

BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY I

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), Scottish author and creator of the oft-quoted detective-hero Sherlock Holmes wrote *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891);

"It was on a bitterly cold and frosty morning, towards the end of the winter of '97, that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. It was Holmes. The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face, and told me at a glance that something was amiss.

"Come, Watson, come!" he cried. "The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!"--from "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange"



Inspired by [Sir Walter Scott](#), [Robert Louis Stevenson](#), [Edgar Allan Poe](#), [Guy de Maupassant](#), and [Emile Gaboriau](#), Arthur Conan Doyle's

now-iconic mastermind sleuth and his companion Dr. John H. Watson redefined the detective *genre*. Conan Doyle's medical training under Dr. Joseph Bell and practical experience as a doctor in several locales and as ship's doctor are the foundation for Holmes's methods of deductive reasoning. "*It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.*"--from "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet". The Edwardian and Victorian era stories are set in London, England, and places abroad. Sherlock Holmes first appeared in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887 and Conan Doyle would write fifty-five more stories and four novels starring Holmes. He wrote many other notable fiction and non-fiction works including *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895), *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1896), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), *The Lost World* (1912), *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922), and *Memories and Adventures* (1924-30), many which have been translated to dozens of languages and are still in print today.

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the eldest son born to Roman Catholic parents Mary *née* Foley (1838-1921) and artist Charles Altamont Doyle (1832-1893). Charles would lead a life troubled by alcoholism and depression; after spending much time in mental institutions, he died in Scotland in 1893. Supported by an uncle, young Arthur's education started in 1868 at the Jesuit preparatory school Hodder in the Ribble Valley of Lancashire, England. He then attended Stonyhurst College, graduating in 1875; next he travelled to the town of Feldkirch in Austria to study at the Jesuit college. At Edinburgh University he studied medicine and met his mentor, professor and doctor Joseph Bell. Conan Doyle worked as doctor's assistant and ship's doctor, travelling to Africa on the steamer *Mayumba*. He graduated in 1885, publishing his thesis "An Essay Upon the Vasomotor Changes in *Tabes Dorsalis*". During his years of studies and afterwards he wrote numerous articles and stories for such publications as the *Edinburgh Journal*, *The Lancet*, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *London Society*, [William Makepeace Thackeray's](#) *The Cornhill*, and [Charles Dickens's](#) *All The Year Round*. They include "The Captain of the Pole-Star", "The Five

Orange Pips", "The Heiress of Glenmahowley", "J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement", and "The Man From Archangel".

In June of 1882 Conan Doyle settled in Southsea, Portsmouth, England, where he opened his own successful medical practice. He continued to write and travelled often to London. In August of 1885 he married Louise Hawkins (1856-1906), with whom he would have two children: daughter Mary Louise (b.1889) and son Alleyne Kingsley (1892-1918). Arthur and Louise honeymooned in Ireland and while Conan Doyle continued to practice medicine he also kept up his prodigious output of fiction. In 1886, newly married and still struggling to make it as an author, Doyle started writing the mystery novel *A Tangled Skein*. Two years later, the novel was renamed *A Study in Scarlet* and published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. *A Study in Scarlet*, which first introduced the wildly popular characters Detective Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Watson, finally earned Doyle the recognition he had so desired. It was the first of 60 stories that Doyle would pen about Sherlock Holmes over the course of his writing career. Also, in 1887, Doyle submitted two letters about his conversion to Spiritualism to a weekly periodical called *Light*. The next year, his first novel *The Mystery of Cloomber* (1888) was released. Based on the Monmouth Rebellion of 1865, *Micah Clark* was next published in 1889. The same year that *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1891) was published, the Conan DoYLES moved to London, settling in South Norwood. In 1892 Louise contracted tuberculosis and the Conan DoYLES moved to Hindhead, Haslemere, Surrey where the air was healthier for her. In 1894 Conan Doyle embarked on a lecture tour of the United States and Canada.

Doyle continued to actively participate in the Spiritualist movement from 1887 to 1916, during which time he wrote three books that experts consider largely autobiographical. These include *Beyond the City* (1893), *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) and *A Duet with an Occasional Chorus* (1899). Upon achieving success as a writer, Doyle decided to retire from medicine. Throughout this period, he additionally produced a handful of historical novels including one about the Napoleonic Era called *The Great Shadow* in 1892, and his

most famous historical novel, *Rodney Stone*, in 1896.

The prolific author also composed four of his most popular Sherlock Holmes books during the 1890s and early 1900s: *The Sign of Four* (1890), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894) and *The Hounds of Baskervilles*, published in 1901. Arthur, as a writer, was always inclined towards writing historical novels and believed that the success of Sherlock Holmes came as a hurdle in this. He decided to kill the character of Sherlock Holmes and did so in the story *The Final Problem* in 1893. A public hullabaloo ensued and he had to bring the character back in the story. In 1901, Doyle reintroduced Sherlock Holmes as a ghost in *The Hounds of Baskervilles* and later brought him back to life in *The Adventure of the Empty House* so the lucrative character could earn Doyle the money to fund his missionary work.

In 1900 Conan Doyle served as a doctor at the Longman Hospital during the South African War. His first of many war-related works, *The Great Boer War* (1900), was followed by *The War in South Africa: its Cause and Conduct* (1902), which earned him the title Knight bachelor in 1902 from King Edward VII. After serving as military correspondent during the First World War he wrote *British Campaign in France and Flanders* (1920). He also continued to write fiction including and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905). The same year *Sir Nigel* (1906) was published, Louise died of tuberculosis. A year later, on 18 September 1907 Conan Doyle married Jean Blyth Leckie (1872-1940) with whom he would have three children: Denis (b.1909), Adrian (b.1910), and Jean Lena Annette (b.1912).

For many years Conan Doyle had strayed from his religious upbringing and by the 1920's was profoundly interested in Spiritualism, begun by Swedish mystic and philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg. Proponents including [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#) believed that the living could communicate with the dead. Conan Doyle's spiritualist writings include *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), and *Pheneas Speaks*:

Direct Spirit Communications in the Family Circle (1927). One of his last works, *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* was published in 1927.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died at his home "Windlesham" in Crowborough, Sussex, on 7 July 1930. He was first buried in the rose garden of Windlesham. When "*His Beloved, His Wife*" Jean died in 1940 he was reinterred to rest with her, "*reunited*", in the Minstead churchyard of Hampshire, England. His grave memorial in part reads "*Steel True, Blade Straight, Arthur Conan Doyle, Knight, Patriot, Physician, & Man of Letters.*"

Vocabulary Check

Write the English meaning for the following words taken from the text:

- a) inspired _____
- b) iconic _____
- c) sleuth _____
- d) mentor _____
- e) prodigious _____
- f) embarked _____
- g) prolific _____
- h) inclined _____
- i) hullabaloo _____
- j) lucrative _____
- k) strayed _____
- l) profoundly _____
- m) proponents _____

Comprehension Questions

Write the answer to the following questions in your own words with a sentence:

- 1) How did Conan Doyle's characters affect mystery novels?

- 2) What provided the foundation for Holmes's methods of investigation?

3) What did he do after he graduated?

4) How many Sherlock Holmes stories did Conan Doyle write?

5) Why did Conan Doyle & his wife leave London?

6) What other (3) kinds of novels did Conan Doyle write?

7) Why did he kill off the character of Sherlock Holmes?

8) Why did he bring Holmes back to life?

9) What did the Sherlock Holmes character enable Conan Doyle to do?

10) What did Spiritualists believe in?
