

Presentation Notes – The Man With The Twisted Lip

Nashville 3P Scholars – Presentation by Tom Vickstrom June 15, 2019

An opium den and a disfigured beggar are featured in “The Man with the Twisted Lip.” Today we’ll examine a few of the details of this colorful story and have some glimpses of a bigger picture of the setting in East London around June 1889 when the story takes place, and the society of people who lived there.

As a side note, this story may be the only one in the Canon where Watson’s first name is used in the story itself. The intro to *A Study in Scarlet*, Part 1, has the first name: “Being a reprint from the *Reminiscences of John H Watson, MD, late of the Mary Medical Department.*” In *Twisted Lip*, however his wife calls Watson “James.” When Kate Whitney cries on her shoulder, she asks, “Should you rather that I sent James off to bed?”

For Holmes, “The Man With The Twisted Lip” case might have been more a three pipe problem! Holmes, at the end of the story, is asked how he solved the mystery of the disappearance of the respectable Neville St. Clair. The results, he says, were achieved by “sitting on five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast.” Holmes pulled an all-nighter to think through the problem, “eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining on his strong aquiline features.” How about that ounce of shag, possibly consumed in a seven hour period from about midnight?

The Tobacco Leaf trade journal, published in 1908 states that “one of the most popular features of the club life of workingmen in the north and east of London are smoking competitions. Twenty or thirty men will solemnly sit down in a small rooms to silently wrestle for the proud title of champion smoker. To make an ordinary pipeful of shag last sixty or seventy minutes is a common accomplishment. The champion smoker of the world kept his pipe alight for nearly 2 ½ hours, and competed against 100 competitors representing nineteen smoking clubs.ⁱ In these competitions an eighth of an ounce was used for a pipeful. It is supposed, therefore that Holmes “ounce of shag” represents that he smoked eight pipefuls that night, assuming his old brier pipe held the same ration!

Speaking of smoking, the subject of matches comes up in this story – with the beggar, Hugh Boone. “His hideous face is familiar to every man who goes much to the city. He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas.”

The name Vesta has origins with the Roman goddess of the hearth. Self-lighting matches were invented by a French chemist in 1805. Quoting from author Mark Chervenka here: “In almost all countries but England, the flammable part of a match has always been on a wood or cardboard stick. In England, however, the flammable tip is on the end of a waxed string. This variety of a match is called a “vesta.” It is like a small, thin wax candle. With could be used a vesta *box*, typically containing a small hole about the same diameter as the stem of the vesta. The hole was used to hold a burning vesta – the vesta box acted as a candleholder, the vesta the candle. The vesta would burn just long enough to put a key in a lock or illumination for a quick change into bed clothes. Vestas are still used today in England and several other foreign countries. Vestas are shorter than American matchsticks and average about one and one quarter inches long and sold in vesta boxes easily recognized by their size ii A page of colorful vesta boxes is provided. The “book of matches” or matchbook as we know it, did not come into use until about 1892 and was an American invention.

The beggar Hugh Boone probably sold vestas made by Bryant and May, which was the largest factory of this type in London, employing 1,400, mostly women and girls. A fascinating handout explains how the match workers went on strike in 1888, just about the time of this story. They were trailblazers in bringing about social change, because they formed the largest female union in the country. Furthermore In 1889 the great Dock Workers Strike took place; some 130,000 laborers took part and shut down the docks of London. They were aided by funds sent from their comrades in Brisbane, Australia.

The site of the “Bar of Gold” was stated to be on Swandam Lane. There is a Swan Lane, as well as an Old Swan Lane, but no Swandam Lane. A 1893 map of the adjacent area is filled with colorful street names: Fishmonger’s Hall Street, Black Raven Alley, George Alley, Angel’s Passage, Red Bull Yard, etc. The Bar of Gold, however was said to be just west of London Bridge and not to the east. Doyle wrote, “Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river *to the east* of London Bridge “

Let’s talk for a moment about East London. It has always been the blight of London poverty. Its rests on a strip of gravel left by the ice ages. Its mud flats were drained of sludge and diked up. Its proximity to the great docks of London have contributed to an influx of the roughest elements of society as well as a landing place of various immigrants, which gave it a flavor of alien identity. It was developed hodge-podge and as London’s population grew past five million at the time of this story, the various sections including Shadwell, Limehouse, and Whitechapel were packed with humanity, many in squalid conditions. London theatre and music halls had early roots here, as did religious dissent and political diversity; in fact an anti-authoritarian spirit permeated. Sylvia Pankhurst, internationally known suffragist was later to establish her headquarters in East London, to galvanize the “great abyss of poverty.” As transportation improved and the living areas of population spread out, the poorest remained. Thousands of dock laborers lived and worked here, the so-called “stink industries” were here and further east, downwind of London, and the “sweats” industry flourished after the invention of the sewing machine, making clothing and footwear at the wholesale level.

Author John Marriott says it this way, “Therein were located not only the workshops that provided products such as clothing, furniture and footwear which satiated the ever increasing demands of wealthy Londoners for such accessories, and the massive gas, chemical, engineering and munitions plants that helped serve the needs of an advanced industrial and imperial nation, but also an extensive communications infrastructure of river, rail and dock which became a gateway between England and the world through which passed an endless stream of raw materials, manufactured goods and human cargoes.

A social reformer, Charles Booth, published an 1886 color-coded study of parts of the East End. Red for “moderate lower-middle class, hardworking, sober shopkeepers and the like.” Dark blue typified by “casual earnings, very poor. The laborers do not get as much a three days’ work a week.” Black color code denoted “the lowest class – occasional laborers, street sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals. Their life is the life of savages and extreme hardships, and their only luxury is drink.”ⁱⁱⁱ The fact that hundreds of cargo ships from around the world came up the Thames to the massive dockyards, and the thousands of sailors of foreign nationalities and transient behaviors, surely had a huge impact on the flavor and character of the area.

Around the mid-1880s it became fashionable for the some adventurous aristocracy and the “comfortable classes” from the more proper London and the West End to go “slumming” – some in the name of enlightenment and social reform and others to frequent slums for immoral pursuits, to descent into coarseness and vulgarity, breaking from Victorian constraints. The slums, in fact became

a tourist attraction as well. London guidebooks not only directed visitors to shops, theatres, monuments and churches, but also mapped excursions to the world renowned philanthropic institutions located in notorious slums districts.”^{iv}

Opium was said to improve the creative powers, and made the drug more appealing to those searching for artistic and literary inspiration. A number of writers played on the perceived glamor of the drug, praising its ability to enhance the imagination. Doyle was said to have made at least one excursion to the Opium dens by the 1890. As to the sinister opium den described in “Twisted Lip”, Doyle seems to have been making sort of a public service announcement in describing the horrors of opium addiction, the Bar of Gold’s sordid physical setting, and the wreck and ruin it caused its habitual users and their families. He may have been voicing his sentiments to the public in general, who used laudanum in vast amounts, at home, and the social reform tide was turning against it.

Some of the so-called opium dens within Chinatown were more so casual places for the clannish oriental society to congregate and socialize. As Chinatown pockets of population grew from two small communities and developed in subsequent decades, there are these fact: “A police raid on unlicensed lodging houses for seamen run by the Chinese community in 1912 found traces of opium smoking in eleven of them. Although no evidence of organized crime emerged from such raids, a lingering suspicion of evil-ding kept police on the alert.”^v It was rumored that a mysterious ‘Mr. King’ was peddling drugs among the Cantonese community, and when a crime reporter named Arthur Ward saw a tall, elegant Chinaman in evening dress leave a house and enter a waiting limousine, the mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu was invented. The Limehouse district achieved notoriety for this, as did that East London, earlier, in 1887 when “The Monster of East End” struck terror.

A side note offered here about the underclass and criminal culture of East End. Vast amounts of food arrived at the docks. In fact, all the cargo and merchandise helped fuel the underworld, via theft. A wonderful book, “The Illustrated Mayhew’s London” includes a chapter entitled, ‘The Filth, Dishonesty, and Immorality of Low Lodging-Houses’ and describes a particular niche in fencing – chiefly in provisions that converted readily for sale to the lodgers. “Some of the ‘fences’ board, lodge, and clothe two or three boys or girls, and send them out regularly to thieve, the fence usually taking all the proceed, and rewarding the thief with a trifle of pocket-money, and plenty of beer and tobacco.”^{vi} Known as ‘finders’, their booty included fish, bacon, butcher’s meat, groceries and tea, stolen from docks, warehouses, butcher shops, and retail shops.

The character Hugh Boone was a beggar. Beggars were on the lower end of street folk in general. Why not be a street peddler instead? Keeping in mind that supermarkets did not exist, and the innovation of refrigerated warehouses was just beginning. “The Illustrated Mayhew’s London” offers fascinating insight about street sellers, although the setting is dated mid-century. Roving hawkers, some at market stalls, and any place where crowds come and go, included sellers of pies, baked potatoes, pea soup and hot eels, pickled whelks, boiled puddings, peppermint water, and ham sandwiches, There were also flower girls, fresh milk vendors, sellers of old clothes, peddlers of newspapers, live animals, birds, and more. The street hawkers were collectively known as “Costermongers.” The term is derived from the words *costard* (a now extinct medieval variety of large, ribbed apple) and monger (seller). Children made up part of this workforce. Education reforms, by 1876 required children to attend school to the age of 10 years old, and in 1899 this was raised to 12 years old. Before that, some lads as early as seven years old would be apprenticed to their father ‘as soon as they could shout well’. During off duty hours, playing cards and gambling, was a favorite pastime.

Back to the story...Watson located the "Bar of Gold" between a slop shop and a gin shop. We'll take a look at exactly a "slop shop" was, as well as a "gin shop."

The slop shop of Victorian London was not a place where a cheap meal of porridge and grog was served. Slop Shops specialized in making and/or selling cheap clothes and used clothes, typically part of a wholesale network. Low-wage pieceworkers or 'slop-workers' lived and worked in crowded, dirty, conditions of poverty using sewing machines and hand-tailoring work to mass-produce clothing or portions of clothing.

As for the Gin Shop, that's somewhat self-explanatory. However it can be theorized that the opium houses of the nineteenth century, or more importantly, household use of opium products, existed because of the gin houses of the eighteenth century. The population wanted it, in the form of laudanum. Let's try and connect the dots. Gin was the craze and the fad of the eighteenth century across England and in London until drinking tea gained popularity. "The influence of Methodism was growing even among the urban poor. And, suddenly, there was the new fashion for tea. Eventually everyone just started drinking tea instead." ^{vii} And the trading for tea came heavily from guess where? China. A major export to China to prevent a trade deficit became opium from the British-colonized India. When large numbers of Chinese became addicted to opium, the practice of smoking opium migrated to seaports around the world. As for laudanum, it was often cheaper than alcohol, making it affordable to all levels of society and became widely used throughout Victorian society as a medicine. The 1908 Pharmacy Act greatly restricted morphine, cocaine, opium and derivatives containing more than 1 per cent morphine. Please see article provided...

Back to Gin and "knocking back a flash!"

Here are some excerpts from Wikipedia: Gin was popularized in England following the accession of William of Orange in 1688. Gin provided an alternative to French brandy at a time of both political and religious conflict between Britain and France. By 1743, England was drinking 2.2 gallons (10 liters) of gin per person per year. As consumption levels increased, an organized campaign for more effective legislation began to emerge, gin consumption blamed for both increased crime and increased ill health among children. Gin drinking declined both due to legislation and the rising cost of grain. The Gin Craze had mostly ended by 1757. The government tried to ensure this by temporarily banning the manufacture of spirits from domestic grain. There was a resurgence of gin consumption during the Victorian era, with numerous "Gin Palaces" appearing. In 1840, the amount of gin consumed in London (but by that time with a population in excess of one million) finally matched that from when prohibition ended in 1743.

What were Gin Palaces? These drinking establishments were warm refuges with ostentatious looks, where many different varieties of gin were kept in enormous tanks behind long wooden bars, sometimes served alongside biscuits, cakes, and other sweets. Gin palaces attracted imbibers of all backgrounds: from elegantly outfitted gentlemen to members of London's working classes, the appeal of the gin palace was nigh on universal. The gin palace maintained its popularity well through the Victorian age, and gin's status was enormously elevated from the Gin Craze days: stories abound of society ladies sipping their gin in teacups, while members of the Royal Navy received their regular gin rations. Though there aren't any working gin palaces left in London today, they played an essential part in ushering in today's gin culture. ^{viii}

As for the poor and the working class, the average person could not afford French wines or brandy, so gin took over as the cheapest, and most easily obtained, strong liquor. Gin was hawked by barbers, peddlers, and grocers and even sold on market-stalls. Gin had become the poor man's drink as it was cheap, and some workers were given gin as part of their wages.

“Much of the gin was drunk by women, consequently the children were neglected, daughters were sold into prostitution, and wet nurses gave gin to babies to quiet them. This worked provided they were given a large enough dose. The thirst for gin appeared insatiable. People sold their furnishings and even their homes to get money to buy their favourite tipple. ix

Author Peter Ackroyd wrote this for the Londonist, “How London Became Hopelessly Hooked On Gin”:

Gin was Dutch and therefore preferable to suspicious French liquors. The craze for gin began, approximately, in 1720 but it had been readily available since the time of the Glorious Revolution in 1688. William III brought the drink with him from the purlieux of Rotterdam, and soon enough the Dutch spirit had supplanted the taste for French brandies. Anything French was suspect.

In these earlier years, “You could buy gin literally anywhere. The gin was sold in the shops of weavers, dyers, barbers, carpenters and shoemakers; the workhouses, prisons and madhouses were awash. There were degrees of nastiness and discomfort. Inns had lodging rooms for guests, while alehouses provided 'houses of call' for the various trades of the city; the brandy shops or dram shops were of the lowest grade, where cellars, back rooms and holes in the wall provided shelter for copious consumption.

Gin was sold from wheelbarrows, from temporary stalls, from alleys, from back rooms and from cheap lodging houses. It was consumed greedily by beggars and vagrants, by the inmates of prisons or workhouses, by Londoners young and old. Even children got a taste for gin. It was a particular favorite of women, who also used liberal quantities of the stuff to silence children. The consequences were dire. Children would congregate in a gin shop, and would drink until they could not move. Men and women died in the gutters after too much consumption. 18th century London had more gin shops than we have fast food restaurants

William Maitland, whose *The History of London* was published in the mid-18th century, reckoned that 8,659 gin shops were operating in the city. In one of those ultimately unfathomable changes of taste, the craze for gin subsided. This had nothing to do with the attempt at prohibition, which had become a dead failure. Bad harvests rendered gin more expensive. x Religion and changes in society also brought about change.

East Enders sometimes had idle hours to drink gin, and motive. I’m talking of out of work dock workers. Dockworkers are entitled to another entire story. Occupations tied to the waterfront included stevedores, lighter men, rope makers, porters, carmen and coal-heavers, ship builders, and others. For dockworkers, a regular workweek was not guaranteed, as the arrival of ships was sporadic and on short notice. “An ‘call-on’ system was adopted, whereby a number of times a day, workers would congregate at each of the docks and a foreman would select which ones to hire, often for less than a few hours at a time, based on the availability of work. The system was degrading and encouraged both favoritism and petty corruption, as trade union leader Ben Tillet describes: “We are driven into a shed, iron-barred from end to end, outside of which a foreman or contractor walks up and down with the air of a dealer in a cattle market, picking and choosing from a crowd of men, who, their eagerness to obtain employment, trample each other under foot, and where like beasts, they fight for the chances of a day's work” xi

As for history and evolution of the docks, they included the West India Docks established in 1803, providing berths for larger ships and a model for future London dock building. Imported produce from the West Indies was unloaded directly into quayside warehouses. The old Brunswick Dock, a shipyard at Blackwall became the basis for the East India Company's East India Docks established there in 1806. The London Docks were built in 1805, and the waste soil and rubble from the

construction was carried by barge to west London, to build up the marshy area of Pimlico. These docks imported tobacco, wine, wool and other goods into guarded warehouses within high walls (some of which still remain). They were able to berth over 300 sailing vessels simultaneously, but by 1971 they closed, no longer able to accommodate modern shipping. The most central docks, St Katharine Docks, were built in 1828 to accommodate luxury goods, clearing the slums that lay in the area and in 1864, management of the docks was combined with that of the London Docks. The Millwall Docks were created in 1868, predominantly for the import of grain and timber. These docks housed the first purpose built granary for the Baltic grain market.

Let's talk about the opium den and opium.

Before we continue with opium, a trivia question! What new over-the counter medicine helped cause opium use to be phased out in common household use? Clues: It was the active ingredient of a powdered willow bark whose properties were found to ease inflammation and help cure fevers. In 1899 its name was abbreviated by from *Acetylsalicylic acid*. It is now known as Aspirin. Its German parent company was Bayer. This same company, however, also invented heroin in 1897.

We can recall that when Watson walked through the smoky gloom of the opium den named the "Bar of Gold", describes the experience, "I walked down the narrow of passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying fumes of the drug." Yet all the while who was sitting there but Sherlock Holmes, pretending – or perhaps not – to be smoking an opium pipe, but certainly breathing there normally, and probably for hours, and probably high as a kite! In any case, once they made their way outside, Homes, with a burst of hearty laughter, remarks "I suppose Watson, that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favored me with your medical views." Marek Kohn, author of *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground*, argues that Holmes was typical of a view at the time that cocaine was for "brainy, highly-strung" people who needed constant stimulation. It was a "personal shortcoming" but not a sign of the depravity that drugs would later be associated with.

Of Isa Whitney, for whom Watson searched, found, and sent home, it was said that as a college student he was intrigued by "De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, and so he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. Thomas De Quincey, an English essayist wrote "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater" as an autobiographical account about his laudanum addiction and its effect on his life. It was published in *London Magazine*. The *Confessions* was released in book form in 1822, and in a revised edition in 1856. The book proposed that, unlike alcohol, opium improved the creative powers, an opinion that only served to make the drug more appealing to those searching for artistic and literary inspiration. A number of other writers also played on the perceived glamor of the drug, praising its ability to enhance the imagination.

As to laudanum, what was it, or is it? It was a mixture of alcohol and opium invented in the Sixteenth century. Opium being a yellow-brown, addictive narcotic drug obtained from the dried juice of unripe pods of the opium poppy. By the 1800s laudanum was widely available—it could be easily purchased from pubs, grocers, barber shops, tobacconists, pharmacies, and even confectioners. The drug was often cheaper than alcohol, making it affordable to all levels of society. It was prescribed for everything from soothing a cranky infant to treating headaches, persistent cough, gout, rheumatism, diarrhea, and melancholy

The India-China opium trade was very important to the British economy. Britain had fought two wars in the mid-19th century known as the 'Opium Wars', ostensibly in support of free trade against Chinese restrictions but in reality because of the immense profits to be made in the trading of opium. Since the British captured Calcutta in 1756, the cultivation of poppies for opium had been actively encouraged by the British and the trade formed an important part of India's (and the East India Company's) economy.

Opium and other narcotic drugs played an important part in Victorian life. Shocking though it might be to us in the 21st century, in Victorian times it was possible to walk into a chemist and buy, without prescription, laudanum, cocaine and even arsenic. Opium preparations were sold freely in towns and country markets, indeed the consumption of opium was just as popular in the country as it was in urban areas.

The most popular preparation was laudanum, an alcoholic herbal mixture containing 10% opium. Called the 'aspirin of the nineteenth century,' laudanum was a popular painkiller and relaxant, recommended for all sorts of ailments including coughs, rheumatism, 'women's troubles' and also, perhaps most disturbingly, as a soporific for babies and young children. And as twenty or twenty-five drops of laudanum could be bought for just a penny, it was also affordable.

19th century recipe for a cough mixture: two tablespoonfuls of vinegar, two tablespoonfuls of treacle, 60 drops of laudanum. One teaspoonful to be taken night and morning.

Laudanum addicts would enjoy highs of euphoria followed by deep lows of depression, along with slurred speech and restlessness. Withdrawal symptoms included aches and cramps, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea but even so, it was not until the early 20th century that it was recognized as addictive.

Many notable Victorians are known to have used laudanum as a painkiller. Authors, poets and writers such as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot were users of laudanum. The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley suffered terrible laudanum-induced hallucinations. Robert Clive, 'Clive of India', used laudanum to ease gallstone pain and depression.

Many of the opium-based preparations were targeted at women. Marketed as 'women's friends', these were widely prescribed by doctors for problems with menstruation and childbirth, and even for fashionable female maladies of the day such as 'the vapours', which included hysteria, depression and fainting fits.

Children were also given opiates. To keep them quiet, children were often spoon fed Godfrey's Cordial (also called Mother's Friend), consisting of opium, water and treacle and recommended for colic, hiccups and coughs. Overuse of this dangerous concoction is known to have resulted in the severe illness or death of many infants and children.

The 1868 Pharmacy Act attempted to control the sale and supply of opium-based preparations by ensuring that they could only be sold by registered chemists. However this was largely ineffective, as there was no limit on the amount the chemist could sell to the public.

The Victorian attitude to opium was complex. The middle and upper classes saw the heavy use of laudanum among the lower classes as 'misuse' of the drug; however their own use of opiates was seen as no more than a 'habit'.

The end of the 19th century saw the introduction of a new pain reliever, aspirin. By this time many doctors were becoming concerned about the indiscriminate use of laudanum and its addictive qualities.

There was now a growing anti-opium movement. The public viewed the smoking of opium for pleasure as a vice practiced by Orientals, an attitude fueled by sensationalist journalism and works of fiction such as Sax Rohmer's novels. These books featured the evil arch villain Dr Fu Manchu, an Oriental mastermind determined to take over the Western world.

In 1888 Benjamin Broomhall formed the "Christian Union for the Severance of the British Empire with the Opium Traffic". The anti-opium movement finally won a significant victory in 1910 when after much lobbying, Britain agreed to dismantle the India-China opium trade." ^{xii}

Author Louise Crane's article, "Drugs in Victorian England" offers this insight:

There was an eagerness to understand more about the mind, the body, and the connection between altered mental states and something more spiritual. Experimentation and exploration led to enlightened thinking.

Most Victorians were poor and life was hard: drugs and medicines were vital. Chemists were available for free whereas doctors were not, and most Victorians got their drugs over the counter, without a prescription. The wide range of drugs available at the time is intriguing.



An opium den in London's East End, c. 1880 via Wikimedia Commons

Opium pills were coated in varnish for the working class, silver for the rich, and gold for the very rich. Angelic children frolicked on the bottles of Ayer's Cherry Pectoral, a mixture of alcohol and opium that would now be deemed a poison. Coca leaf, from which cocaine is now obtained, was advertised as a nerve and muscle tonic, to "appease hunger and thirst" and to relieve sickness. ^{xiii}

For some new reading along the lines of "Twisted Lip", the following is offered:

A novel published in 2018 entitled, "Mycroft and Holmes" By Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Anna Waterhouse has a plot in which Sherlock finds himself at home among the street urchins, and when a boy dies of a suspected drug overdose, he decides to investigate, following a trail of strange subterranean symbols to the squalid opium dens of the London docks. Meanwhile a meeting with a beautiful Chinese woman leads Mycroft to the very same mystery, one that forces him to examine the underbelly of the opium trade that is enriching his beloved Britain's coffers.

Related notes, not delivered during presentation:

Quotes from “The Man With the Twisted Lip”

Isa Whitney, was much addicted to opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey’s description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man.

Let’s hear Doyle’s description of the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane as described by Watson.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search. Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecabin of an emigrant ship. Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbor. At the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon his knees, staring into the fire.

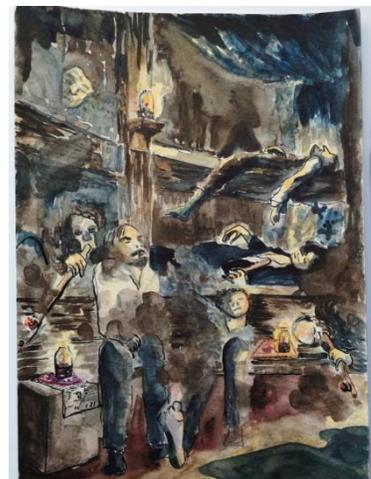
Recommended viewing – a watercolor depiction of an East End opium den:

<https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Drawing-Opium-den-Sherlock-Holmes-illustration/409683/4440950/view>



Photo of a bottle of laudanum

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/representations-of-drugs-in-19th-century-literature#>



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- ^{iv} Koven, Seth, "Slumming- Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London", Princeton University Press, 2004, Introduction
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- ^x Acloyd, Peter, "How London Became Hopelessly Hooked On Gin", The Londonist, Sept 2016, <https://londonist.com/2016/09/london-s-first-gin-boom>
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