

# A Brief Interview with Kieran McMullen

Author of  
*Watson's Afghan Adventure*

Sherlockian E-Times: There are lots of Sherlock Holmes stories out there but few about Watson.

What made you want to write a story about him?

McMullen: As a boy, my father (who taught English Literature at St. John's University) handed me the complete works of Sherlock Holmes the summer of my fourth grade year.

He wanted me to read the complete Canon for a summer project.

He hoped it would help my reading skills and possibly keep me away from mischief.

I was fascinated by the Great Detective but more appreciative of Watson.

I knew that I could never be the hero of the novel.

Holmes was too smart and I was not.

I had to work hard for my grades in school, Holmes would have sailed through the problems.

But I could place myself in the role of Watson; loyal, fairly intelligent, ready for action or the boredom of waiting, all to help my friend.

Watson was who I identified with and so it was he who's history I wanted to know about.

I thought others might want to know about him also.

Sherlockian E-Times: The title of the book is "Watson's Afghan Adventure" but there is more to it than that, can you tell us some.

McMullen: Well, I did considerable research over the years and of course there are excellent studies and histories of Holmes by Baring-Gould and others, but all only touch lightly on Watson.

So, having reread the canon in detail to cull all the facts I could about Watson I then incorporated his history from the other sources and was still left with giant voids in his life.

I filled in those voids.

The loss of his mother, his father's second wife, his boyhood in Australia, his schooling in England and his service in the Army are all filled in to some degree because these things were important to who he became.

Though the bulk of the story, of course, occurs in Afghanistan.

Sherlockian E-Times: That's a fairly large time period.

How did you fill all that in?

McMullen: Fortunately, once you accept a birth date for Watson and a Date for his meeting of Holmes you have the parameters you have to work in.

The question really becomes: Where was Watson at what time and what would he have really seen and experienced?

For example: when he arrived in Bombay where would he have stayed, who would he have met, how did he get from there to the 5th Northumberland?

How did he get from the 5th to the Battle of Maiwand hundreds of miles away?

Were there railroads and if there were where did they go?

Where there weren't railroads how did he move along?

There are literally hundreds of questions to ask, and more importantly, answer.

Sherlockian E-Times: You have Watson at a number of battles in the book, are they real?

McMullen: Every battle portrayed in the book is real and described as it happened from a compilation of the Official Reports and personal descriptions by participants.

The difficult part is not having enough information on the battles, it's that there is so much information on the battles.

Standing where we are now we have lots of documentation and can almost describe major battles like Maiwand down to the last cartridge fired.

The more difficult part is describing what Watson would have seen from where he stood.

Anyone who has walked the desert or been in a firefight knows that you only know what is in front of you as far as the next hill or the next building.

You don't see the "big picture".

If you're hunkered down in the dry wash riverbed, you have no idea that a mile away the 66th is making their last stand.

In a time when there is no radio communication, heliograph is not always reliable and you can't see signal flags through the black powder smoke and dust of battle what you know is what's happening to the men around you.

So the difficulty with the battles is, what does Watson see before him and how does he deal with it.

Sherlockian E-Times: You also give Watson a religious bent, why?

McMullen: I've always thought, that while not being a "practicing" Christian, Watson was rather like

myself and many of the men I knew in the army.

We might not go to Mass on Sunday but there was a true belief in God and a hope of salvation.

You know the old saying "there are no atheists in foxholes".

I guarantee that that's true.

Sherlockian E-Times: Will there be more tales about Watson?

McMullen: I believe so, but perhaps his friend Sherlock Holmes will have to help next time!