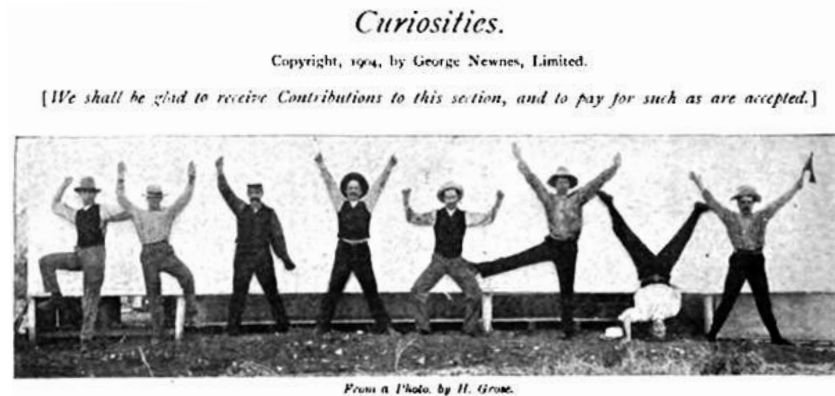


Where Did You Get That Hat?

by Matthew D. Hall

The August 1904 issue of *The Strand Magazine* lead its 'Curiosities' section with a Sherlockian submission (Figure 1 below).¹ These dancing miners represent the first organised Sherlockian activity documented. The answer to the question - the name of the mine location - was never answered in



Picture from The Strand Magazine Vol.XXVIII, 1904.

later issues of *The Strand*. However, Sherlockian research published in *The Passengers' Log* over the years has showed that the men as posed spelt the word 'LACESIGE'. There was no 'K' present in the original canonical cipher, and it is assumed a hard 'C' was substituted

providing us with 'LAKESIGE'. The 'G' is in fact meant to be a 'D', as the two letters have mirrored cipher symbols. And so we have 'LAKESIDE'. Further work in *The Passengers' Log* had identified a number of possible locations for Lakeside, but no categorical answer existed.²

The caption says:

WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE MINE? Some miners in Australia have adapted the cipher of "The Dancing Men" given in the Sherlock Holmes story published in THE STRAND MAGAZINE for December, 1903, and have spelt out the name of their mine as shown in the photograph. Can our readers give the name of the mine? The photograph was sent to Sir A Conan Doyle, Undershaw, Hindhead, Haslemere.

I recently published an article analysing the photographer of that photo, H.H. Grose, in an effort to determine where the photo was taken.³ Henry Herman Grose (1874-1918) practiced as a professional photographer in the arid Karlgoorlie and Boulder region of Western Australia, where a gold rush had led to rapid settlement in the area around ten years before the photograph was taken. Contemporary newspapers contain photographs taken by Grose at the nearby mining location of Lakeside, such as the day shift crew at the Leviathan Battery and Cyanide Plant.

When I was in London in 2024, climbing the stairs at the Sherlock Holmes pub to gaze in at the 221B sitting room recreation, I was excited to notice a photo of the famous 'dancing men' on the wall of the

¹ 'Curiosities' *Strand Magazine* Vol. XXVIII, 1904, George Newnes, Ltd., Strand, London.

² Barnes, Bill and Elliott, Doug 'Sherlock Holmes in Australia' in *Australia and Sherlock Holmes*, 2008, The Baker Street Irregulars, New York ; *The Passengers' Log*, May/August 2003 (Vol. 6, Nos. 3&4) and October 2003 (Vol. 7 No. 1), Sydney Passengers, Sydney.

³ Hall, Matthew *Passengers' Log*, Vol.27 No.4 & Vol.28 No.1, 2025, Sydney Passengers, Sydney.

stairway. I absent-mindedly took a photo on my phone, impressed that the Australian miners were being shown so far from home, and continued up the stairs.



The framed photograph on the stairway of the Sherlock Holmes pub, London.

That evening I had a chance to review the framed photograph (Figure 2 left). It revealed in great detail the miners, and looked like an original photograph. Affixed to the glass was a circular label stamped with the number 18, and underneath was a legend:

*THE DANCING MEN a photograph. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on a lecture tour of the United States, was greeted at one town by these men forming letters from the code deciphered by Sherlock Holmes in *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*.*

What? Americans!?! Something is wrong. How did the photograph end up in the pub, and how did these Brits get it so wrong and

mis-label the most important Sherlockian gathering EVER, stealing the credit those Australian miners deserve? I was flummoxed, and resolved to understand this historical error.

“A comparison of photographs has proved conclusively” (*The Adventure of the Second Stain*)

Things became more confusing when comparing the pub photo with the published *Strand* photograph (Figure 3 below). The pub photo is understandably more clear than the small grainy *Strand* photo. Both



Figure 3 - A comparison of the Strand Magazine photograph in August 1904, and the Sherlock Holmes pub photograph.

have the same background; the same word is being ciphered by the same people. But wait - when we look closer, what has happened to the hats?

In *The Strand* the dancing miners wear hats (except the gentleman balancing on his head), but in the photograph at the Sherlock Holmes pub, they are hatless! One plausible hypothesis is that someone at *The Strand* manipulated the photo for publication by adding hats. Do we have a prequel to the Cottingley scandal? No. Close

inspection reveals that the miners are in slightly different positions, and one or two hats can be seen on the ground in the ‘hatless’ photo.

The conclusion then must be that two photographs were posed and taken by H.H. Grose, and mailed to Doyle. Having gone to the bother of setting up the scene, a photographer in 1904 would have certainly taken more than one exposure to ensure a good quality photo. Doyle provided the photograph of the miners in hats to *The Strand Magazine* for publication, and retained the other. There are no archival holdings from this period of operations of *The Strand Magazine*, so that original is considered lost.

What of the hatless photograph then? Does the Sherlock Holmes pub in London have an original photograph that was sent to Doyle?

A large number of items on display in the Sherlock Holmes pub were originally displayed in the 1951 Sherlock Holmes exhibition in London, but the Dancing Miners photograph is not in the catalogue for that exhibition.⁴ The following year (1952), Adrian Conan Doyle organised a follow-on Sherlock exhibition in New York. This American exhibition used many items from the London exhibition, and some new items were included. The framed Dancing Men photograph was one of the items exhibited for the first time in New York. The catalogue of the American exhibition lists it as item number 143:

*THE DANCING MEN: a photograph. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, on a lecture tour of the United States, was greeted at one town by these men forming letters from the code deciphered by Sherlock Holmes in The Adventure of the Dancing Men.*⁵

The item is in Section VI of the exhibition, that contains many items with American connections, such as a wood inlay of two profiles of Sherlock Holmes made by Jay Finlay Christ lent by Vincent Starrett, and a poker-work drawing of Sherlock Holmes sent to Conan Doyle by “an ardent admirer” in 1903.

After these exhibitions items went into storage and then many items from the 1951 and 1952 exhibitions were loaned as part of the “collection in the bars and the grill room and in the reconstruction of part of the living room at 221B Baker Street” at the Sherlock Holmes pub when it opened in 1957. The published catalogue of the Sherlock Holmes pub collection indeed lists the photograph as item 18 with an identical description to that from the New York catalogue of 1952.⁶ The hatless photograph was later reproduced in *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centenary 1859-1959*, published by Adrian, and its caption continues the American line: *Local inhabitants of small American town greet Conan Doyle in the style of The Dancing Men from the ‘Adventures of Sherlock Holmes’.*⁷

It turns out that the presence of two photographs has been noticed once before (“there is nothing new under the sun”). The 1963 *Baker Street Journal* contains a report on a meeting of ‘The Speckled Band of Boston’ scion.⁸ *The Strand* photograph was handed out, and they held a competition to see who could decipher it (presumably without the benefit of the dancing men cipher) and Dr Dunning won the competition. The meeting report acknowledges a different picture without hats in the 1959 *Centenary* book, but for some inexplicable reason they did not recognise the Australia v America discrepancy in captions.

⁴ *Sherlock Holmes, Catalogue of an Exhibition held at Abbey House, Baker Street, London May-September 1951*, Borough of St Marylebone Public Libraries Committee, 1951.

⁵ Doyle, Adrian Conan *The Sherlock Holmes Exhibition Catalogue*, L. Middleditch Co., New York, 1952.

⁶ Richard Lonsdale-Hands Associates, *The Sherlock Holmes, Northumberland Street, London, W.C.2., Catalogue of the Collection*, 1963, Whitbread & Co. Ltd, London.

⁷ Doyle, Adrian Conan *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centenary: 1859-1959*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, 1959.

⁸ *Baker Street Journal*, 1963, p 186.

“That the piççe is gënuinë is cërtain” (The Illustrious Client)

Many documents and items owned by Adrian Conan Doyle are now held by the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Foundation, which he created in 1965 when he moved to the castle of Lucens (the Château de Lucens) in Switzerland. At the same time, he established a Sherlock Holmes museum, originally located in the castle, displaying his recreation of 221B and various documents and items belonging to the Foundation. Following Adrian’s death in 1970, the archives owned by the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Foundation were placed in the Manuscript Department of the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, while the Sherlock Holmes Museum stayed in the castle until it was eventually relocated in another building in Lucens.

Laurence Pernet, who worked at the Conan Doyle archives in Lausanne, stepped in to help. Included in the Lausanne archives are some of the framed pictures that were exhibited in New York in 1952, including the one of the Dancing Miners. It is identical to the framed picture in London, with the caption in a matte window below the picture. Laurence also found the original ‘hatless’ photo mailed from Australia in the Lucens collection.⁹ As produced by H.H. Grose, the photograph is pasted on a brownish cardboard bearing an ink stamp of the photographer’s name on the lower left corner (“H. H. Grose. PHOTO”). Directly beneath the photograph on the card, in what is clearly Arthur Conan Doyle’s own hand, is written “The Dancing men done by Western Americans”. The rear of the cabinet card is blank.



The original cabinet card photograph taken by H. H. Grose, and held in the Lucens collection.

Adrian Conan Doyle is famous for his inaccuracy when it comes to his father’s legacy, so my first reaction to the description of Americans is that it was wishful thinking on the part of Adrian. In fact, it was Arthur Conan Doyle who got it wrong, and Adrian simply created a legend for the photo for his American exhibition based on his father’s note! Doyle’s memory was on the right track - the photo was taken in Western Australia, not “Western America”, but in this case his

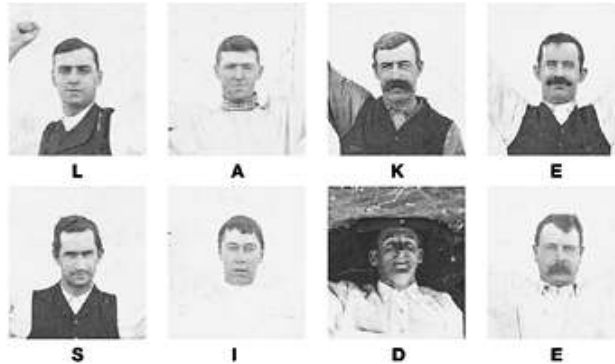
memory had failed him. A little licence was taken by Adrian in creating a photo description that describes the men greeting Doyle as he visited a town.

“I steppëd to my burzau and brought out an enlargëd photograph.” (The Adventure of the Lions Manë)

A museum quality scan of the photograph was arranged, that allows the card backing with the ‘H. H. Grose’ stamp and Arthur Conan Doyle’s handwritten note to be seen for the first time. The resolution from the original allows us to see the faces of these early Sherlockians. Four men wear waistcoats, three have moustaches, and their expressions present a combination of smiles and focus. Our ‘D’ can be flipped, revealing his head resting on a blanket on the ground, with his feet and an arm behind his back supporting himself against the well. Several hats can be spotted, cast aside for the second photograph. While many photographs taken by Grose appear in newspapers at the time, including of miners working at Lakeside, those printed photographs are of poor resolution.

⁹ Item held by the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire – Lausanne, Fonds Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Lucens, Switzerland. Catalogue IS 4314/1/5/4/3.

There is one more note to make regarding our dancing miners. Many photographs of mine employees were published in Kalgoorlie area newspapers. For example, the *Kalgoorlie Western Argus* regularly published collections of photographs and advertised them in other newspapers, but in most cases the very large groups doesn't allow for easily distinguishing individuals. Its edition of 17th March 1903 included a photo captioned "Official Staff, Lakeside" of five men wearing hats. The following year (21st June 1904) *The Argus* again published a photo of the five official staff (Figure 6 below). In these photographs we find some of our Lakeside Dancing Miners, and quite probably all five. Frustratingly, there are no captions naming the men in the newspaper, but it both confirms Lakeside as the location of the photos, and lays the foundation for finding names for our first Sherlockians.



Portraits of the eight Australian Dancing Miners.

The Bottom Line

The original photograph of the Dancing Miners wearing hats published in *The Strand Magazine* in 1904 is likely lost. Excitingly, the original of a second photograph (without hats) sent to Arthur Conan Doyle at the same time exists in Lucens. It was retained by Arthur Conan Doyle and at some point he mis-labelled it. It passed along to Adrian, who probably selected it for exhibition based on its American connections. The eight Dancing Miners may still be anonymous, but now we can see these Australians -



Illustrations of 'Official Staff, Lakeside' from the *Kalgoorlie Western Argus*, 17th March 1903 (centre upper) and 21st June 1904 (centre lower). At left and right are comparisons of men from the official staff photographs, with the Dancing Miners photograph.

they are no longer grainy faces in the 1904 *Strand Magazine*. They smile at us from their home in Lucens, and from the wall of The Sherlock Holmes pub in London, perhaps a little happier now that the record has been corrected, and the world knows they are Western Australians.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to a number of Sherlockians who went out of their way to provide advice. Bill Barnes of the Sydney Passengers (Australia) and Peter Blau of the Red Circle (USA) directed me to Jean Upton, Catherine Cooke, and Roger Johnson of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. They provided wonderful insight into the 1951 and 1952 exhibitions, and advice on where to look next. Massive thanks to Laurence Pernet (Switzerland) whose encyclopaedic knowledge of their collection was so helpful in identifying the original Dancing Men photograph.

