

Please support the

**ALDEBURGH CHRISTMAS DAY SWIM 2006  
11.00 am opposite the Moot Hall**

**Sherlock Holmes and the German Ocean**

The long nervous fingers of Sherlock Holmes retrieved a pinch of sweet latakia tobacco from the slipper under his chair, and began to stuff a meerschaum pipe. His long aquiline nose twitched in anticipation of pleasure. But Holmes' attention was elsewhere, fixed on the dense gothic type of The Times. He would examine this every day, from the personal advertisements on the first page to the opinions of the Thunderer in the middle right through to the prices of stocks and consols. It was the morning of 24 December 1906. In the street below, the breath of horses appeared yellow in the dense cold fog. I had just arrived at 222B Baker St, and I was relieved to be out of the cold which had been agitating the wound I sustained in my left leg during the Second Afghan War. The kedgerree that Mrs Hudson had prepared for breakfast was untouched. Sherlock Holmes began to read aloud:

*Captain Charles Ulrich Vernon Wentworth, proprietor of the new hotel at Tiffany Corner Aldeburgh, has appealed to the public for help in finding the jewels lost by one of his guests from her room at the hotel overlooking the German Ocean. A reward of £100 guineas is offered for information leading to their recovery. The identity of their owner cannot be revealed. But she is believed to be a member of one of Europe's oldest and most venerable royal families. Theft is suspected, although the room was locked at the time the jewels disappeared. There was no sign of forced entry. Only the owner of the jewels and Captain Vernon Wentworth had keys, and they with the owner's entourage and Mr Glencairne Stuart Ogilvie of Thorpeness were taking the sea air on Aldeburgh pier at the time of the disappearance.*

"Good morning Holmes" I said. But there was no reply, such was the intensity of Sherlock Holmes' concentration. Blue tobacco smoke curled up from his pipe. As the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece struck nine o'clock, I lit a Turkish cigarette. And at that moment the bell in the hall below rang urgently. "Ha, we have a visitor Watson" said Holmes. "She is unusually tall, for a woman. And she speaks with a thick foreign accent. She is in distress, because she has lost her jewels in a locked room and for other reasons that as yet I do not know."

And then before I could ask Holmes how he could already know so much about our visitor, she was in the room before us and just as Holmes had described. Over the previous six weeks, since Holmes had solved the Mystery of the Speckled Band, he had been overcome with torpor. Now he was all animation, as both of us listened to the young woman's plea.

*"Meester 'Omes, I cannot tell you oo I am. But your powers of seduction ( I apologise dear reader the lady meant deduction) and slooshing (Er, I think that should be sleuthing, scientific method) are known to zee ole world. Sergeant Bugg at Leiston Police Station sez e can not spare ze time. E sez e is bizzie with poachers on Lord Huntingfield's estate and zey are pilfering( wot iz zis?) in Mr Garrett's workshop. Even worse, he suspects that I ((MOI !)) have secreted the jewels away. The ferret eyed (I take that to be eagle eyed) policeman 'as never seen a foreigner before. E sez it is no possible to steel jewels from locked room. Meester 'Omes, I believe that only you can save me from scandal. Zair cannot be anoizzer scandal in Bohemia. And unless my jewels are found my reputation..."*

And the young lady, whom I now realised had the distinctive bone structure and obtruding chin of the Hapsburg dynasty, broke down and wept. Holmes, never a man easy in the company of feminine emotion, averted his gaze. And it fell to me to offer the young lady what solicitous comfort I could, so far as would be appropriate to my position as a medical practitioner and married man.

Holmes though was ahead of us, calling excitedly for Mrs Hudson to find Bradshaw's railway timetable for the East Coast Line, eventually retrieved from under the stained notes of an experiment in forensic chemistry. "Watson, we would be unwise to assume that the villain is still in Aldeburgh. So I will stay here. You will travel to the hotel with our client, and report back to me what you see and find."

And with that, the adventure of the German Ocean began. I walked briskly back to Wimpole St, and did my best to explain to my dear wife that although I would be away for Christmas Day my thoughts would be with her. She did not seem to fully understand, so I thought it indelicate to go into more detail about the sex and youth of our client. Instead, I had an inspiration. I would motor to Aldeburgh,

thereby ensuring that if it ever came to the chase I would have the advantage of speed. Holmes need never know.

So it was that 6 hours later in the fading light I approached Aldeburgh after a laborious journey out of our capital city down the Mile End Road, past the market gardens of Stratford, into open countryside across the common land at Wanstead Flats, through the undulating Essex countryside, the new red brick streets of Chelmsford, the ancient timbered settlement of Colchester, along the docks of Ipswich, down the narrow Thoroughfare of Woodbridge out again on the Yarmouth Road, and past the tall steeple of Wickham Market Church. I am pleased to report that along the old toll road from Snape, I was able to throttle my 60hp Dietrich-Bugatti to over 35 miles per hour - although I slowed down to a respectable speed as the thatch of the Aldeburgh Golf Club came into view. My investigation was about to begin, which I approached with high hopes in the certain belief that the explanation had to be simple. How pleasant it would be, I pondered, to present the mysterious lady with the solution while Holmes laboured at a disadvantage back in London. The lady herself would travel down by rail, on the East Suffolk Railway Line to Aldeburgh and in a few hours would arrive at the station by the Railway Inn.

I decided to fill the intervening hours by finding lodgings. To my disappointment, the very last room at Captain Wentworth's new hotel had just been taken by a musician, a violinist. But I was taken in just down the road by the Cross Inn. This was a very different establishment, as old and crooked as the town itself, where ships masts had been used as timbers, and flotsam and jetsam held the walls together. Local fishermen in the snug talked in an accent I could hardly understand. Smugglers. Of course, I now realised that more than likely the fate of the jewels was to be discovered in the very inn where I was staying. I made a mental note to search the cellars after dark that very same night.

In the meantime though, I had to meet our client. In the cold crisp moonlight, I walked back up the hill past the church towards the station. In the far corner of the churchyard, I could see the memorial to the lifeboatmen killed in the disaster only six years previously. The subsequent enquiry had filled all the newspapers at the time. Would the disaster, I wondered, lead me to the motive for the crime? After all, the drowned lifeboatmen had left behind six destitute families. No honest living was to be made here by families that could not put to sea. Crime was perhaps the only way. On top of the old cliff I could see far out into the ocean, and the twinkling lights of fishing boats, coasters and even a liner. Perhaps this was the very liner that had brought our client to these shores.

With these thoughts turning over in my mind and with increasing conviction that the criminal was a local man, I made my way under the gas light to the station platform. Here I spotted a poster. It advertised the Traditional Christmas Swim, to take place by kind permission of Captain Vernon Wentworth at 10.30 a.m. the very next day on his shingle beach opposite the Moot Hall. A bathing machine was to be provided for the women participants. I would make myself useful and offer my medical services to the swimmers. For this was my chance, I realised, to inspect the physiques of the local men and apprehend those with criminal capability.....

The story, related by Dr Watson in unusually advanced old age to a very young Mark Fairweather, continues in 2007.