The Forty-Seven
A key to the mystery

slavering hordes from without: the supernatural threat feared by the Forty-Seven, apparently, has a propensity to salivate.

Great Visual Representations in Science, unproduced episode: would Mulliner, a chemist by training, have found iconic significance in the periodic element tables of Newlands, Mendeleyev or Meyer?

looked like a corpse, but he was full of life: argyria, a rare condition usually induced by ingesting large quantities of silver compounds or colloidal silver metal, produces a distinctive blue-grey or blackish pigmentation of the skin, which is often said to resemble the pallor of death. If the photograph was produced in black-and-white, the condition would not be apparent.

regularly locked himself away in solitude for three or four days: the period of a full moon’s influence is often reckoned as three nights.

allowing his nearest opponent to break the tape: as the second-placed runner, Mulliner became a silver medallist, and apparently retired with his ambitions achieved.

orb web: spun by, among others, the Argiope argentata or silver argiope spider.

Stuff of our salvation: taken literally, implies that “Forty-Seven” is a material.

Poor Miss Finch: sensation novel (1872). Twin brothers, vying for the affection of the blind heroine, are distinguishable only by one brother’s dark-blue skin pigmentation. This is the result of consuming silver nitrate as a cure for epilepsy.

Buenos Aires: capital of Argentina.

keen to draw connections: Jack Childs, probably addressed formally as John, was a tall (long) man with a wooden leg. Mulliner may have been thinking of Long John Silver, particularly if Childs had been invalided from the Royal or Merchant Navy during the War.

forty-two: atomic number of molybdenum, a hard transition metal identified and isolated around 1780. Little-known, with uses mainly confined to alloy production, and has no folkloric significance.

source of the source: the phrase “the curious incident of the dog in the night-time” is taken from Conan Doyle’s ‘Silver Blaze,’ a Sherlock Holmes short story published in 1892.

Vampires were on our side: vampire-werewolf conflict is the theme of various sources in popular culture such as the 2003 feature film Underworld, though this was probably not on Childs’ mind (most likely, he was simply bored of Luff’s obtuseness).

1960, March the thirteenth: full moon.

somewhere in South Yorkshire: Sheffield, alongside Birmingham and London, was a major centre for the British silver-working industry.

round white projector beam… eyes tracking to the screen… staring him in the face: Luff is confronted by, firstly, a glowing white disc (resembling the full moon), and then, as he turns, the display wall of a typical school chemistry laboratory, where we might reasonably expect to find a periodic table of the elements. Positioned near the centre of a short-form periodic table is a square approximately as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>47</th>
<th>Ag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>silver</td>
<td>107.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luff, as a non-chemist, has no inkling of the relationship between the element and its atomic number before this point – hence the extent of the sudden realisation.