

Watson's Wives

When writing the Appendix to CoSH2 I made a serious error. The error involved the number wives that Watson had. I had decided that number was to be two, but the evidence in the Canon suggests the number could be three. I did not explain my reasoning for rejecting a third wife. This also led to me not explaining the adjusting of some dates to reflect this decision.

The process of sorting the canonical stories into any order involved several aspects:

- Was a specific date (year, season, month, day) mentioned
- References to past events/cases
- Was Watson living at Baker Street & the related question...
- Was Watson married
- What had other chroniclers thought (Craig, Miller, Peoria, and various adaptations of Baring-Gould – all on the Web). I also had Baring-Gould's masterful two volume Annotated Sherlock Holmes, and his derived book "Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street).

From all of these points many have attempted a chronology.

We know that Watson married Mary Marston after "The Sign of the Four."

We know that Watson is no longer married when Holmes returns from his absence after the Falls of Reichenbach.

We know that Watson is married again and not residing at 221B Baker Street after January 1903.

We know Conan Doyle made chronology errors, one of the most glaring instances is that he explicitly dates "Wisteria Lodge" to a date of March 1892 with Watson living at 221B – yet 1) Watson had already left Baker Street when he married Mary Marston, and 2) Holmes was supposed to be dead, but Holmes was either in, or on his way to Tibet.

A crucial text is "The Stockbroker's Clerk" – Watson buys a practice in Paddington that previously had an income of £1200pa and is now at the time of purchase is £300 (from a excellent annual income to a very low one), then after three months Holmes visits him. From Holmes's speech it appears that no cases have involved Watson since "The Sign of the Four" – this does not preclude cases that may have occurred that Watson was unaware of. Alas, although we know Watson marries in summer, the year is not stated, and the stated three months is since Watson had last seen Holmes, not time he had been married.

So, I located "Jack the Ripper" and "Copper Beeches" between "the Sign of the Four" and "The Stockbroker's Clerk", noting the facts stated in the latter. I have since moved "Copper Beeches" (that has no internal dating) to be after "The Stockbroker's Clerk". I cannot move the dates of "Jack the Ripper" - the dates are real facts!

My explanation for Holmes's remark that alludes to there being no cases since "The Sign of the Four" now leaves

only the Ripper case as a problem, Watson knew he could not publish or acknowledge Holmes's part in that case, so I propose that is why he simply ignored it! Of course there were other cases in that period, but Watson was not involved in them

The problem regarding Watson's wives is the mention of him having one, when other chroniclers have either ignored this fact when dating cases, or in the case of Baring-Gould fabricating the existence of another Mrs. Watson prior to Mary.

I rejected the possibility of Watson having three wives because I felt that there was really no solid evidence for this, and the time scale that Baring-Gould suggested was too short: Watson had to meet this woman (Baring-Gould suggested in the USA which I also disliked), woo her, marry her, and then somehow lose her! All of this in a period of about one year.

I therefore ignored Baring-Gould's dating of any cases that involved Watson being married before May 1889.

So in my chronology Watson has two wives, Mary Marston and Elizabeth Reeth, and it is from the progeny of the latter union that we have access to the tales in the Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes.