

CASE ARCHIVE

COLD CASE PUZZLE FILES

Five Fictional Cases. Five Sets of Clues. One Detective: You.

Reopen the files. Decode the evidence. Rebuild the timelines. Decide what really happened.

PRINTABLE INVESTIGATION DOSSIER

DETECTIVE BRIEFING

Five cases have been pulled from the archive. Each was closed without a satisfying answer. Your job is to work from the evidence inside the file, separate useful facts from distractions, and make the final deduction.

Every case in this book is fictional. The people, places, businesses, events, and evidence were invented for the puzzles.

HOW TO INVESTIGATE

Read the case summary first. Then work through every evidence item. Write directly on the worksheets if you print the book. Do not open the solutions section until you have committed to an answer.

The cases use different mechanics: substitution cipher, logic grid, timeline and alibi reconstruction, map/location deduction, and code breaking.

CASE 01: THE LOCKED RECORD ROOM

PRIMARY PUZZLE: SUBSTITUTION CIPHER

At 8:10 on a rainy Thursday morning, archivist Mara Venn unlocked the basement record room at Bellweather Historical Society and found a display case open. A handwritten 1924 railway ledger, scheduled for public exhibition that weekend, was gone. There was no forced entry. The basement door had been locked overnight, and only four people had authorized keys: Mara, facilities manager Owen Pike, curator Celia Frost, and volunteer coordinator Dean Mercer.

The previous evening, all four had been in the building. Mara left at 6:20. Celia said she spent 6:15 to 6:45 upstairs photographing donation boxes. Owen said he checked the boiler at 6:30 and left through the loading entrance. Dean said he finished volunteer schedules in the office and departed at 6:40.

Investigators found one unusual item beneath the empty display: a torn strip of paper containing a coded message. The display lock itself was undamaged. A humidity log showed the record-room door opened at 6:32 and closed at 6:36. The hallway camera had been offline since 5:50 because of a scheduled network reset. Someone with a key had four quiet minutes in the room.

YOUR OBJECTIVE

Decode Evidence E. Then decide which key holder's account is contradicted by the combined evidence.

ARCHIVE 17-B | EVIDENCE BOARD

EVIDENCE A: DOOR LOG

Record-room access: 6:32 PM open. 6:36 PM closed. No other opening recorded until 8:10 AM.

EVIDENCE B: PHOTO METADATA

Celia's donation-box photos are timestamped 6:18, 6:27, 6:35 and 6:43 PM from the second-floor collection room.

EVIDENCE C: BOILER CONTROLLER

The boiler panel records a manual maintenance acknowledgement at 6:31 PM. The boiler room is beside the loading entrance, one floor below the archive corridor.

EVIDENCE D: VOLUNTEER PRINTER

Dean's office printer logged the final volunteer schedule at 6:11 PM. No computer activity is recorded after 6:14.

EVIDENCE E: CODED STRIP

QEB IBADBO FP FK QEB YIRB CLIIBO.

Cipher Scratchpad

Hint: the same shift is applied to every letter.

ARCHIVE 17-B | FINAL DEDUCTION

Decode Evidence E. Then decide which key holder's account is contradicted by the combined evidence.

My answer:

Evidence that matters most:

Evidence I ruled out or treated as secondary:

CASE 02: THE MISSING TROPHY

PRIMARY PUZZLE: LOGIC GRID

The silver Hawthorne Cup vanished during the final hour of the Northbridge Community Club's centennial reception. At 9:00 PM it was visible inside a glass cabinet in the west lounge. At 9:45, when the chairman went to retrieve it for photographs, the cabinet was empty. The lock had been opened normally.

Four committee members had cabinet access: Alice Rowan, Ben Hale, Carla Wynn, and David Moss. During the critical period, each person was seen in one different location: kitchen, terrace, library, or west lounge. Each also carried one different item for the event: camera, flower box, speech folder, or key pouch.

Witnesses remembered fragments, but nobody had the whole picture. The person in the west lounge had the key pouch. Ben was not in the lounge or library. Carla was not carrying the key pouch. Alice was on the terrace. The camera was with the person in the library. David did not carry flowers. The kitchen volunteer remembered the flower box arriving there at 9:20.

Use the grid to match each person to one location and one item. The person in the west lounge had the only item containing the cabinet key.

YOUR OBJECTIVE

Complete the logic grid. Who was in the west lounge with the key pouch?

FILE 22-C | EVIDENCE BOARD

CLUE 1
Alice was on the terrace.

CLUE 2
The person in the west lounge carried the key pouch.

CLUE 3
Ben was neither in the west lounge nor the library.

CLUE 4
Carla was not carrying the key pouch.

CLUE 5
The camera was with the person in the library.

CLUE 6
David did not carry the flower box. The flower box went to the kitchen.

Logic Grid: Locations

	Kitchen	Terrace	Library	West Lounge
Alice	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ben	☐	☐	☐	☐
Carla	☐	☐	☐	☐
David	☐	☐	☐	☐

Logic Grid: Items

	Camera	Flowers	Speech Folder	Key Pouch
Alice	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ben	☐	☐	☐	☐
Carla	☐	☐	☐	☐
David	☐	☐	☐	☐

Mark possibilities and eliminations. Each person has one location and one item.

FILE 22-C | FINAL DEDUCTION

Complete the logic grid. Who was in the west lounge with the key pouch?

My answer:

Evidence that matters most:

Evidence I ruled out or treated as secondary:

CASE 03: THE LAST TRAIN ALIBI

PRIMARY PUZZLE: TIMELINE / ALIBI

At 10:05 PM, stationmaster Elias Ward discovered that a sealed envelope containing the proceeds from a charity auction had disappeared from the locked drawer in his office at Redwick Station. The drawer had last been checked at 9:15 PM. Four people remained in the station after the auction: porter Nina Bell, caterer Tom Arlen, auction clerk Priya Shaw, and musician Leo Grant.

The office sits off the main concourse. Walking times matter: platform to office, three minutes; café to office, two minutes; parking lot to office, four minutes; waiting room to office, one minute. The drawer key was temporarily kept behind the ticket counter.

A train arrived at 9:32 and departed at 9:38. Nina says she was on the platform for the entire stop. Tom says he was cleaning the café from 9:25 until 9:50. Priya says she carried boxes to her car and returned at 9:44. Leo says he stayed in the waiting room until his taxi arrived at 9:41.

A receipt printer, parking gate, platform log and taxi record allow you to rebuild the window in which each person could have reached the office.

YOUR OBJECTIVE

Who had an unaccounted window large enough to collect the key, enter the office, take the envelope and return the key by 9:36?

FILE 31-A | EVIDENCE BOARD

PLATFORM LOG
Nina scanned baggage at 9:31, 9:34 and 9:37.

CAFÉ RECEIPT
A staff meal was closed on Tom's register at 9:29. The next register action was 9:48.

PARKING GATE
Priya's vehicle exited at 9:27 and re-entered at 9:43.

TAXI RECORD
Leo's taxi entered the station loop at 9:40 and departed at 9:42.

TICKET COUNTER
The temporary drawer key was returned to its hook at 9:36.

Timeline

Person	9:25	9:30	9:35	9:40-9:45
Nina				
Tom				
Priya				
Leo				

FILE 31-A | FINAL DEDUCTION

Who had an unaccounted window large enough to collect the key, enter the office, take the envelope and return the key by 9:36?

My answer:

Evidence that matters most:

Evidence I ruled out or treated as secondary:

CASE 04: THE LIGHTHOUSE MAP

PRIMARY PUZZLE: MAP / LOCATION

A brass navigation compass disappeared from the keeper's cottage at Greyhaven Lighthouse during a historical open house. The cottage was closed to visitors from 2:00 to 2:30 PM while volunteers reset the exhibit. At 2:25, the compass was missing.

Four volunteers were assigned nearby: Mira at the ticket booth, Jonah at the boathouse, Elise at the cliff garden, and Rowan at the signal shed. Each location connects to the cottage by marked footpaths. A sudden five-minute rain shower began at 2:12. The wet ground preserved useful information.

The ticket booth is west of the cottage. The boathouse is south by the water. The garden is east. The signal shed is north. Direct paths from each location meet at the cottage. The west and east paths are gravel. The north path is packed dirt. The south path crosses a short wooden footbridge.

At 2:20, a volunteer found one fresh muddy shoe print on the cottage's north step. No wet prints were found on the gravel approaches or the wooden bridge.

YOUR OBJECTIVE

Which volunteer most likely approached the cottage during the closed period, and from which direction?

FILE 44-D | EVIDENCE BOARD

MAP KEY

North: signal shed. South: boathouse. East: cliff garden. West: ticket booth. All four paths terminate at the cottage.

WEATHER

Rain fell from 2:12 to 2:17. The north packed-dirt path became muddy. Gravel drained quickly. The bridge itself does not hold footprints.

WITNESS

A visitor spoke with Mira at the ticket booth from 2:10 to 2:19.

BOAT LOG

Jonah signed a life-jacket return at the boathouse at 2:16.

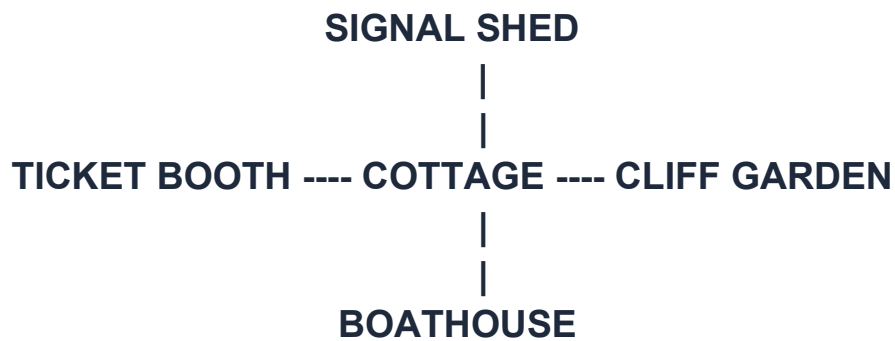
GARDEN PHOTO

Elise appears in a visitor's garden photo timestamped 2:18.

PHYSICAL CLUE

A fresh muddy shoe print was found on the cottage's north step at 2:20.

Location Map



FILE 44-D | FINAL DEDUCTION

Which volunteer most likely approached the cottage during the closed period, and from which direction?

My answer:

Evidence that matters most:

Evidence I ruled out or treated as secondary:

CASE 05: THE CLOCKMAKER'S BOX

PRIMARY PUZZLE: CODE BREAKING

When clockmaker Silas Reed died, he left a small locked box to the town museum with one instruction: "The combination is already in my workshop." The museum's curator expected a simple three-number code. Instead, the workshop contained dozens of clocks, handwritten repair cards and a peculiar note pinned above the bench.

Before the box could be catalogued, someone tried to force it open, damaging the outer latch but not the combination wheels. Nothing was taken. The curator decided to solve the code before moving the box.

Four apprentices had worked with Silas in his final years: Ada, Bram, Cora and Felix. Each offered a theory. Ada said the code was a date. Bram insisted it came from the serial number on Silas's favorite clock. Cora thought the repair cards mattered. Felix said Silas always hid instructions in plain sight.

The note reads: "FIRST, count what CHIMES. SECOND, take what is MISSING. THIRD, use the hour that NEVER MOVES." Three workshop observations supply the rest.

YOUR OBJECTIVE

What three-digit combination opens the box?

FILE 58-E | EVIDENCE BOARD

OBSERVATION 1

At noon, Silas's favorite mantel clock strikes exactly 7 times because its chime mechanism is intentionally incomplete.

OBSERVATION 2

A repair card lists gears numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9. One number is absent.

OBSERVATION 3

A painted demonstration clock on the wall has fixed hands. The hour hand points to 4 and cannot move.

THE NOTE

FIRST, count what CHIMES. SECOND, take what is MISSING. THIRD, use the hour that NEVER MOVES.

BOX

The lock accepts three single digits in order.

Combination Worksheet

FIRST: _____ SECOND: _____ THIRD: _____

FILE 58-E | FINAL DEDUCTION

What three-digit combination opens the box?

My answer:

Evidence that matters most:

Evidence I ruled out or treated as secondary:

DETECTIVE'S NOTEBOOK

Case: _____ Suspect / Answer: _____

FACTS I KNOW

QUESTIONS I STILL HAVE

CONTRADICTIONS

MY WORKING THEORY

CASE SOLUTIONS

Stop here unless you are ready to close the files.

Case 1: THE LOCKED RECORD ROOM

ANSWER: Dean Mercer

The cipher is a Caesar shift of 3 and decodes to "THE LEDGER IS IN THE BLUE FOLDER." Celia has timestamped activity upstairs spanning the access window. Owen's boiler acknowledgement at 6:31 places him at the boiler immediately before the archive opened, which is possible but supports his stated task. Dean claimed to be finishing schedules until about 6:40, yet his last computer and printer activity ended by 6:14. His stated alibi does not cover 6:32 to 6:36. The coded strip points to knowledge of where the ledger was concealed. Of the four accounts, Dean's is the one directly contradicted by the records.

Case 2: THE MISSING TROPHY

ANSWER: David Moss

Alice is fixed on the terrace. Ben cannot be lounge or library, so he must be in the kitchen, and the kitchen's item is the flower box. The library carries the camera. Carla cannot carry the key pouch, and David does not carry flowers. With Ben in the kitchen and Alice on the terrace, the remaining locations are library and west lounge for Carla and David. If David were in the library, he would carry the camera and Carla would be in the lounge with the key pouch, contradicting the clue that Carla did not have the key pouch. Therefore Carla is in the library with the camera, and David is in the west lounge with the key pouch.

Case 3: THE LAST TRAIN ALIBI

ANSWER: Tom Arlen

Nina has platform scans at 9:31, 9:34 and 9:37, making a round trip to the office before the key was returned at 9:36 impractical. Priya's car was outside the station from 9:27 to 9:43. Leo was in the waiting-room area and his taxi record supports his departure at 9:42, but the key was already back by 9:36. Tom's only electronic activity between 9:29 and 9:48 is absent. From the café, the office is two minutes away, leaving ample time to reach the counter, use the key, enter the office and return it before 9:36. His claim of continuous cleaning is unsupported during the critical window.

Case 4: THE LIGHTHOUSE MAP

ANSWER: Rowan, from the north signal-shed path

The decisive location clue is the fresh muddy print on the north step after the 2:12 to 2:17 rain. The north path is the only packed-dirt route and leads directly from Rowan's signal shed. Mira is witnessed at the west booth through 2:19, Jonah has a 2:16 boathouse log, and Elise appears in the east garden at 2:18. The physical trail points north, toward Rowan's assignment.

Case 5: THE CLOCKMAKER'S BOX

ANSWER: 754

The note gives the order. First, count what chimes: the mantel clock strikes 7 times. Second, take what is missing: gear number 5 is absent from the repair card. Third, use the hour that never moves: the fixed demonstration clock points to 4. The combination is 7-5-4.

ARCHIVE CLOSED

Five cases reopened. Five deductions made.

The best investigators do not chase every detail. They ask which facts can coexist, which claims cannot, and which piece of evidence changes the whole case.

CASE FILES 01-05 • FICTIONAL INVESTIGATION PUZZLES