

SEASONS in Sherlock Holmes

In Conan Doyle's and my stories, we reference seasons as if when these occur is common knowledge. But this far from the truth. I live in the southern hemisphere so most would assume that the seasons are one half a year out of step, e.g. Summer = Winter. However, it is not so simple as that, in Australia the start of Winter is not the start in Summer in the United Kingdom, nor in the United States: it is also true that the start of Summer in the UK is not the same as that in the USA.

Conan Doyle (and I) use the British system, where seasons begin on a specific date every year and this date relates to earlier pre-Christian events that were later incorporated into the calendric system. The United States system is based upon astronomic events, and since the year is 365.2422 days long that means that the start of each season can vary by one day as the day count aligns between 365 and 366 to approximate to 365.2422. We have leap years every four years, but not if the year number is evenly divisible by 100, but we do have a leap year if the year number is evenly divisible by 400 — this system approximates the length of the year to 365.242 (an error of 1 day in 5000) days.

The length of the year does not change (unless you count the addition of a "leap second" once every few years), it is how we count the length of the year that does. Starting from NOW as you read, where will the Earth be relative to the Sun in one year by your day count? Answer 365 days, but your position on the Earth will not be pointing in the same angle towards the Sun,

you will have to wait 5 hours 48 minutes and 46 seconds for that to occur. Of course in 4 years time a leap year will have occurred. And again our position relative to the Sun is corrected every 100 and 400 years. This calendric consideration affects the definition of a Season start in the USA where Season start date may be one day deficient, or for that of Summer, Autumn, and Winter they may be even two days deficient as leap year adjustments are made.

The following chart shows the Seasonal characteristics:

Name	UK Start	UK Event	US Start	US Event	Celtic Season	Aust. Start
Spring	Feb 2	Candlemas	Mar 20	Vernal Equinox	Imbolc	Sep 1
Summer	May 1	May Day	Jun 20	Summer Solstice	Beltane	Dec 1
Autumn / Fall	Aug 1	Lammas	Sep 22	Autumnal Equinox	Lughnasadh	Mar 1
Winter	Nov 1	All Hallows	Dec 21	Winter Solstice	Samhain	Jun 1

British (UK) dates of seasons are based upon older calendric considerations, Christian celebrations that are superimposed or aligned with older Celtic and other pagan events.

SPRING

Starts at Candlemas in the UK, this being 40 days after Christmas (40 days and nights of Biblical fame), at Imbolc celebrating the Celtic goddess Brigid, the season of planting; closely related and so dated to the Roman

Lupercalia celebrating the god Lupercus the god of fertility and shepherds. In the times when the majority of Europeans were still pastoralists, the day when cattle were let loose to roam on the fresh grass.

In the USA it starts on the 20th or 21st of March at the Vernal Equinox when the number of hours of daylight and nighttime are equal.

In Australia, it starts 1st September at the end of the coldest and wettest three months of the year.

SUMMER

Starts at Mayday, the 1st of May, the Celtic season of Beltane, the festival of the goddess of Flora (in her many guises and names) the goddess of flowers. Thus, the Summer Solstice is also known as Midsummer's Day.

In the USA it starts at the Summer Solstice on 20th to the 22nd of June, the longest day of the year.

In Australia the 1st of December, commencing the three hottest months of the year (at least in the southern states and territories, in the north there are only two seasons, the Wet and the Dry).

AUTUMN

Starts at Lammas (meaning Loaf-Mass), the 1st of August, the Harvest Festival celebrating Lughnasadh for the god Lugh.

In the USA it starts on the 22nd or 23rd of September at the Autumnal Equinox when the number of hours of daylight and nighttime are equal. Generally called FALL since this is when leaves start to fall.

In Australia's south it starts March 1st.

WINTER

Starts at All Hallows (All Helios or All Saints) the 1st of September at the festival of Samhain when cattle were slain in preparation for the long cold and wet of winter, bonfires were lit and much feasting on the abundance of meat. It is probable that the festivities of Guy Fawkes's Night still occur as it falls in the week of Samhain.

In the USA it starts 21st or 22nd of December at the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year. It is no coincidence that this is close to Christmas, and also that Christmas matches the birth of Mithra(s) the god of Zoroastrianism and Roman Mithraism. The largely USA custom of Halloween (All Hallows's Even[ing]) echoes the festivities of this date.

In Australia, it is June the 1st.

Conclusion

Americans reading the accounts of Sherlock Holmes should be aware the references to the seasons are half of a season earlier (about 7 weeks), so in "Sherlock Holmes in Cambrian" the 1st of August Lughnasadh that commences Autumn, is nearly 9 weeks before Autumn begins for them.

Residents of the Southern Hemisphere will have to just do their best by subtracting or adding one half a year.

Implications

When playing "The Game" (attempting to create a chronology of events in the Holmes Canon) persons must be aware of the seasonal date differences between the UK and the USA. Some Holmes stories give only a season (possibly in a year) as part of the dating problem: players of the game in the USA could get their seasonal dates wrong by several weeks!