

What are we to make of "The Field Bazaar"? Is it just a joke told for charity by Arthur Conan Doyle, or is it an oddly short canonical Sherlock Holmes story? Reasonable minds have differed. Compare, e.g., Ian McQueen (23 Sherlock Holmes J. 66) and Ian Schoenherr (30 Baker Street J. (n.s.) 178). Fortunately, the mere mapping of the story need not (and does not here) involve taking a position on the question. For additions and improvements to the material printed here, read the 2016 Green Bag Almanac & Reader. Thanks to Catleya Concepcion, Curtis Gannon, Frances MacRae, Ira Brad Matesky, Albert Rosenblatt, Julia Rosenblatt, and Andrew Solberg.

"I should certainly do it," said Sherlock Holmes. I started at the interruption, for my companion had been eating his breakfast with his attention entirely centred upon the paper which was propped up by the coffee pot. Now I looked across at him to find his eyes fastened upon me with the half-amused, half-questioning expression which he usually assumed when he felt he had made an intellectual point.

"Do what?" I asked. He smiled as he took his slipper from the mantelpiece and drew from it enough shag tobacco to fill the old clay pipe with which he invariably rounded off his breakfast.

"A most characteristic question of yours, Watson," said he. "You will not, I am sure, be offended if I say that any reputation for sharpness which I may possess has been entirely gained by the admirable foil which you have made for me. Have I not heard of debutantes who have insisted upon plainness in their chaperones? There is a certain analogy."

Our long companionship in the Baker Street rooms had left us on those easy terms of intimacy when much may be said without offence. And yet I acknowledge that I was nettled at his remark.

"I may be very obtuse," said I, "but I confess that I am unable to see how you have managed to know that I was . . . I was . . ."

"Asked to help in the Edinburgh University Bazaar." [1] "Precisely. The letter has only just come to hand, and I have not spoken to you since."

"In spite of that," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and putting his finger tips together, "I would even venture to suggest that the object of the bazaar is to enlarge the University cricket field." [2]

I looked at him in such bewilderment that he vibrated with silent laughter.

"The fact is, my dear Watson, that you are an excellent subject," said he. "You are never blasé. You respond instantly to any external stimulus. Your mental processes may be slow but they are never obscure, and I found during breakfast that you were easier reading than the leader in the Times in front of me."

"I should be glad to know how you arrived at your conclusions," said I.

"I fear that my good nature in giving explanations has seriously compromised my reputation," said Holmes. "But in this case the train of reasoning is based upon such obvious facts that no credit can be claimed for it. You entered the room with a thoughtful expression, the expression of a man who is debating some point in his mind. In your hand you held a solitary letter. Now last night you retired in the best of spirits, so it was clear that it was this letter in your hand which had caused the change in you."

"This is obvious."

"It is all obvious when it is explained to you. I naturally asked myself what the letter could contain which might have this effect upon you. As you walked you held the flap side of the envelope towards me, and I saw upon it the same shield-shaped device which I have observed upon your old college cricket cap. It was clear, then, that the request came from Edinburgh University—or from some club connected with the University. [3 & 4] When you reached the table you laid down the letter beside your plate with the address uppermost, and you walked over to look at the framed photograph upon the left of the mantelpiece."

It amazed me to see the accuracy with which he had observed my movements. "What next?" I asked.

"I began by glancing at the address, and I could tell, even at the distance of six feet, that it was an unofficial communication. This I gathered from the use of the word 'Doctor' upon the address, to which, as a Bachelor of Medicine, [5 & 6] you have no legal claim. I knew that University officials are pedantic in their correct use of titles, and I was thus enabled to say with certainty that your letter was unofficial. When on your return to the table you turned over your letter and allowed me to perceive that the enclosure was a printed one, the idea of a bazaar first occurred to me. I had already weighed the possibility of its being a political communication, but this seemed improbable in the present stagnant conditions of politics."

"When you returned to the table your face still retained its expression and it was evident that your examination of the photograph had not changed the current of your thoughts. In that case it must itself bear upon the subject in question. I turned my attention to the photograph, therefore, and saw at once that it consisted of yourself as a member of the Edinburgh University Eleven, [7] with the pavilion and cricket-field [8] in the background. My small experience of cricket clubs has taught me that next to churches and cavalry ensigns they are the most debt-laden things upon earth. When upon your return to the table I saw you take out your pencil and draw lines upon the envelope, I was convinced that you were endeavouring to realise some projected improvement which was to be brought about by a bazaar. Your face still showed some indecision, so that I was able to break in upon you with my advice that you should assist in so good an object."

I could not help smiling at the extreme simplicity of his explanation.

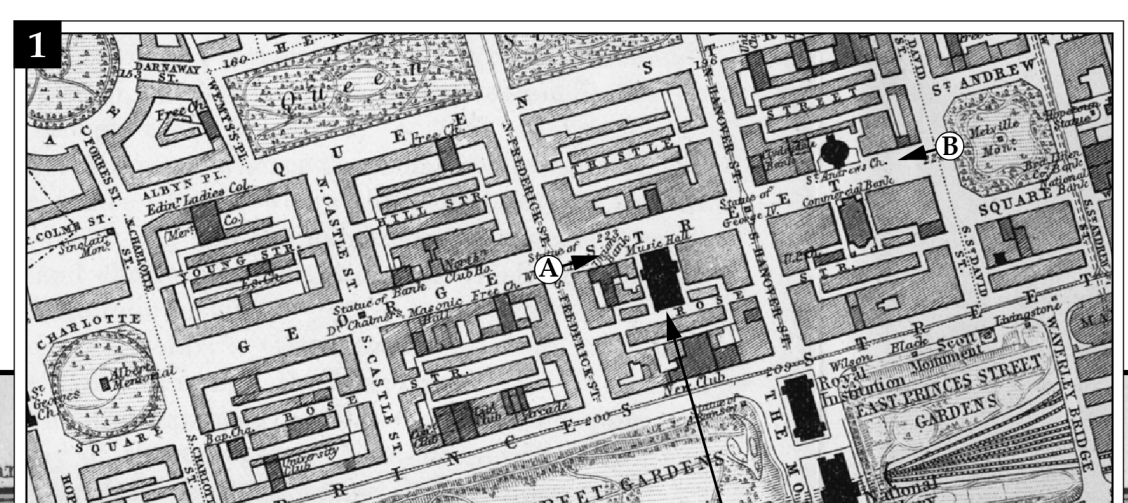
"Of course, it was as easy as possible," said I.

My remark appeared to nettles him.

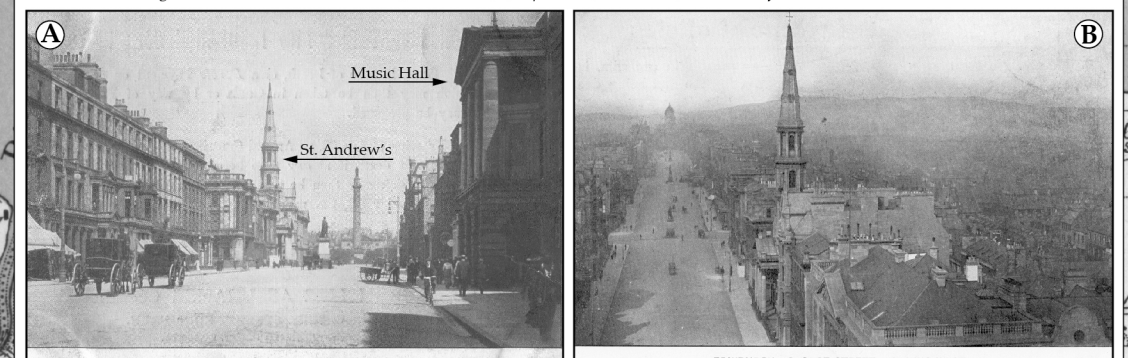
"I may add," said he, "that the particular help which you have been asked to give was that you should write in their album, and that you have already made up your mind that the present incident will be the subject of your article."

"But how ——" I cried.

"It is as easy as possible," said he, "and I leave its solution to your own ingenuity. In the meantime," he added, raising his paper, "you will excuse me if I return to this very interesting article upon the trees of Cremona, [9] and the exact reasons for their pre-eminence in the manufacture of violins. It is one of those small outlying problems to which I am sometimes tempted to direct my attention."



Edinburgh University Bazaar: The bazaar was held November 19-21, 1896, in the Music Hall, on the south side of George Street, in the middle of the block cornered to the one containing St. Andrew's Church. Located in the midst of Edinburgh's New Town, the Music Hall was (and is) one of the most prominent public venues in Edinburgh. The arrows attached to the circled "A" and "B" in the map above indicate the perspectives from which photos "A" and "B" below were taken. Image sources: Bartholomew's Pocket Guide to Edinburgh and Environs beta. 38 & 39 (2d ed. 1896) (map detail); Postcards, collection of Ross Davies.



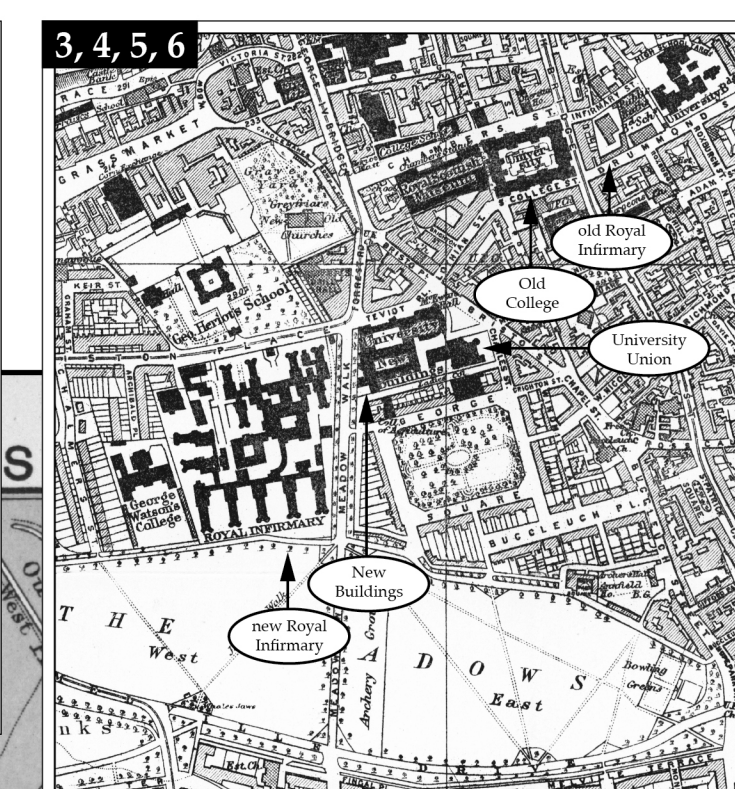
Edinburgh: GEORGE STREET, LOOKING EAST (A) GEORGE STREET, LOOKING WEST (B)



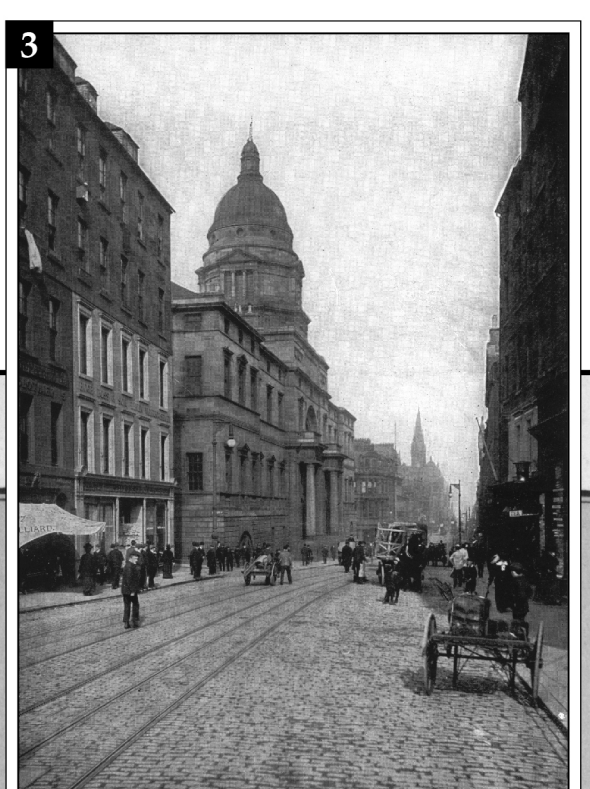
Bachelor of Medicine: In the two decades since Watson earned his M.B. (in 1876 or thereabouts), much had changed in Edinburgh's facilities for medical education. If he attended the bazaar, he surely visited Edinburgh University's New Buildings in Teviot Place (above) into which the medical faculty had moved in 1880. Watson would have received much of his instruction in the medical arts in a handsome old structure — located on the west side of the South Bridge road — that was known in his student days as the "College" but which by 1896 was the "Old College" (see note 3). Even the Old College would have been an unfamiliar sight, because its dome was an 1887 addition. Image source: Edinburgh and Vicinity, an album containing over 250 views (ca. 1900). See also Maurice Campbell, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson: A Medical Digression 21 (1983 prtg.); Matthew H. Kaufman, Medical Teaching in Edinburgh during the 18th and 19th centuries 1-4, 27-35, 57, 192 (2003).



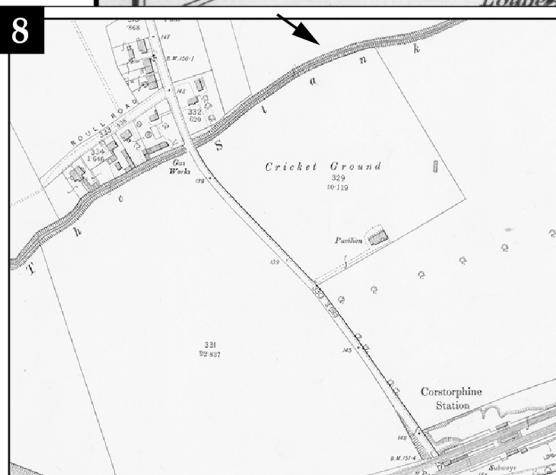
some club connected with the University: If the letter to Watson did not originate in the office of the SRC (see note 3), then it probably emanated from the University Union, a building dedicated to student activities. The Union, which had opened just a few years earlier (in 1889), was the SRC's first big project. It, too, had been funded in part by a big SRC event — a "fancy fair" held in November 1886. Image source: A Pictorial Guide to Edinburgh and Its Environs beta. 144 & 145 (1910). See also Ian Catto (ed.), No spirits and precious few women: Edinburgh University Union 1889-1989 at 9-12 (1989).



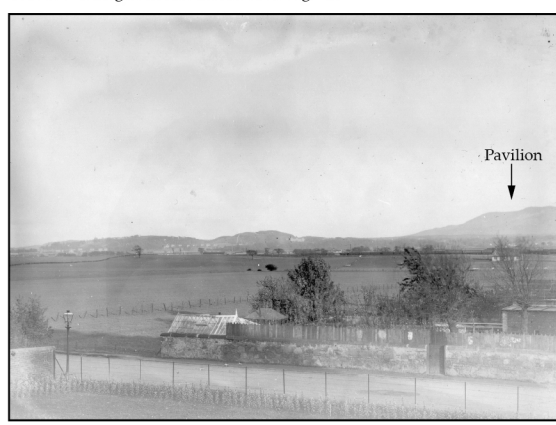
Facilities for medical care, medical education, and student activities had expanded and improved greatly since Watson's college days. They tended, however, to remain in the same neighborhoods. Thus, for example, the old medical buildings were on the south side of Edinburgh's Old Town, and the new buildings were built just a few blocks away (above). Similarly, the new Craigholm field was, like its Corstorphine predecessor, well south and west of the city center (see notes 2 & 8). Image source: A Pictorial Guide to Edinburgh and Its Environs (1910) (Central Edinburgh map detail).



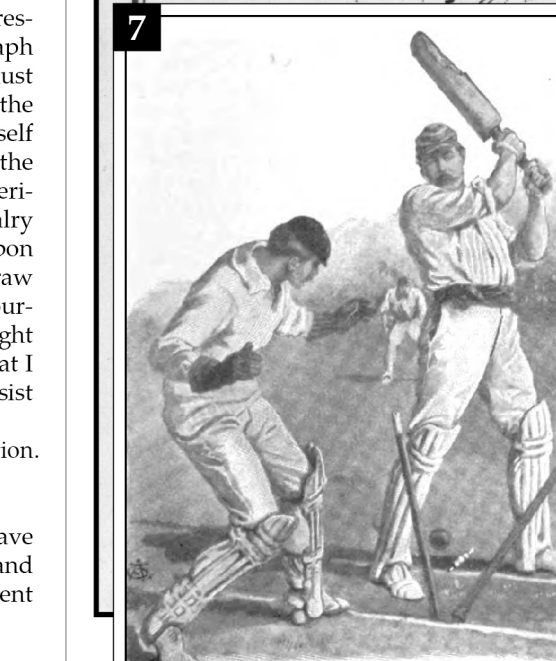
some club connected with the University: The Edinburgh University Students' Representative Council (SRC) was responsible for much of the organization of the bazaar. And it was in the SRC's official organ, The Student, that "The Field Bazaar" was published. So, it seems likely that it was someone from the SRC or The Student who wrote to Watson. The offices of the SRC were in the "Old College" (above, the big domed building on the left), which had housed the medical school when Watson was a student (see note 5). Today the Old College is home to the Edinburgh Law School. Image source: Edinburgh and Vicinity, an album containing over 250 views (ca. 1900). See also J.J. Macpherson, Twenty-one Years of Corporate Life at Edinburgh University (1905) (frontispiece: "The window in the basement furthest from the porch on the left is that of the Students' Representative Council Office."); id. at 29-30, 44.



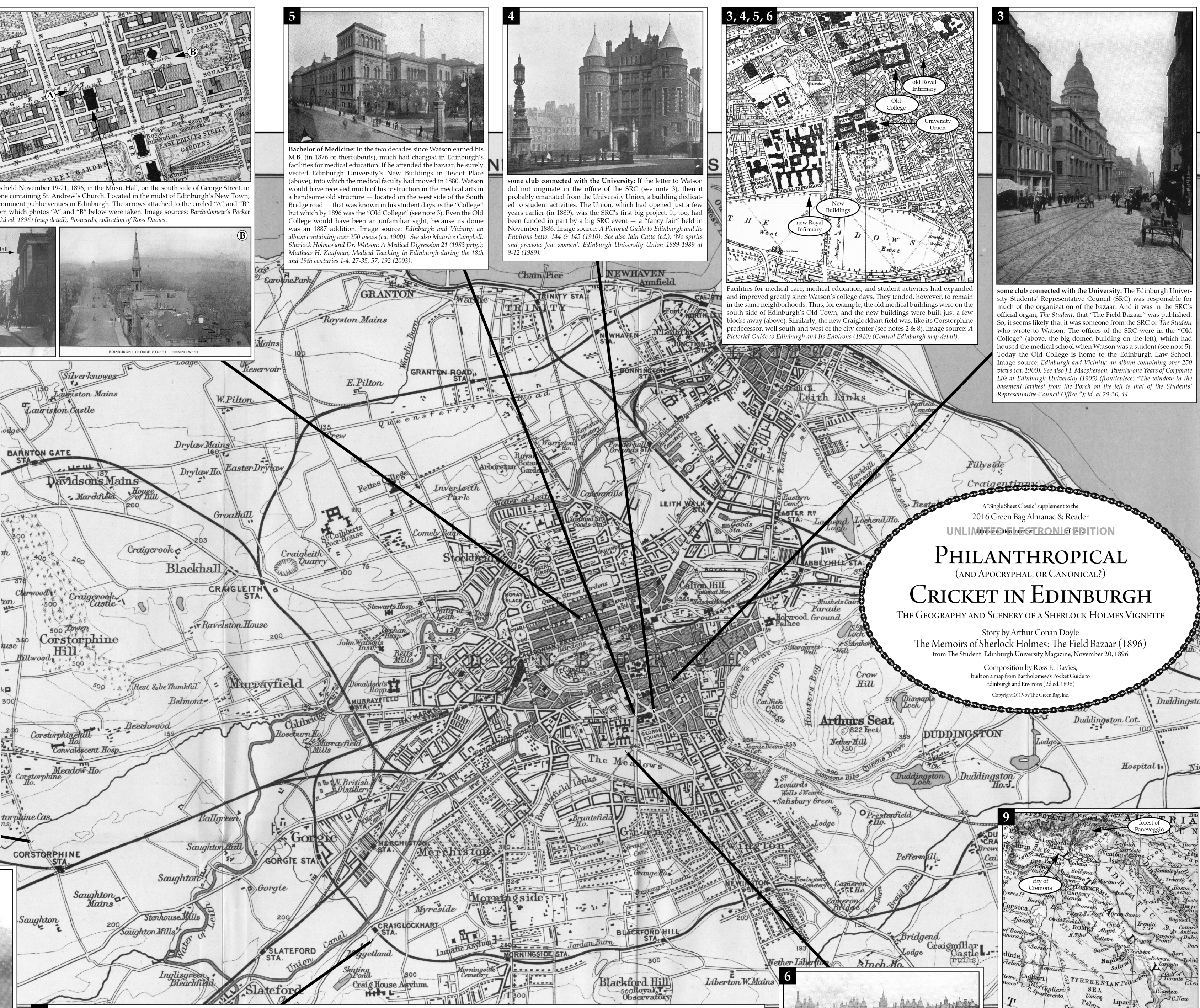
pavilion and cricket-field: When he was a medical student Watson would have played on the Cricket Ground in Corstorphine, where Edinburgh University athletes competed from 1873 until the move to Craigholm in 1896. The students' need for a pavilion at their new field was probably no surprise, since they'd had one in Corstorphine. The arrow on the map (above) indicates the perspective from which the photo (below) was taken. Image sources: Ordnance Survey, Edinburghshire 003.09 (includes: Currie, Edinburgh), 1895 [82877421] (map detail) (reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland); Photograph courtesy of The Corstorphine Trust (n.d.) (caption on the original: "From the corner of Sycamore Terrace/ Meadowhouse Road looking towards Craigholm. Carrick Knowe in middle distance before Gantley & Davidson Building begun c. 1930s. Glasgow/Edinburgh railway line mid picture with the cricket pavilion in Union Park right centre (white buildings)").



Pavilion



member of the Edinburgh University Eleven: "[A] game which has on the whole given me more pleasure during my life than any other branch of sport." Image and quote source: Arthur Conan Doyle, Some Recollections of Sport, 38 The Strand 243, 248, 249 (Oct. 1909).

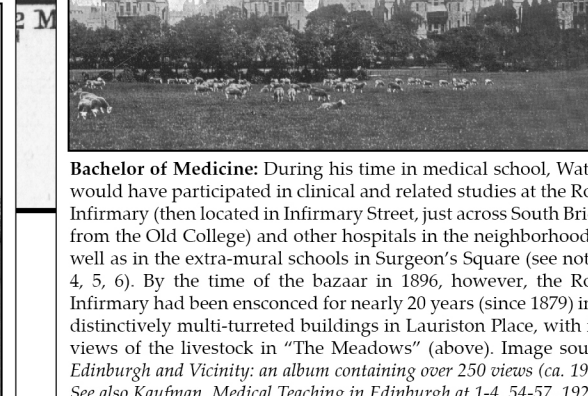


PHILANTHROPICAL (AND APOCRYPHAL, OR CANONICAL?) CRICKET IN EDINBURGH

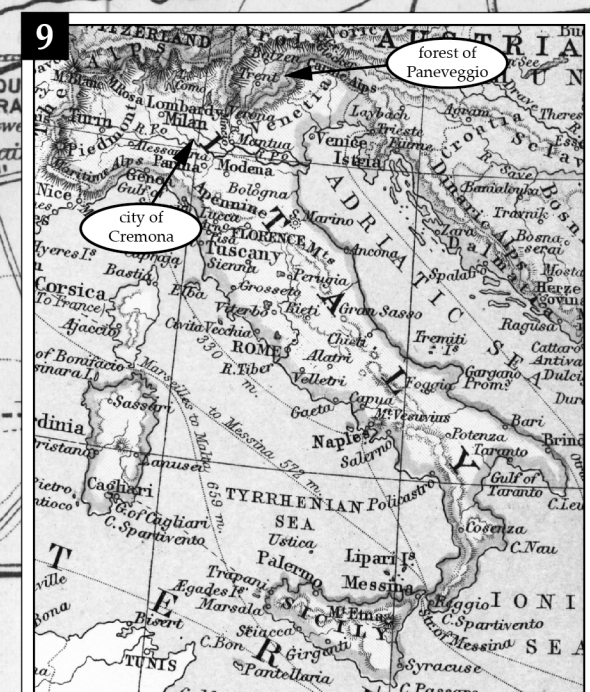
THE GEOGRAPHY AND SCENERY OF A SHERLOCK HOLMES VIGNETTE
Story by Arthur Conan Doyle
The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes: The Field Bazaar (1896)
from The Student, Edinburgh University Magazine, November 20, 1896
Composition by Ross E. Davies,
built on a map from Bartholomew's Pocket Guide to
Edinburgh and Environs (2d ed. 1896)
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enlarge the University cricket field: Holmes was wrong. The University had already acquired (in 1894) land for a new field in Craigholm to replace its longtime athletics home in Corstorphine (see note 8). Rather, the bazaar was held to raise money to build a pavilion at Edinburgh University's new field at Craigholm. It was a great success, raising £3,156 & 12s — much more than the organizers' goal of £2,000 — and the pavilion was completed in short order (left). A mark of the success of the project is that the pavilion remains in use today. Various improvements have been made over the years, including the Simon Memorial Clock in 1912, and more work was underway as this map was being prepared in 2015 (right). Appropriately, the facility has been used since 1979 by Watson's College . . . the renowned George Watson's College. Image sources: Edinburgh University Students' Handbook No. 24, beta. 96 & 97 (1919) (left); Photograph by Ross Davies (2015) (right). See also Usher, The story of Edinburgh University Athletic Club beta. 20 & 21; Dundee Courier & Argus, Nov. 23, 1896, at 2; Craigholm, 29 Univ. of Edinburgh J., 131 (Dec. 1979).



Bachelor of Medicine: During his time in medical school, Watson would have participated in clinical and related studies at the Royal Infirmary (then located in Infirmary Street, just across South Bridge from the Old College) and other hospitals in the neighborhood, as well as in the extra-mural schools in Surgeon's Square (see note 3, 4, 5, 6). By the time of the bazaar in 1896, however, the Royal Infirmary had been enclosed for nearly 20 years (since 1879) in its distinctively multi-turreted buildings in Lauriston Place, with fine views of the Westlock in "The Meadows" (above). Image source: Edinburgh and Vicinity, an album containing over 250 views (ca. 1900). See also Kaufman, Medical Teaching in Edinburgh at 1-4, 54-57, 192.



trees of Cremona: Holmes traveled from Mecca to Khartoum to Montpelier to London in the early 1890s. Did he make a detour to visit the Italian alpine "forest of violins" (the groves of spruce with mysterious musical properties in the forest of Paneveggio) from which the great luthiers of Cremona drew (and still draw) their raw materials? Or was his only connection to that ancient Italian town his own violin, which was surely made there? Image source: J.G. Bartholomew (ed.), The Citizen's Atlas of the World map 7 (1898) (detail); see also The Adventure of the Empty House (1903); The Adventure of the Cardboard Box (1893); Aaron S. Allen, "Fatto differenzia": Stradivari's violins and the musical trees of the Paneveggio in Invaluable trees: Cultures of nature 301 (2012).

OUR LONG COMPANIONSHIP IN THE BAKER STREET ROOMS HAD LEFT US ON THOSE EASY TERMS OF INTIMACY WHEN MUCH MAY BE SAID WITHOUT OFFENCE.

"IT IS AS EASY AS POSSIBLE," SAID HE, "AND I LEAVE ITS SOLUTION TO YOUR OWN INGENUITY."