



he house in Oxford to which

we retreated was in the northern district of the town, a tree-studded neighbourhood of large brick houses inhabited by dons and their families.

It is close enough to town that a stroll to the Bodleian and Radcliffe libraries, even with an arm full of books, is a pleasant interlude; it is far enough from the centre that the wrangle of bells of a Sunday morning is amusing, not headache-inducing.

My house is like its fellows from the outside, with high walls on all sides, a spacious gravel drive at the front, and a narrow turret glued onto one corner. The house and its garden are too nondescript for any passer-by to bother with a second glance, and as far as the neighbours are concerned, the owner is an independent older woman who spends much of her live travelling and working on her academic studies, which (it being Oxford) could be Romanian campanology or liver flukes of the upper Nile.

Once upon a time, Holmes had arrived at my student flat through an upper window, setting off an elaborate and circuitous traverse of Oxford's roof-tops in the snow.

Fortunately for us, this time I was permitted to drive through the elaborate and circuitous city roads in the actor's Mercedes.

