

Watson's Wives

When writing the Appendix to “Chronicles of Sherlock Volume II” I made a serious decision. The decision 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 possibly three. I did not explain my reasoning for rejecting a third wife. This also led to me not explaining the adjusting 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” his not married in September 1888, see the “Noble Bachelor” and not married in April 1889, see “Copper Beeches”, but he is married June 1889, see the “Stock Broker’s clerk”.

We know that Watson is no longer married when Holmes returns from his absence after the Falls of Reichenbach, see the “Empty House”.

We know that Watson is married again and not residing at 221B Baker Street after January 1903, see the “Blanched Soldier”. We do not know the name of this wife from the Canon.

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 (I make it 87 days) Holmes visits him. Alas, although we know Watson marries in spring, the year is not stated, and the stated three months is since Watson had last seen Holmes, not the time he had been married.

The problem regarding the number of Watson’s wives is

the lack of a mention of him having more than two, in fact the only mention of a second wife other than Mary Marston is made by Holmes himself, when in the “Blanched Soldier” he states “*Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife*”. Prior to this revelation, the Canon has only the references to a single wife of Mary Marston. When assigning dates to the cases in the Canon it is essential to consider whether Watson was living at 221B Baker Street, if he was not, then he was married for it is also never stated in the Canon that Watson has any other abode unless he is married.

Baring-Gould fabricated the existence of another Mrs. Watson prior to Mary. It never entered into my head that Watson might have had a wife before Mary, it is simply not mentioned in the Canon. However, it is also not stated in the Canon that Mary was Watson’s first or second wife, nor that the unnamed wife of 1903 is the second or third. I was unaware of the possibility of a third wife until I read Baring-Gould’s “Annotated Sherlock Holmes”, and then I pondered why he had introduced Constance Adams as a wife before Mary Marston. As stated above, one of my key guiding principles in creating my chronology was the related questions of “was Watson living at 221B Baker Street” and “was Watson married”, essentially being the same consideration.

Why did Baring-Gould need a third wife for his chronology when I did not? The obvious answer to this was that Baring-Gould was placing the date of stories which answered my key question “no” before May 1891. So I set to re-examining those stories. Conan Doyle generally does not give a year (or even a date in a year)

for most stories, and even when he does, that date cannot always be trusted, for example dating “Wisteria Lodge” when Holmes was either in, or on his way to, Tibet.

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.

Using both my own chronology, and that of Baring-Gould I set about checking all dating involving Watson not residing at 221B Baker Street, and did any of Baring-Gould’s dates rely on a marriage before 1 May 1889. I found that none of Baring-Gould’s dates relied on a marriage to Constance Adams.

The result of my research left only one problem, and that was the dating of “Scandal in Bohemia” when Watson was clearly married and not living at 221B Baker Street, and the text precisely dates the story 20 March 1888, and that contradicts the date of Watson marrying Mary Marston to 1 May 1889, a date Baring-Gould and I agree upon. I left the date of “Scandal in Bohemia” as 20 March 1888 in the published chronology of 2014, silently ignoring that this was problem.

This single story could be the undoing of my chronology, and I presumed that the date agreed with Baring-Gould’s chronology that necessitated Constance Adams. It was

with great relief that closer examination of Baring-Gould's dating of events when he suggests that Watson went to USA and came back with Constance Adams, who he then married also hinged upon the dating of "Scandal in Bohemia". It was the only story that did not fit into his chronology. I then noticed that Baring-Gould had rejected the specified date of that story and allocated a new date to it. To my delight I found that even the new allocated date did not fit into his chronology, it was after the death of Constance Adams and before the marriage to Mary Marston, yet according to the text of the Canon Watson is married.

Baring-Gould gives good reasoning as to moving the date, and finally sets the date for "Scandal in Bohemia" based on actual weather conditions in London (to which I have no access) that match the real world and the described weather in the Canon, and yet his chosen date still has the impossibility of Watson being married when his own chronology asserts that he is not.

Based upon Baring-Gould's assertion that the stated date is in error, I felt no qualms about also moving the date of "Scandal in Bohemia" so that Watson is married to Mary Martson. Thus, my chronology now has no problems with dating events (that I am currently aware of), while the chronology of Baring-Gould has at least one dated story incorrect and requires the fiction of Constance Adams.

One niggling quotation remains, from the "Sign of the Four" where Watson writes "*In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents*", if Watson did not voyage to the U.S.A. and

meet Constance Adams, then what are the three continents he is referring to? One can hardly speculate that Watson would include experience with women in Australia, living there only as a child. So Europe and the Asia (sub-continental India/Afghanistan) are two, what of the third? It can only be Africa, Watson would have made landfall at least twice at both Port Said and Port Tewfik when travelling to and from India.

The view of the estate of Conan Doyle is that Watson had two wives, and any other number is pure speculation.

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.