A LETTER FROM MARA VALE

Dear Assistant,

Welcome to the Briarbridge Lost & Found Bureau. Your desk is the one by the window. Your badge is the brass one in the top drawer, a key crossed with a quill.

You find us at sixes and sevens. One Tuesday early last month our Archivist, Mr Ambrose Pell, did not come to work. With him went the leather book the town calls the Register. Worse, he had cut the answer out of every open case we have, and we cannot say for certain who owns what.

Half the town thinks he has stolen it. I have known Ambrose for nineteen years, and I think nothing of the kind. If the Register is gone, he had a reason.

The leather book went with him; the File stayed. That is his name for this cabinet of twenty open files. By town custom an open file stays everything: nothing in it can be settled until the Bureau answers. Most have somebody waiting under a cloud. Each is complete but for one word, the word that explains everything. In its place he has pinned five word ladders.

A note on the cabinet says: ‘For my successor. Mind the gaps.’

Three weeks from now, on a Tuesday at six, the Town Clerk holds the Quarter Sitting, and it does two things. Every open file with no answer from the Bureau is decided against the person accused. And a dealer named Corwin Slate has put in a claim for everything of value in the files, and for the Register itself. Whatever we cannot prove him wrong about, he gets. He crossed the bay to Saltmere soon after Ambrose went, and does his business by post.

Each answer you find puts somebody right for now. It is final only if a keeper stands up for it on Tuesday. I cannot: I am Curator, I keep the building and the kettle, not the File, and the Clerk will not hear me. I believe Ambrose meant to be away, and any answer he wrote, Mr Slate would have copied. Solve the ladders, and read his note after each: it says where next.

In great haste,

Mara Vale
Curator, Briarbridge Lost & Found Bureau

RECEIVED
DAY ONE

HOW THE FILES WORK

Every case in this book is solved the same way, in five steps.

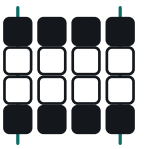
1 READ THE CASE FILE

Every case opens with a briefing: what has gone missing or gone wrong, who is worried about it, and a question with three possible answers. One word has been cut from the file. It is always a five-letter word, and it is the key to the case.



2 CLIMB THE FIVE LADDERS

Each case has five exhibits, A to E. Every exhibit is a piece of evidence with a word ladder beneath it. The top and bottom words of the ladder are printed for you, and both appear in the exhibit in CAPITALS. Fill in the missing words between them. Each word differs from the word above it by exactly one letter, in the same position.



3 COLLECT THE EVIDENCE LETTERS

In every ladder one square is shaded. When you have solved the ladder, copy the letter from the shaded square into the matching box on the case file page. Five ladders give five letters, and together they make the missing word.



4 CRACK THE CASE

Now read the briefing and exhibits again with the missing word in mind. It will rule out the wrong answers and point to the right one. Tick your theory, then turn to its solution. Read the Archivist's note there before opening the next file: it says where to look.



5 FILL IN THE MASTER LOG

Each time you close a case, write its missing word in the Master Log on page 12. One square in every row is shaded. When all twenty words are in place, the shaded squares, read from top to bottom, answer the biggest question of all.



FOUR LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

The cabinet gets harder as you go. Every level keeps the rules of the level before and takes away a little more help.

GENTLE
CASES 1 TO 5

Every missing word has its own clue, printed beside its rung. Read the clue, check that only one letter changes, write the word in.

STEADY
CASES 6 TO 10

The clues are pinned up in no particular order, and you must work out which clue belongs to which rung. Two clues on every board are red herrings: they fit no rung at all.

TRICKY
CASES 11 TO 15

The clues stop being definitions and start coming at you sideways: sayings, riddles, double meanings. Two are still red herrings, and now one rung in every ladder has no clue at all. Only one word can stand between its neighbours.

FIENDISH
CASES 16 TO 20

Riddle clues, two red herrings, and now up to two rungs with no clue. Worse, the five evidence letters arrive out of order: collect all five, then unscramble them to find the missing word.

THE RULES OF THE LADDER

HARDER AS YOU GO

- Change exactly one letter at each step. Never add, remove or rearrange letters.
- Every rung is an ordinary English word. No names, no abbreviations.
- A true clue describes one rung and one rung only. A red herring describes a real word that has no place on the ladder.
- The shaded square is always in a missing word, so you must solve the ladder to earn the letter.
- Spellings are British (so a car has a tyre), but the vocabulary is everyday on both sides of the Atlantic.

DETECTIVE'S TIPS

1. **Work from both ends.** The word above the bottom rung is only one letter away from it.
2. **Count what has to change.** Compare the top and bottom words: every letter that differs must change at least once on the way down.
3. With shuffled clues, start with the clue you are surest of and ask where its word could sit.
4. **Pencil, not pen.** Detectives change their minds.
5. Stuck? The Hint Desk at the back has three hints for every case, from a gentle nudge to a firm push.
6. **Solve the cases in order.** A quiet story runs through all twenty, and the levels build on one another.

WHO'S WHO AT THE BUREAU

MARA VALE — CURATOR



Nineteen years at the Bureau. Dry, quick, loyal to a fault, and hopeless at word ladders. She will hand you every file and put the kettle on.

AMBROSE PELL — THE ARCHIVIST



Thirty-one years without a careless act. Vanished last month with the leather book. Calls the cabinet 'the File'. Trusts nobody who copies.

CORWIN SLATE — DEALER, QUAY STREET



Charming, patient, and always somewhere near whatever is valuable. Crossed the bay soon after, and now presses his claims by post, under a violet seal.

YOU — THE NEW ASSISTANT



Day one. A brass badge, a desk by the window, a cabinet of twenty files, and a pencil. Mind the gaps.

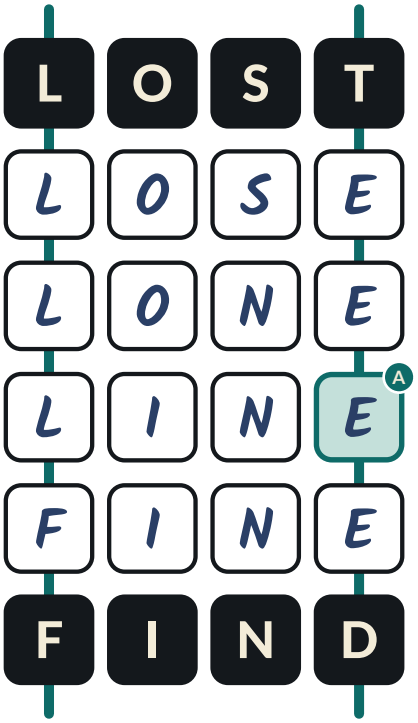
A WORKED EXAMPLE

Here is a training ladder, already solved, so you can see how everything fits together. It is not one of the hundred.

LOST & FOUND BUREAU · EVIDENCE CARD — TRAINING FILE · EXHIBIT A

A Note On The Bureau Door

A note found pinned to the Bureau door: ‘Things are only **LOST** until somebody takes the trouble to **FIND** them.’



START

1. Fail to win
2. Solitary; single
3. A queue; a mark made with a ruler
4. Sunny and dry; a penalty to pay

FINISH

WHAT CHANGED AT EACH STEP

LOST to LOSE: the fourth letter changes, T to E.
LOSE to LONE: the third letter changes, S to N.
LONE to LINE: the second letter changes, O to I.
LINE to FINE: the first letter changes, L to F.
FINE to FIND: the fourth letter changes, E to D.

The Evidence Letter. The shaded square is the fourth square of the third missing word, LINE. So the evidence letter from this ladder is E. In a real case you would copy it into box A on the case file page.

01 CASE FILE ●○○○ GENTLE

BRIARBRIDGE LOST & FOUND BUREAU

THE CLOCK THAT STOPPED TWICE



WHERE Town Hall Clock Tower
REPORTED BY Horace Finch, clockmaker

HORACE Finch has wound the Town Hall clock every Friday since he was a lad. One Monday at the end of September, as the lamps were lit, it stopped a minute short of a quarter past six, and went on by itself twenty minutes later. Finch climbed the tower, found no fault and set it right. On Tuesday it did the same.

Those were the evenings of the Autumn Fly, the town's pigeon race. The fifty-pound prize is shared by birds home both evenings before the clock strikes the quarter. It is still unpaid. The Council blamed Finch for a neglected clock, and gave notice on his shop.

Finch blamed Toby Marsh, the apprentice he had scolded that week. Or Councillor Agnes Dray, who wants her nephew's firm to sell the town an electric clock. Or Sid Gammon, who flew a hen from his loft on the Town Hall roof. Then the Archivist opened this file, and by town custom everything froze.

'Finch's notice stands,' says Mara Vale. 'The Quarter Sitting is twenty-one days off, and an unanswered file goes against the person accused. His shop goes, and the prize is paid. The Archivist's last line: "Look behind the parapet, beside the face. There is a" – snip. Find the word.'

THE QUESTION — TICK ONE THEORY WHEN YOU HAVE THE MISSING WORD

LEVEL 1 GENTLE

WHO STOPPED THE TOWN HALL CLOCK?

A THEORY ☐

Toby Marsh, the apprentice.

B THEORY ☐

Councillor Dray, who wants a new clock.

C THEORY ☐

Sid Gammon, the pigeon man.

THE MISSING WORD

One letter from each exhibit, A to E.
Then enter the word in the Master Log, page 12.

A	B	C	D	E

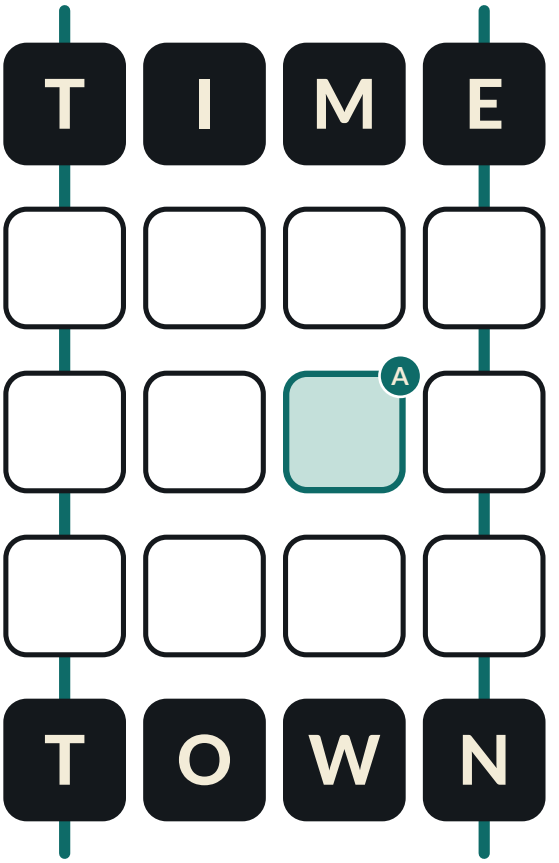
POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

CASE 01 · EXHIBIT A

RE: THE CLOCKMAKER'S LOG

'I blamed the boy in my temper. In fairness, Toby was at my own bench on Monday, and on Tuesday at choir practice across **TOWN** the whole **TIME**. An odd week: a gentleman stopped me to ask at what hours the Bureau stands empty.'

Climb from **TIME** to **TOWN**, one letter at a time. Each rung has its clue beside it.

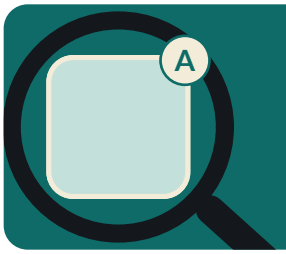


START

1. Grow weary
2. Ripped: 'he ___ up the letter'
3. Ripped: 'a ___ sleeve'

FINISH

Tea first. Then think. A.P.



EVIDENCE LETTER A

Copy the letter from the shaded square into box A on page 13.

THE MISSING WORD

A B C D E

PAGE 13

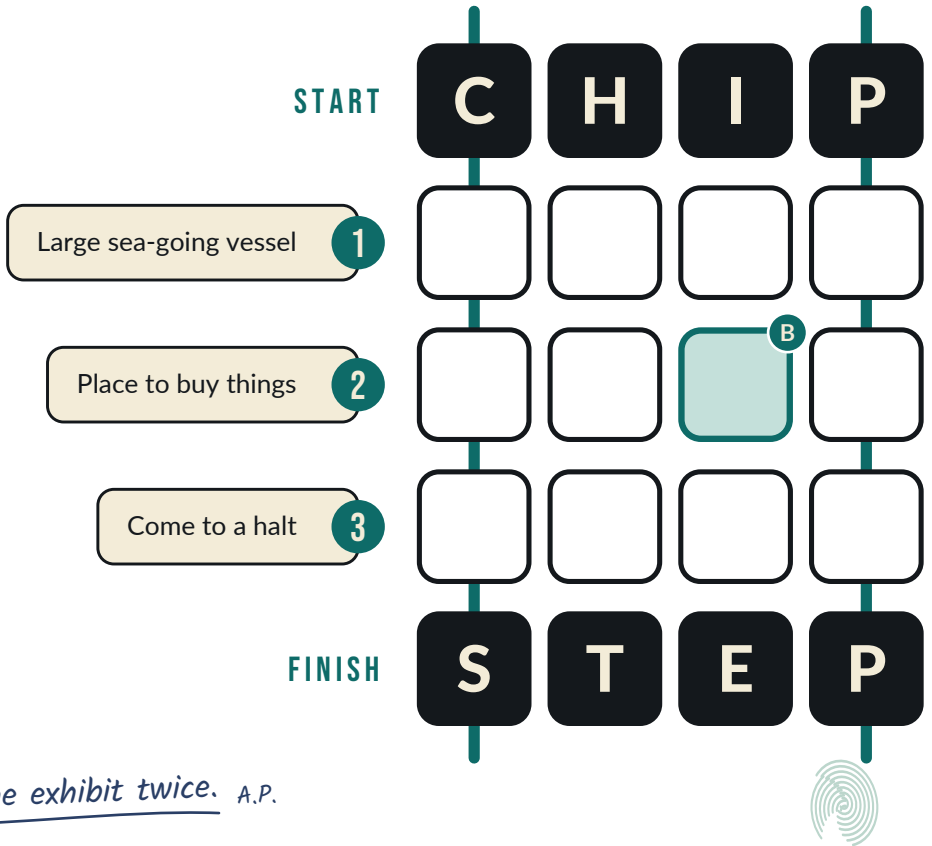
LOST & FOUND BUREAU · EVIDENCE CARD

CASE 01 · EXHIBIT B

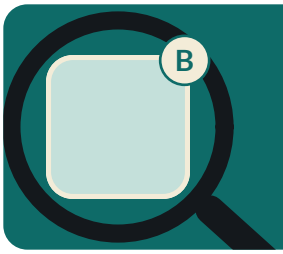
The Tower Stair

Finch holds one tower key; a spare hangs in the Council office. The Council's engineer climbed every **STEP** and found the works sound: not a **CHIP** off one tooth. Nothing inside stopped it.

Climb from **CHIP** to **STEP**, one letter at a time. Each rung has its clue beside it.



Read the exhibit twice. A.P.



EVIDENCE LETTER B

Copy the letter from the shaded square into box B on page 13.

THE MISSING WORD

A B C D E

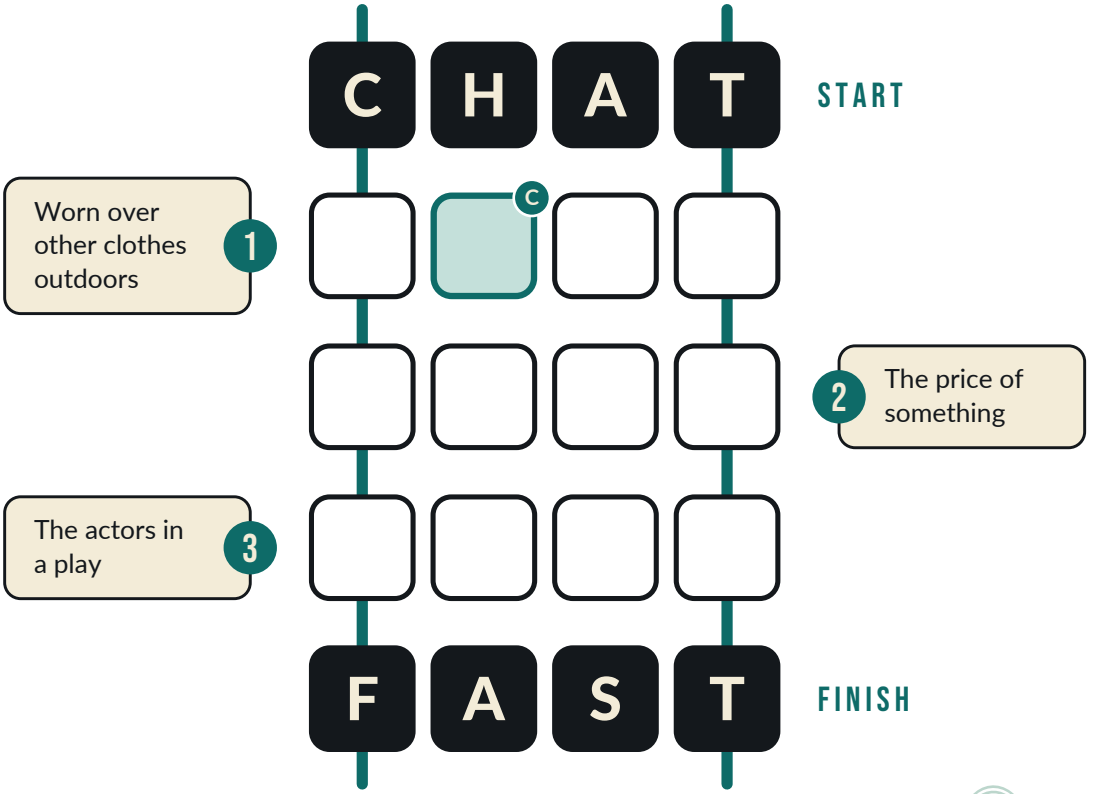
PAGE 13

The Councillor's Statement

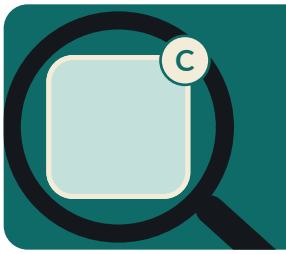
CASE 01 · EXHIBIT C

'Yes, I want that clock gone, and **FAST**, as I said in a **CHAT** with the verger. But the Council let the roof space behind that parapet years ago, with its hatch and its only key. Ask who is up there, not who is glad.'

Climb from **CHAT** to **FAST**, one letter at a time. Each rung has its clue beside it.



Both ends are true. A.P.



EVIDENCE LETTER C

Copy the letter from the shaded square into box C on page 13.

THE MISSING WORD

A B C D E

PAGE 13

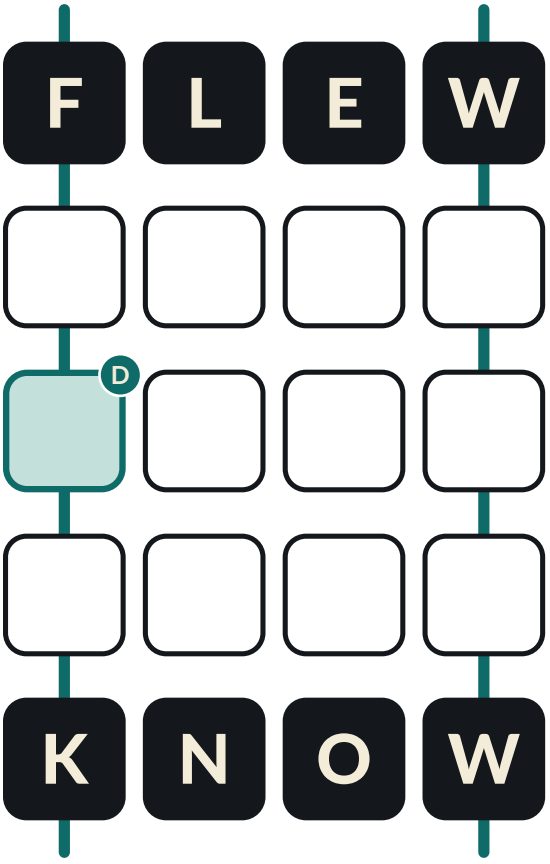
POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

CASE 01 · EXHIBIT D

RE: THE LAMPLIGHTER'S REMARK

'Both evenings three birds **FLEW** over after I had lit the square, Gammon's hen last. Too late, I thought. But the quarter had not struck, so home in time they were. That is all I **KNOW**.'

Climb from **FLEW** to **KNOW**, one letter at a time. Each rung has its clue beside it.

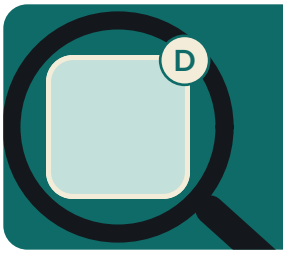


START

1. Move along like a river
2. Not quick
3. White winter flakes

FINISH

What changes? What stays? A.P.



EVIDENCE LETTER D

Copy the letter from the shaded square into box D on page 13.

THE MISSING WORD

A B C D E

PAGE 13

E EXHIBIT

The Clock That Stopped Twice

CASE 01

GENTLE

LOST & FOUND BUREAU · EVIDENCE CARD

CASE 01 · EXHIBIT E

The View From The Cab Rank

The drivers on the **RANK** face the Town **HALL** clock. 'Both evenings something long and thin poked out over the parapet beside the face,' said one. 'At a quarter past, the big hand sticks out that way. The thing was gone when the quarter struck. Dusk hid the rest.'

Climb from **HALL** to **RANK**, one letter at a time. Each rung has its clue beside it.

START	H	A	L	L
1 Of more than average height	E			
2 Speak; have a conversation				
3 Large container for water or fuel				
FINISH	R	A	N	K

Slow is quick. A.P.

EVIDENCE LETTER E

Copy the letter from the shaded square into box E on page 13.

THE MISSING WORD

A B C D E

PAGE 13

NINETEEN MORE FILES ARE WAITING

You have just opened Case 1. The full paperback has all twenty linked mysteries: 100 word ladders, 20 bonus ladders, four levels from Gentle to Fiendish, and the Master Log, where your twenty missing words reveal one last hidden message.

STUCK ON CASE 1?

The three hints for every case, from a gentle nudge to a firm push, and the full reasoned solutions are in the back of the book. They are not part of this sample.

WHERE TO BUY THE FULL BOOK

The Missing Word Files is a 172-page, 7 x 10 inch paperback, sold through Amazon in the UK and the US. Amazon prints each copy and delivers it. Visit the website for the buy links, or search Amazon for The Missing Word Files.

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THEMISSINGWORDFILES.COM

Things are only lost until somebody takes the trouble to find them.

Printing Tip: choose Fit To Page to print on A4 or US Letter paper.

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