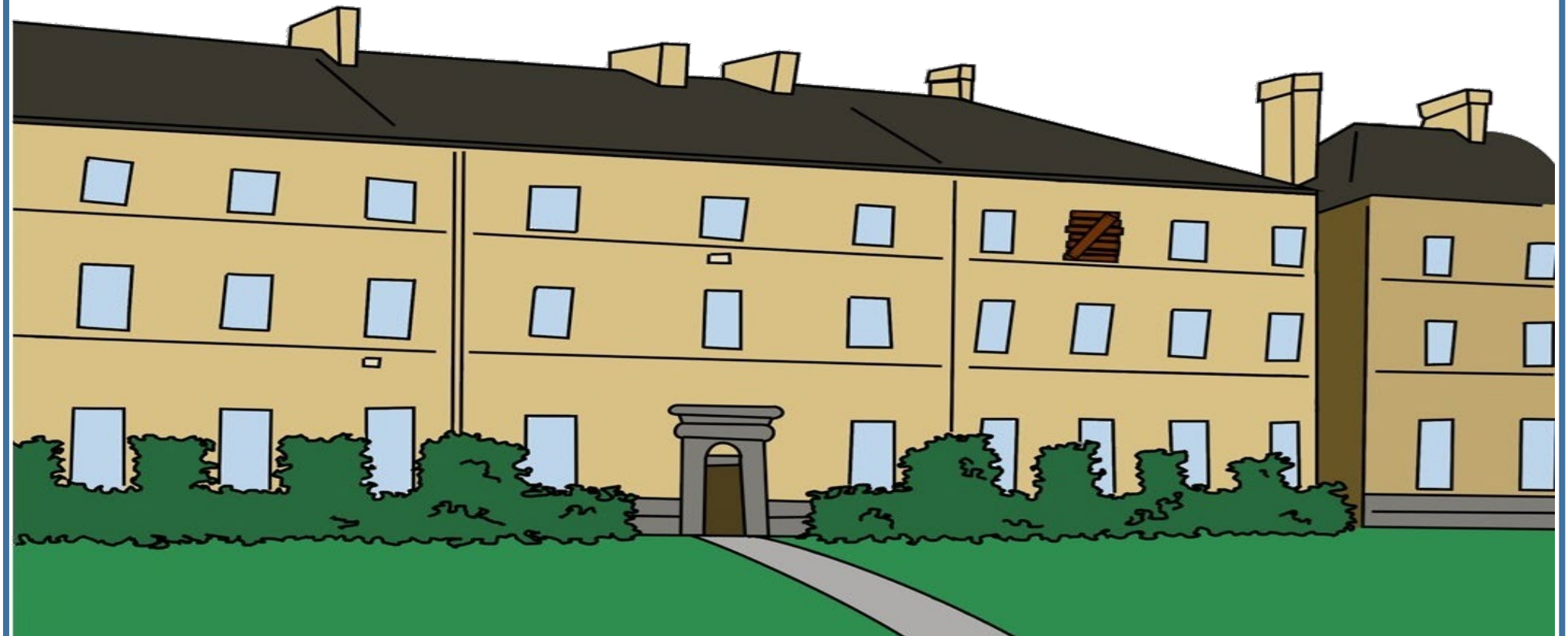
Baker Street *Elementary*

Presents

"The Life and Times in Victorian London"



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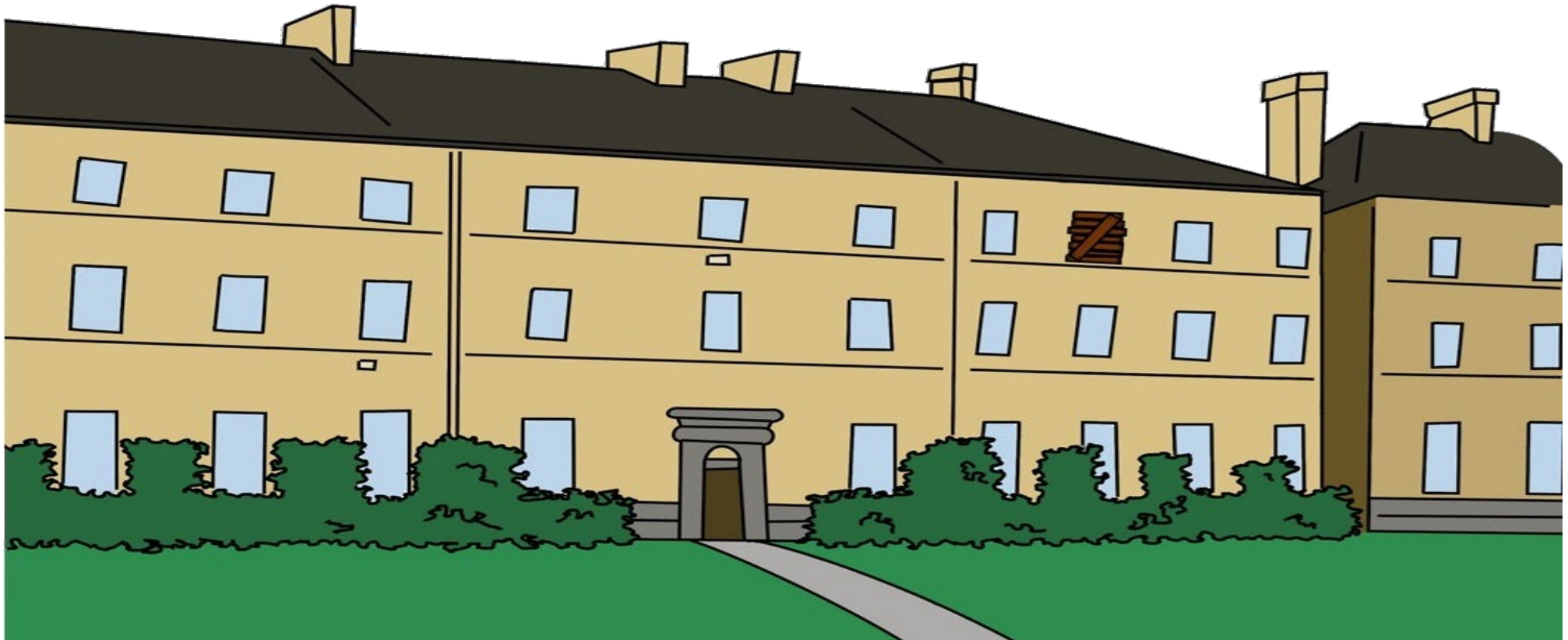
The Life and Times in Victorian London

 # 010 – Practicing Law in Victorian London – January, 2022



Welcome to topic number 10… today, Gregson, we will be looking at how law is being practiced during Victorian times.

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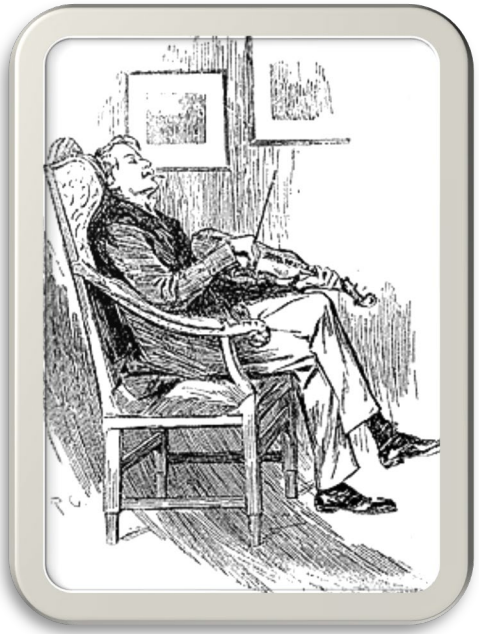
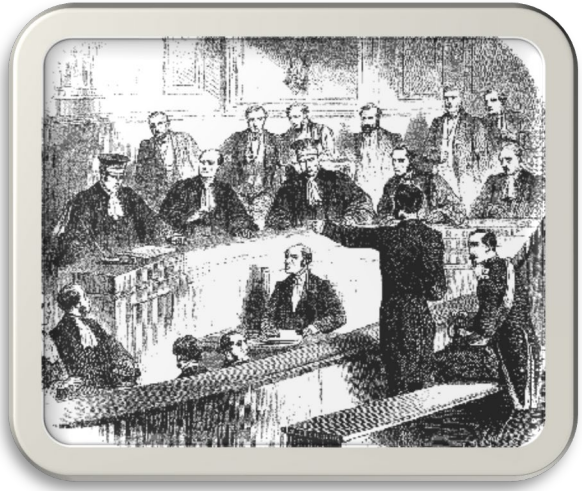


In A Study in Scarlet, Watson notes that Sherlock Holmes "has a good practical knowledge of British law."

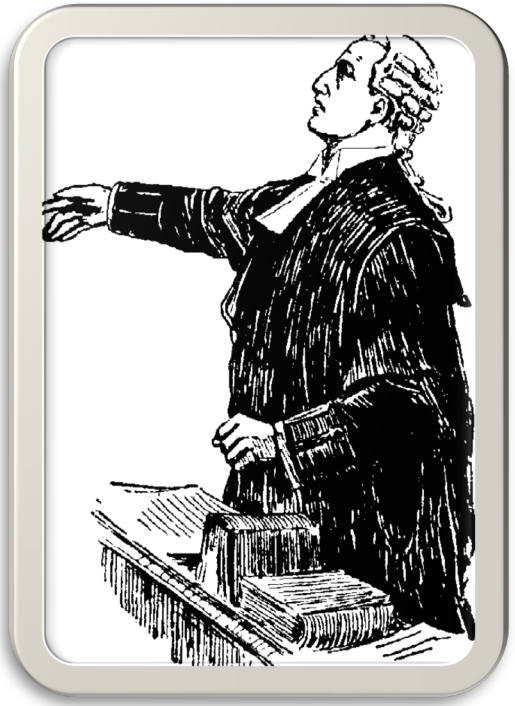
Given his country squire ancestry, a legal background would not have been out of the question for the detective.

Country squires served as justices of the peace, adjudicating various crimes committed within their jurisdiction, and such a background would have provided Holmes an opportunity to observe the legal process while growing up.

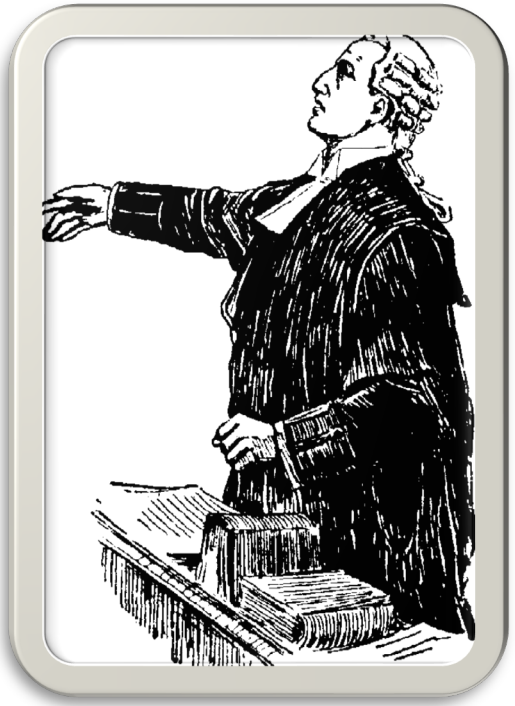
Lestrade, actually becoming a lawyer, however, would have required a great deal of study and training.



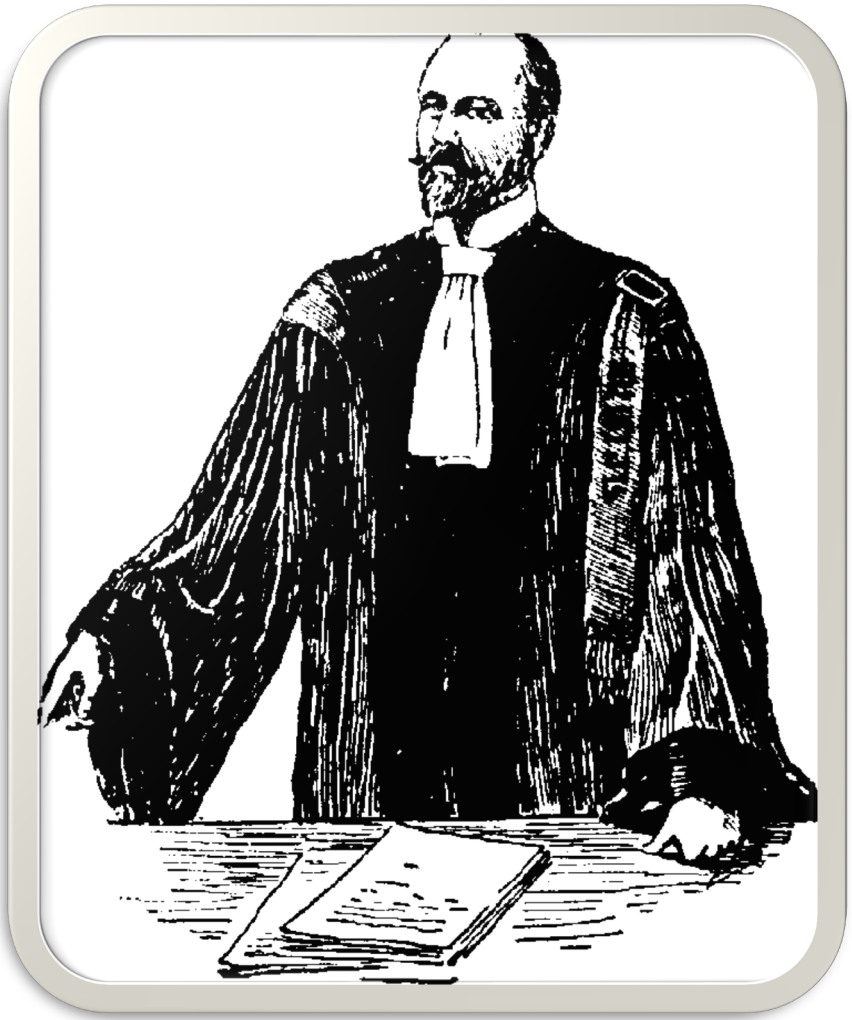
The British legal profession was, and is, divided into two different groups:



those who are able to argue cases in court, primarily barristers, but also sarjeants and advocates; and solicitors, also referred to as attorneys.



These two groups were highly divided with respect to social status, practice, and education.



Barristers held the higher status, argued cases in common-law courts, and gained their education either at the "Inns of Court"…

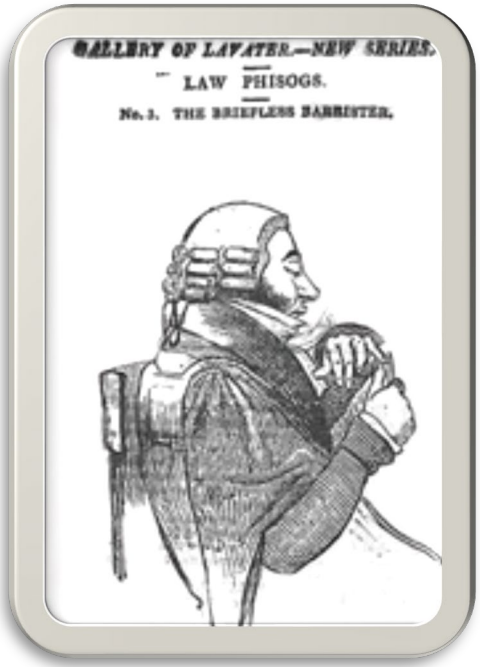
…one of four Inns who determined those who could be "called to the bar" and allowed to present cases in court…

…at the University College in London in 1826, or Oxford or Cambridge law schools established in the 1850s.

Once their education was completed, they were then required to dine at one of the Inns several times a year, and if the older members approved, would be "called to the bar."

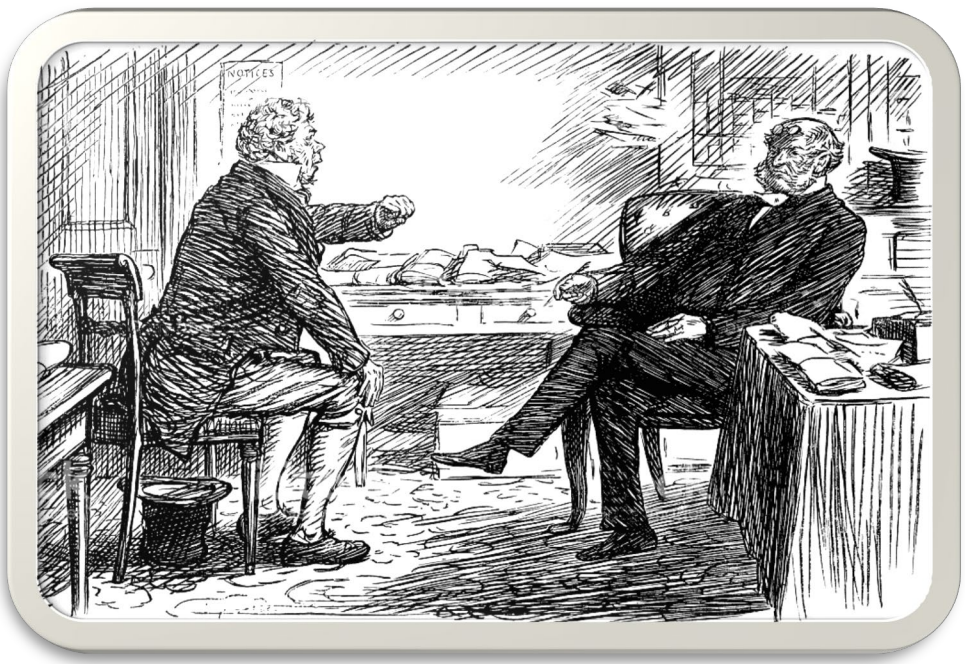
These men were not allowed to form partnerships, but could share chambers.

An individual never hired a barrister directly.



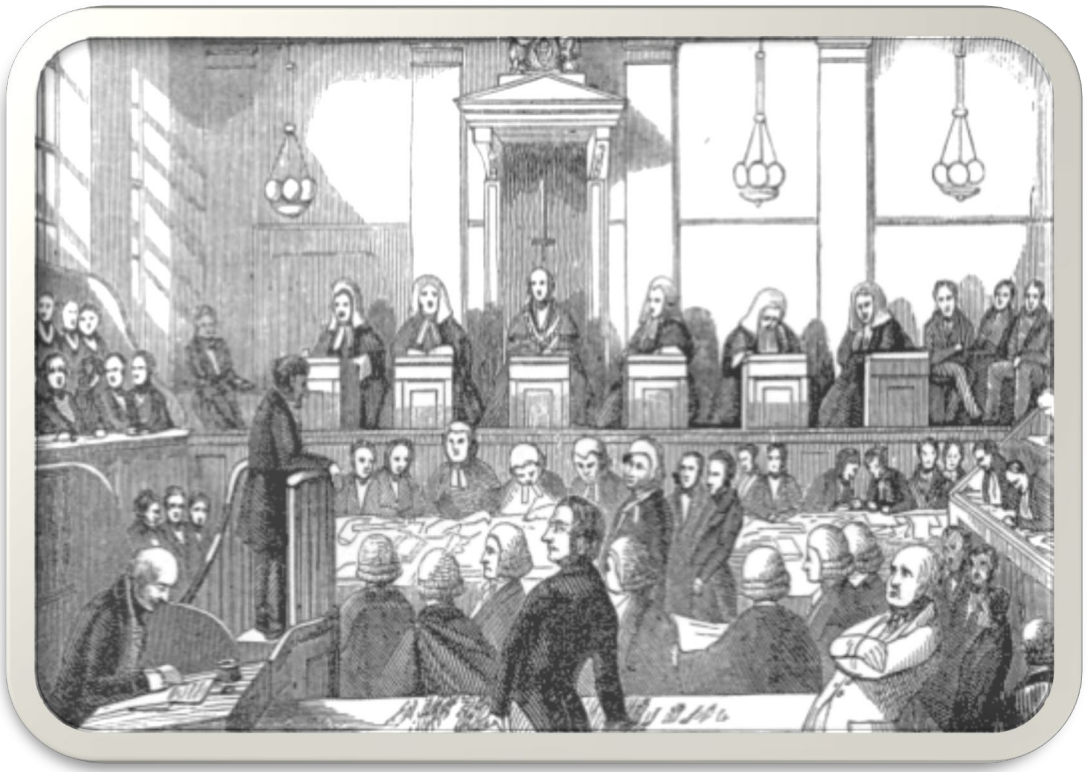
They would contact a solicitor who served as a go-between, selecting the barrister who would argue the case based on the materials collected and prepared by the solicitor.

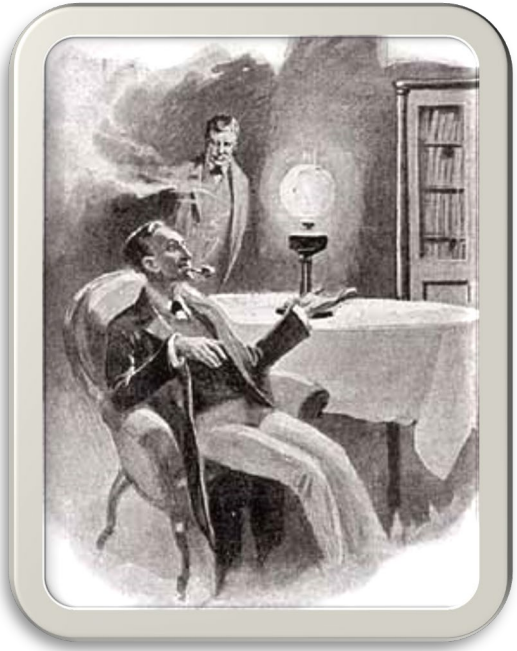
Most towns had at least one solicitor, who was often connected with the area's prominent families and served a number of functions, including clerk of the peace during the justices' of the peace quarterly court sessions.



Because their training involved a five-year apprenticeship, three, if they attended one of the law schools mentioned above, these professionals were considered less prestigious than barristers.

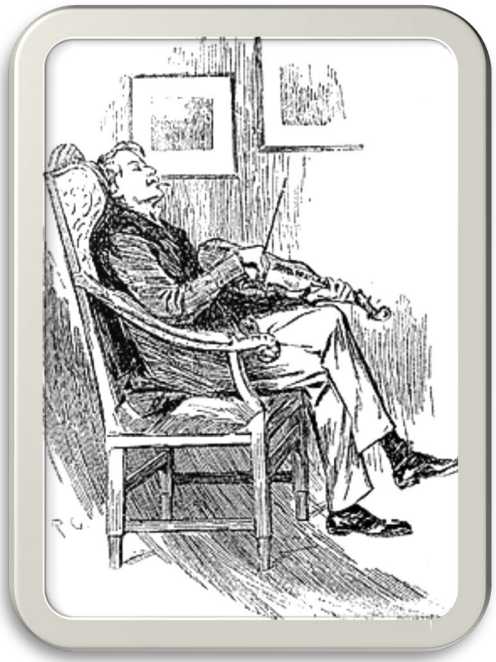
They did, however, have the advantage of forming partnerships.



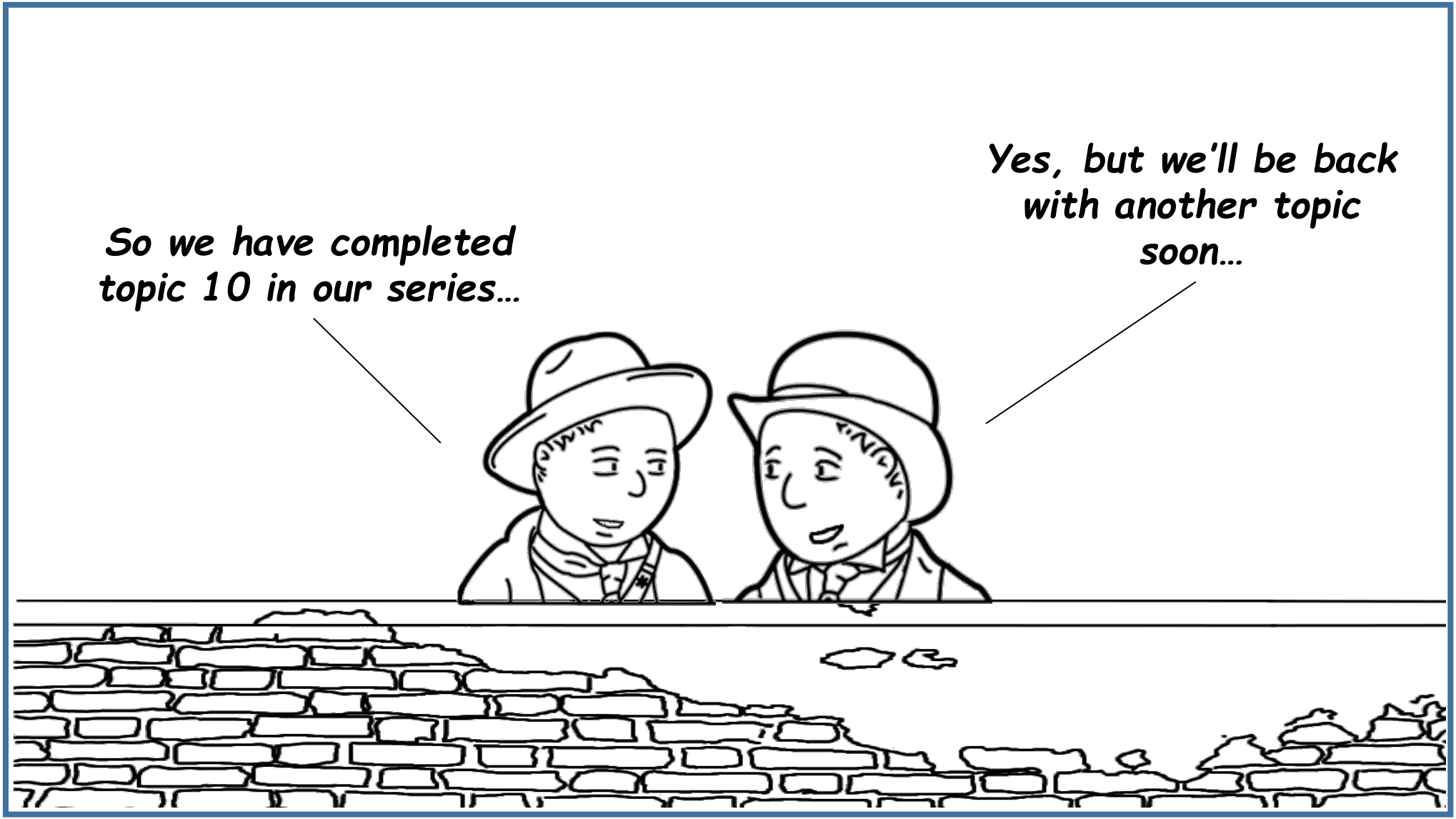


In "The Adventure of the Five Orange Pips," Watson reiterates the characterization of his roommate as a "lawyer."

While no indication exists Sherlock ever completed the formal training to actually use the title….



…he did maintain his legal knowledge in his "brain attic," a necessary tool for identifying whether a crime had occurred as well as who perpetrated it.


So we have completed topic 10 in our series…
Yes, but we'll be back with another topic soon…

References for this topic:

1) Doyle, Arthur Conan (2012-12-13). The Complete Sherlock Holmes: with an introduction from Robert Ryan. Simon & Schuster UK. Kindle Edition.
2) Mitchell, Sally, 1988. Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia (Garland Reference Library of Social Science, vol. 438). Garland Publishing, Inc.

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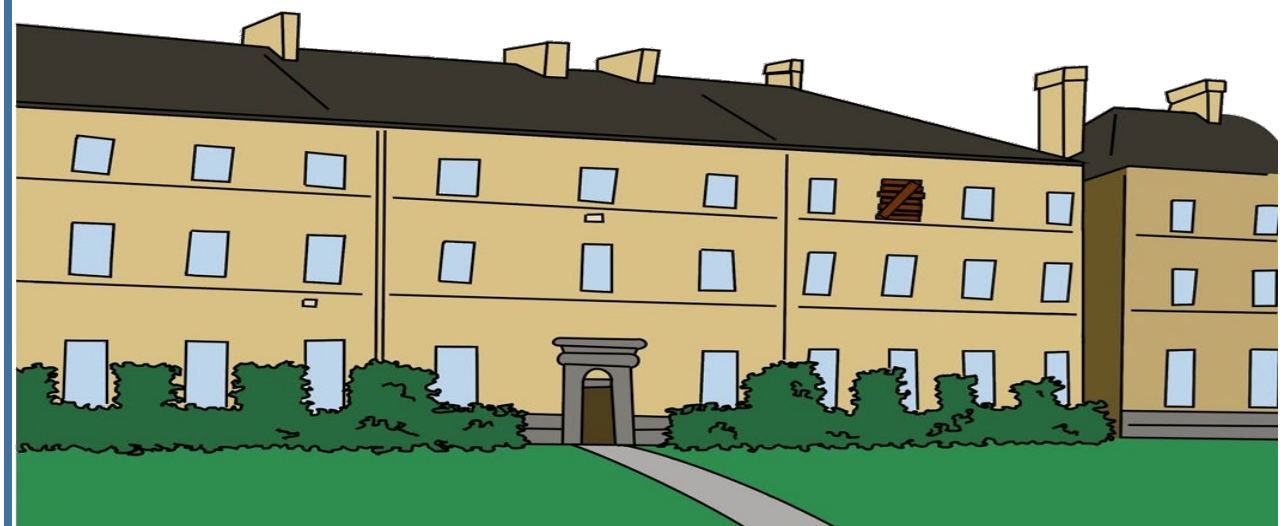
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