

The World of Sherlock Holmes

by Francine Kitts

When fledgling physician Arthur Conan Doyle realized that his meager practice was not paying the bills, he began writing stories in the hope of supplementing his income. Sherrinford Holmes and Ormond Sacker were born. Mercifully, Doyle renamed them Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John H. Watson before the first adventure was published. Holmes spoke his first words to Watson, "How are you? You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive," and the game was afoot.

In 1887, *A Study in Scarlet*, the first of only 4 Sherlock Holmes novels (the most widely known is *The Hound of the Baskervilles*) ever published, appeared in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, and the rest is history. Doyle could not have suspected that with this novel he would spawn a new "game" - "The Grand Game" played by "Sherlockians", devotees of Sherlock Holmes. Sherlockians come from all walks of life and all corners of the globe. The common bond we share is our affinity for the world's first consulting detective.

"The Grand Game." Sherlockians know that Doyle was merely the literary agent for Watson, who actually wrote the stories. We also know that Holmes is alive and well, is now retired, keeps bees, and lives on a small farm on the Sussex Downs with his housekeeper Martha. On January 6, 2017, Holmes celebrated his 163th birthday. Since an obituary has never been published, Sherlockians are quite certain that he is still alive and happily retired. This is all done with tongue planted firmly in cheek, of course, but if you doubt any of these facts, you will never be able to play the Game.

Although the main Sherlockian societies are the Baker Street Irregulars ("BSI"), founded by Christopher Morley in 1934, and The Sherlock Holmes Society of London ("SHSL"), hundreds of other groups- scion societies- have emerged around the world over the years. Scion meetings are open to anyone interested in departing the twenty-first century for the Victorian Age. These gatherings are peppered with quizzes, songs, skits, presentations, discussions, and the camaraderie created by a common bond.

Sherlockians never tire of reading and rereading the Canon (or Sacred Writings), the 56 short stories and 4 novels, searching for inconsistencies, and hoping to discover an as yet untouched subject for our next essay to be published in one of the many Sherlockian journals. For example, Watson is said to have been wounded in his shoulder by a Jezail bullet during the Battle of Maiwand in the Second Afghan War in the first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. However, in another novel the injury is to his leg (*The Sign of Four*). You can imagine the field day Sherlockians have had with that! In one of the short stories, "The Man with the Twisted Lip," Dr. Watson's wife calls him James instead of John. Hmmm.

Sherlockians are inveterate collectors of all things pertaining to Holmes. In addition to our books, we collect artwork, lapel pins, clocks, teapots, sculptures, deerstalker caps, walking sticks, teddy bears, and anything else we can find.

Sherlockians travel around the world visiting sites mentioned in the Canon. We walk down Baker Street in London with a spring in our step, knowing full well that we will not find 221B, the address where Holmes and Watson took rooms together to share expenses. At that fictitious location, they lived a crime-stopping lifestyle that led Mrs. Hudson, their landlady, to refer to our hero as the “worst tenant in London.”

Doyle tired of writing about the great detective and on May 4, 1891 at Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland, Holmes and his arch-enemy Moriarty apparently struggled to the death in a story entitled “The Final Problem”. But the public outcry for more Holmes was deafening, and perhaps convinced by the black armbands that appeared in the streets of London, Doyle resurrected our hero in “The Empty House.” The 3-year period between the harrowing incident at Reichenbach Falls and the return of Holmes is referred to as “The Great Hiatus.” It seems that the crafty Holmes had merely staged his death to throw the malevolent followers of Moriarty off his trail, and so... the game is **still** afoot!