

# R. Austin Freeman

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**R(ichard) Austin Freeman** (April 11, 1862 London - September 28, 1943 Gravesend) was a British writer of detective stories, mostly featuring the medico-legal forensic investigator Dr Thorndyke. He invented the inverted detective story and used some of his early experiences as a colonial surgeon in his novels.

A large proportion of the Dr Thorndyke stories involve genuine, but often quite arcane, points of scientific knowledge, from areas such as tropical medicine, metallurgy and toxicology.

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## Life

Austin Freeman was the youngest of the five children of tailor Richard Freeman and Ann Maria Dunn. He first trained as an apothecary and then studied medicine at Middlesex Hospital, qualifying in 1887. The same year he married Annie Elizabeth with whom he had two sons. He entered the Colonial Service and was sent to Accra on the Gold Coast. In 1891 he returned to London after suffering from blackwater fever but was unable to find a permanent medical position, and so decided to settle down in Gravesend and earn money from writing fiction, while continuing to practice medicine. His first stories were written in collaboration with Dr John James Pitcairn (1860-1936), medical officer at Holloway Prison and published under the nom de plume "Clifford Ashdown". His first Thorndyke story, *The Red Thumb Mark*, was published in 1907 and shortly afterwards he pioneered the "inverted story", in which the identity of the criminal is shown from the beginning: some of these were collected in *The Singing Bone* in 1912. During the First World War he served as a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corps and afterwards produced a Thorndyke novel

almost every year until his death in 1943.

## **Bibliography**

- *Travels and Life in Ashanti and Jaman* (1898)

### **Dr. Thorndyke novels and short story collections**

- *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907)
- *John Thorndyke's Cases* (1909), published in the USA as *Dr. Thorndyke's Cases*
- *The Eye of Osiris* (1911), published in the USA as *The Vanishing Man*
- *The Mystery of 31 New Inn* (1912)
- *The Singing Bone* (1912), published in the USA as *The Adventures of Dr Thorndyke*
- *A Silent Witness* (1914)
- *Helen Vardon's Confession* (1922)
- *The Cat's Eye* (1923)
- *Dr. Thorndyke's Casebook* (1923), published in the USA as *The Blue Scarab*
- *The Mystery of Angelina Frood* (1924)
- *The Shadow of the Wolf* (1925)
- *The Puzzle Lock* (1925)
- *The D'Arblay Mystery* (1926)
- *A Certain Dr. Thorndyke* (1927)

- *The Magic Casket* (1927)
- *As A Thief in the Night* (1928)
- *The Famous Cases of Dr. Thorndyke* (1928), published in the USA as *The Dr Thorndyke Omnibus*
- *Mr. Pottermack's Oversight* (1930)
- *Pontifex, Son and Thorndyke* (1931)
- *When Rogues Fall Out* (1932), published in the USA as *Dr. Thorndyke's Discovery*
- *Dr. Thorndyke Intervenes* (1933)
- *For the Defence: Dr. Thorndyke* (1934)
- *The Penrose Mystery* (1936)
- *Felo de Se* (1937), published in the USA as *Death At The Inn*
- *The Stoneware Monkey* (1938)
- *Mr. Polton Explains* (1940)
- *Dr. Thorndyke's Crime File* (1941)
- *The Jacob Street Mystery* (1942), published in the USA as *The Unconscious Witness*

## **Other novels and short story collections**

- *The Adventures of Romney Pringle*, with John Pitcairn, as Clifford Ashdown (1902)
- *The Further Adventures of Romney Pringle*, with John Pitcairn, as Clifford Ashdown (1903)
- *From a Surgeon's Diary*, with John Pitcairn, as Clifford Ashdown (1904-5)

- *The Golden Pool: A Story of a Forgotten Mine* (1907)
- *The Unwilling Adventurer* (1913)
- *The Uttermost Farthing* (1913), published in the USA as *A Savant's Vendetta*
- *The Exploits of Danby Croker* (1916)
- *The Great Portrait Mystery* (1918)
- *The Surprising Experiences of Mr Shuttlebury Cobb* (1927)
- *Flighty Phyllis* (1928)
- *The Queen's Treasure*, with John Pitcairn, as Clifford Ashdown (1975)

## References

- *Murder Will Out: The Detective in Fiction*, T. J. Binyon (Oxford, 1989)
- *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes: Early Detective Stories*, ed. Hugh Greene (Penguin, 1971)

## External links

- Works by R Austin Freeman at Project Gutenberg
- Works by R Austin Freeman at Project Gutenberg of Australia

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