish there either.

I did comment earlier that this tale had something of a *twist* – one that Arthur Conan Doyle himself may well have found amusing! Up to this point, I have cheekily omitted to mention *who* awarded the book to Alfred all those years ago at the naval training establishment at Portland. The photograph to the right perhaps speaks for itself...



I must concede, when I first viewed the book-plate photograph in the eBay auction, when I first viewed the book-plate photograph in the eBay auction, my mind started racing! Who was this person who purported to be 'James Moriarty'? Was he aware of Sherlock's nemesis – and was he in on the joke when he signed the book-plate? Did young Alfred find it amusing that he had been awarded a copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* signed by the "Napoleon of crime" himself?

Once again, through the use of the internet I believe I have identified the signatory as one James Henry Moriarty (referred to as 'JHM' from this point). It is my understanding that JHM was born in Portsea, Hampshire on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1858. He was a Chaplain/Naval Instructor at *HMS Boscawen* and would have been approximately thirty five years of age when Alfred commenced his tutelage.

JHM served in the Royal Navy as a Chaplain/Naval Instructor for thirty three years, retiring from duty in 1914. He is then recorded as being the rector of a parish church at Dorney in Buckinghamshire. Sadly, JHM's only son (also called James Henry Moriarty) was killed in World War I. A stained-glass window (designed by the son) at the Dorney church remains to this day.<sup>6</sup> JHM's son is buried at the Bethune Cemetery in France. He was twenty two years old at the time of his death.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dorney-history-group.org.uk/dorney-remembers-world-war-one/>

As to the question – was JHM *aware* that he shared a name with Conan Doyle’s infamous character? Some more investigation was required! Many Sherlockians will know that the character of Professor Moriarty was first introduced to the general public in ‘The Final Problem’, published in *The Strand Magazine* of December 1893.<sup>7</sup> This short story later found its way into the compilation known as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, also published in the same year.<sup>8</sup> However, Professor Moriarty’s christian name was not divulged until 1903, some ten years later, with the publication of ‘The Empty House’.<sup>9</sup> This short story contains the only canonical reference to Moriarty’s first name being “James”.

We know that JHM awarded young Alfred Punshon the book some time between 1893 and 1895. We can therefore say (with some disappointment) that JHM would *not* have been aware of Professor Moriarty’s christian name. However, the character of Professor Moriarty would have been well known to the general public by this time. After all, Holmes had “died” by his nefarious hand with the publishing of ‘The Final Problem’ in 1893. It was certainly big news at the time. The British public were aghast that their champion sleuth had seemingly met his demise!

I find it inconceivable that JHM (and also many of the boys attending *HMS Boscawen*) would not have been aware of the connection. I like to imagine that JHM may have had a wry smile on his face as he signed the book-plate. Perhaps he signed and presented *many* Sherlock Holmes books during his time at *HMS Boscawen*?

JHM lived to the ripe old age of seventy five, dying in 1933. From 1903 (when Moriarty’s christian name was revealed) until his passing thirty years later, JHM would surely have become aware that he shared both a surname – and a christian name - with Sherlock’s notorious foe. I imagine it was quite the ice-breaker at social functions!

So comes to an end the singular story of Alfred Punshon and James Henry Moriarty. And yet...I can’t sign off on this tale without a dash of wild speculation! As I researched this article, I asked myself more than once whether the lives of James Henry Moriarty and Arthur Conan Doyle intersected? Had JHM unknowingly (or knowingly?) provided the moniker for Conan Doyle’s literary scoundrel?

Incredibly, these very questions had already been considered by author Donald Redmond in his 1982 book, *Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Sources*.<sup>10</sup> On page 97, Redmond has this to say about the surname of Moriarty:

*This fine Irish name was rare in London, only one being in the 1910 directory, but there was a Moriarty in Portsmouth. James Henry Moriarty, Royal Navy chaplain who had been curate of St Mark’s, South Shields, 1881-3, had served in ships in the South Pacific and the West Indies before being posted to HMS VOLAGE of the Training Squadron, based at Portsmouth, on 28 May 1889. He served in VOLAGE*

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Final\\_Problem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Final_Problem)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Memoirs\\_of\\_Sherlock\\_Holmes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Memoirs_of_Sherlock_Holmes)

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Adventure\\_of\\_the\\_Empty\\_House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Adventure_of_the_Empty_House)

<sup>10</sup> Redmond, D 1982, *Sherlock Holmes: A Study in Sources*, pp.97-99, 243, 254.

*until 25 March 1893, and went thence to HMS BOSCAWEN at Portland. Doyle had not left Southsea until 1890, and we have already seen Service personnel reflected in canonical names from that period.*

(With thanks to Randall Stock for initially providing me with the above information)

It is well documented that Arthur Conan Doyle (ACD) resided in Portsmouth between 1882 and 1890. His chief residence during that time being 1 Bush Villas, Southsea<sup>11</sup> (an area just south of the Portsmouth City Centre). ACD was an active member of society whilst he lived in Portsmouth. He was a member of the Portsmouth Literary & Scientific Society. He also played for the local cricket team and was the first goal-keeper for the team that later became Portsmouth Football Club.<sup>12</sup> It is also where he wrote both *A Study in Scarlet* (published in 1887) and *The Sign of Four* (published in 1890).

James Henry Moriarty was born in Portsea, Hampshire, the same geographical area as Portsmouth. JHM's father, one Henry Augustus Moriarty was born in Cork, Ireland in 1815 and there is mention of Henry living in Portsea two years after his birth in 1817. JHM was not born until 1858, so it appears that the Moriarty family had lived in the Portsmouth/Portsea area for a considerable time.

An examination of the UK census records indicates that JHM spent an appreciable amount of time living in the Portsmouth area. In 1861 (at the age of two), he is listed as living at 23 King Street, Portsea (about 260 metres from 1 Bush Villas). In 1871 (at the age of twelve), he is listed as living at 4 Long Row, Portsea (about 1.8kms from 1 Bush Villas). In 1881 (at the age of twenty two), he is listed as residing at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, no doubt training to become a naval instructor. In 1891 (at the age of thirty two), he is listed as living with his wife and children at 5 Shaftsbury Road, Portsea (about 400 metres from 1 Bush Villas). And finally, in 1901 (at the age of forty two), JHM is listed as living at 8 Wilberforce Road, Portsmouth (about 120 metres from 1 Bush Villas).<sup>13</sup>

Regrettably, the UK census records do not provide details between 1882 and 1890 (the census only being conducted once every ten years). Nevertheless, the above addresses, and their comparatively close proximity to ACD's address at 1 Bush Villas, is intriguing.

It should be noted that, due to his naval vocation, JHM would certainly have been absent from home for various periods of time (perhaps years) between 1882 and 1890. However, there can be no question that JHM had a familial connection to the Portsmouth/Portsea area, both as a child and as an adult.

JHM and ACD were also of similar ages, JHM being born in August 1858 and ACD in May 1859. ACD would have been twenty three years old when he arrived in Portsmouth in 1882, JHM his senior by about nine months. Being of similar ages perhaps they had similar pastimes and social circles? It is not beyond the realms of possibility to propose that these

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur\\_Conan\\_Doyle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Conan_Doyle)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle/arthur-conan-doyle/portsmouth-connection>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ancestry.com.au/>

gentlemen *may* have crossed paths at some point between 1882 and 1890, perhaps on the sporting field or even at ACD's medical practice. Equally, ACD may simply have come across JHM's name in a newspaper article and thought that it had a nice ring to it!

Without *direct* evidence it is simply speculation to suggest that JHM was, in some way, known to ACD but it's a provocative possibility none-the-less. As a famous consulting detective once proclaimed, "it is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence".<sup>14</sup> In this particular case, there are many gaps in the story – gaps that may never be filled.

However, I am led to believe that a rather extensive collection/archive dedicated to Arthur Conan Doyle exists in Portsmouth (bequeathed by the late Richard Lancelyn Green).<sup>15</sup> Is it possible that this archive contains further information to support the idea that JHM and ACD may have been acquainted in one form or another? Perhaps a holiday to the 'old country' (and in particular, Portsmouth) might be of benefit in the future!

Irrespective of whether James Henry Moriarty was known to Arthur Conan Doyle or not, I find it fascinating that Donald Redmond considered the possibility of a connection between the two gentlemen back in 1982, and some thirty three years later an antique copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* comes to light – signed by the very man himself. As Sherlockians the world over, what an intriguing pastime we share!

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Study\\_in\\_Scarlet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Study_in_Scarlet)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.visitportsmouth.co.uk/conandoyle>



## Silver Screen – Liza the Louse

by Bill Barnes

This letter from a disgruntled movie-goer appeared in the May 1938 issue of *Silver Screen* magazine, published in the USA:

### A LETTER FROM LIZA

*I am annoyed...because actors who go to previews are often so chatty that it is difficult to hear what is being said on the screen. At the Jezebel preview the other night I had to sit behind the party-throwing Basil Rathbone, who enjoyed the picture so thoroughly that not only did they discuss it with each other quite audibly during the entire preview, but they had to point at the screen during tense moments. I thought screen-pointers had gone out with title readers and the dodo bird.*

*Mrs. Rathbone wore a little inverted flower pot number with quite a wild cluster of feathers sprouting up from it. The pot plus the feathers...must have added a goodly foot or so to Mrs. Rathbone's height – and need it be said that she did not remove the hat. And me a Bette Davis pushover. I tell you I became a wild young thing, fit to be tied. As Basil left his seat at the*



Could this have been the hat Ouida was wearing that night?