

Chronology Explanations & Fabrications

In creating my chronology of Holmes and Watson I have tried to follow the clues given in the Canon. However, there is much detail missing, and in order to be able to set the characters against a full history, that I deemed necessary to place the players in a real world, I decided to make my chronology as complete as possible. This meant I required a definitive dating sequence of events, a framework into which I could insert stories and be able to make referential links to other cases, or to actual historic events.

Why invent a totally innovative past for Holmes and Watson when one can stand on the shoulders of giants and perceive an acceptable scenario suitable to one's needs? There was long gap between my writing of the "Scotched, Soused, and Strung Scotsman", and the writing of the "Cartomancer" before I proceeded to conclude "Cartomancer" and write "Colonial Conspiratory", "Bertie" and "Jack the Ripper". My first attempt at a chronology was during the writing of the 'Scotsman', and this allowed me to make historical references to the Forth Bridge, and why Holmes was missing from the start of 'Cartomancer'.

My first significant act was find a complete Canon on the Internet that could be downloaded in plain text format, each story as an individual piece of text identified by the accepted 4 character code so 'Study in Scarlet' is filed as STUD. One fact it took me a while to notice, for I was

neither looking for nor expecting, was that these text files had been translated into American English. By 'translation', I mean spelling, there are the usual spelling changes such as words ending 'our' (color, favor, etc) that are common now-a-days since the Australian Press can often lapse into American English. But there unexpected were changes like barque to bark (no dog mentioned!). How legal this download was I now doubt since copyright still exists on some 4 or 5 stories from the 'Casebook of Sherlock Holmes' until 2023. Let me note that it appears that Australia follows the copyright laws of Britain, and so the entire Canon is in Public Domain.

On copyright issues, it has recently been shown that the Estate of Conan Doyle still has some control over the later writings, and indeed the nature and the extent of the copyright has incurred an out-of-court settlement for the portrayal of Holmes in the series "Enola Holmes", for changing the personality of Holmes to be more compassionate. The attempt of the Estate of Conan Doyle to copyright or licence the name of Holmes, Watson, Mrs. Hudson, 221B Baker Street, etc failed many years ago.

In the initial period of exploration into the chronology, I purchased William S. Baring-Gould's "The Annotated Sherlock Holmes" and became aware that at least one of the giants upon whose shoulders I meant to stand had views I could not accept. While I chose to closely follow Baring-Gould for events prior to 1881, I found it impossible to consider what I thought to be an outrage that there could be gap of close to three years (January

1884 to December 1887) in which Watson went to California, wooed a woman, brought her to England, and married her. No reference to any of this can be found in the Canon, events that should have been some of the most important and influential in Watson's life. The naming of Constance Adams by Baring-Gould particularly irked me because to create her in the first place was bad enough, but to give a name to a totally fictional construct in a man's life was too much. I am not averse to inserting entirely fictional constructs into the chronology, and have done so myself, indeed as I shall shortly detail, but while a person must have had parents who may not be named in the Canon, and for me to name them, is of an order of magnitude considerably less than Baring-Gould's insertion of Constance and three imaginary years of Watson's life. I now have Leslie S. Klinger's "New Annotated Sherlock Holmes" and learn that an extra-Canonical writing of Conan Doyle has this pre-Mary Marston wife named differently and with a similar history to that of Baring-Gould. Nonetheless, the Canon is to be treated with respect and while Conan Doyle made his errors it is not for a creator of a chronology to make such significant variances to what the Canon states, I trust that the variances I have made are not viewed as so radical.

I took Holmes's history from 1810 to the fateful meeting with Watson in 1881 from Baring-Gould, but embellished it with my own ideas, and discounted what I did not like. Even at the very early stages creating my chronology I had decided upon some clear 'facts', and here are some.

Holmes had only one brother, Mycroft seven years his elder. Neither Sherlock nor Mycroft have any other names, and certainly have no sister.

There are some inter-related problems in the Canon, what of Holmes's University degree(s), why did Mycroft not succeed his father as squire of the family estate and is working as a civil servant, and why are Sherlock and Mycroft's parents never mentioned?

The problem as to which University Holmes attended was that he attended *both* Oxford and Cambridge. This led to a new question of why *two Universities*. He went to Oxford and studied chemistry and gained a bachelor's degree in science from Christ Church, he then commenced a post-graduate degree in Natural Science (Doctor of Philosophy) at Gonville and Caius in Cambridge. He did not complete this degree.

In my chronology Holmes could not have graduated with a PhD, otherwise he would have been entitled to the honorific of Doctor. He had a degree in chemistry, but then, as now it is not usual to ever mention any tertiary qualification (Doctor of Medicine being an exception). My reasoning about this incomplete University degree is bound to the same three problems above. Although I am deliberately vague about the circumstances, Holmes's father loses the family's wealth, and so both brothers must find employment. Baring-Gould introduces an elder brother of Sherringford, it is Sherringford who continues to run the Holmes's family estate, thus relieving either younger brother of this duty. But Holmes *did not have* a

third brother. Sherlock did not complete his doctorate because he did not have the funds to do so. Mycroft joins the Civil Service, Sherlock leaves Cambridge to make a living in Holborn. Holmes's parents leave England and go to live with Sherlock's mother's family in the south-west of France. This solution I found appealing because it explained so many aspects of Holmes's, and Mycroft's pasts without introducing too many contentious issues.

I thought it best to not attempt any elaboration about *where* in Yorkshire the Holmes's estate might have been. I had no such doubts about Watson's background.

Before I had read Baring-Gould's "Annotated Sherlock Holmes", I knew that Watson had lived in Australia. The quotation that made this apparent is from the "Sign of the Four" where Watson states "I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work". Ballarat is in the state of Victoria in Australia, where gold was discovered in 1851. To a much lesser extent, "Boscombe Valley" has Australian references (including Ballarat), but there can be no greater power than the words "I have seen... near Ballarat". So Watson had conclusively lived in Australia. Now I sought to provide a similar amount of background for Watson before 1881, as I had for Holmes.

As I have stated above, I knew that Watson had lived in Australia, and reading Baring-Gould did not change what I had already formulated about Watson's past. It was at this point in time I believe that I considered the birth dates of Holmes and Watson, and to be able to

construct a history backwards from 1881 to fit these dates.

Now it is common knowledge (at least in the Holmesian world) that Sherlock Holmes was born 6th January 1854, and by much less clear reasoning that John Watson was born on 7th July – but in what year? Using 1854 as a birth year for Holmes fits all conditions: it gives time for 1) a complete bachelor degree at Oxford, 2) a partial degree at Cambridge, 3) time to be in Montague Street and buy his Stradivarius, and 4) time to spend about 9 months in USA, all before meeting Watson in 1881.

Determining Watson's past before 1881 is more complex. The only clear date we have is the Battle of Maiwand on 27th July 1880. From the Canon we know that before this date Watson obtained his medical degree and then went for military training at the Royal Victoria Military Hospital in Netley, Hampshire. He then went to Afghanistan via India, he was wounded, then hospitalised (probably in India) where he caught Enteric Fever, and was subsequently shipped back to England as an invalid in 1880.

He received an Army pension of 11/6 per day (eleven shillings and six pence) or about £210 per year, however the duration of this pension is not clearly stated and must be inferred from this quotation from a "Study in Scarlet":

"I was dispatched, accordingly, in the troopship Orontes, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission

from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.”

This pension amount needs to be put into perspective, clearly no simple equation can be used to yield ‘that is £X in today’s currency’, the value of the purchasing power of the pound sterling and cost of living, and other factors must be considered. Fortunately there is a good reference in the Canon, in “Stockbroker’s Clerk” Watson purchases a medical practice that yields some £300/year (having decreased from £1200), but still a real world comparison is required. Conan Doyle’s own history provides this. He earned £240/year in 1880 as a ship’s doctor (unqualified), he set up a solo private practice in 1882 in Southsea and earned £154 in the first year, but this rose to £800, and according to Conan Doyle’s biography a typical London practitioner earned £370/year.

Thus, I consider £210/year to be a plausible pension, but surely this could not have been an ongoing pension from the British Government for his military service. When I commenced to write the chronology around 2009, I made a note that the pension was for duration of nine months, and I forgot to note where was the reference to substantiate this (“Study in Scarlet”). If the duration of Watson’s pension was nine months, then a government payout of some £160 seems to me an adequate, if not generous, amount to assist a former army medical officer back into civilian life.

We know that Watson was running short of funds in 1881, for that is the reason he agreed to move into 221B Baker Street. We know that when Holmes first meets Watson, Watson reveals that 'I have another set of vices', but these are unspecified until in "Shoscombe Old Place" where he states (regarding horse racing) "I pay for it with about half my wound pension" (he has the tense wrong, it should read "*I paid*"). It has been estimated that the initial rental of 221B Baker Street would have been about £4 per week, or £208 per year. This would have included laundry, lodging, breakfast at least, of which Watson would have paid half, but Watson's pension of £210/year is already being half spent on horse gambling!

It is also stated in "Sign of the Four" that Watson is a 'half-pay surgeon', this is a difficult statement to interpret for several reasons. Is the use of 'surgeon' simply a slip, where 'doctor' might read better? Certainly as an Army doctor it would be appropriate to consider that Watson's primary function in the army was that of a surgeon, and in my accounts I give Watson the degree of MBBS: bachelor of medicine and surgery. Now, as to 'half-pay', Watson himself describes himself thus, if his Army pension were ongoing, then the £210/year pension *could be* as roughly half that of £370/year, as stated above. However, Baring-Gould cites a reference from Hart's "Army List for the British Army" (1891) that the full pay of an Army surgeon was about £200/year, so a pension of £210/year cannot be described as 'half-pay', but it could be construed as 'half-pay' for a civilian London doctor.

But if Watson's pension was for nine months, it would cease in July 1881 and a larger consideration must be postulated. Watson needs to move into 221B Baker Street for financial reasons, he is already spending half his pension on horses, and in a matter of a few months he will need an income because even if his pension were to continue he cannot afford 221B Baker Street.

I believe that Watson having moved into 221B Baker Street finds that even giving up gambling on horses, this new convivial life style is going to cost him more than he was paying for previously in a private hotel in the Strand. In my chronology Watson seeks employment, for he has not the funds to purchase a practice of his own, so he works as an assistant doctor, or even as a *locum*, between moving to 221B Baker Street in 1881 and May 1889.

Thus, Watson sought employment and worked for a practice owned by another doctor, or doctors, or as a *locum*, or even both, but as such his income could be described as 'half-pay'. When Watson does buy a practice, it is earning £300/year having decreased from £1200/year. If Conan Doyle could live on £154 in his first year as a qualified doctor, then double that amount would suffice for Watson.

In the quotation from "Shoscombe Old Place" above, I believe has a typography error where 'pay' should read 'paid', since the setting of that case is given by both Baring-Gould and myself is 1903, and this reinforces my argument that Watson sought employment after moving

to 221B Baker Street, I speculate that Watson quickly gave up his vice of betting on horses, and that it was with the surety of the six pearls 'of considerable value' owned by Mary Marston that Watson was able to purchase a practice of his own 1885.

Returning to Watson's past before 1881, I set about establishing the detail by working backwards from the known date of the Battle of Maiwand 27 July 1880, and 'facts' as set out in "Study in Scarlet". From Watson's account he does not suggest that his military experience was of a long period, but with a single dated event given, after he graduates as a Doctor, he went to Netley. Now graduation in Britain is technically when one receives the results of the final examination, not the date of the ceremony, so Watson would have become a doctor in June 1878 according to the British university academic-year system. In true military style, Watson spent less than six months at Netley before being shipped to India, and I set these dates: December 1878 he attached to the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers and sent to Afghanistan, in January 1880 he is reassigned to the Berkshire's 66th Foot Army.

What I wanted to know about Watson was his age. Having been brought up with a strong memory of the portrayal of Watson by Nigel Bruce with Basil Rathbone, I found it impossible to give credence to this characterisation. The ageing *Boofus Britannicus* did not accord, and something more akin to the portrayals of David Burke and Edward Hardwicke with Jeremy Brett was to me much more appropriate. Holmes could never

share rooms with an ageing bumbling buffoon, Watson had to be about the same age as Holmes, and also be a man of considerable intelligence: a doctor and a surgeon.

Setting Watson's age was then a question of how long did it take to obtain a medical/surgical degree in 1878. The answer to that I could not discover, so I used my own knowledge of the degree system. Allowing five years to gain a Bachelor of Medicine (i.e. to be called 'doctor') and also obtain a degree in surgery (done concurrently), I allowed another year. In the first year of studies it is often the case to also take a course in a non-medical subject, and I had Watson study Middle English, simply because I too had studied Middle English). So I allowed six years for this education, September 1872 to June 1878. Now I had to decide upon the age at which Watson commenced his degree at the University of London.

Meanwhile, I had also worked on putting dates to Holmes's past. I needed to have him complete a Bachelor's Degree at Oxford, commence a Doctorate at Cambridge, spend between six months and a year in the USA, start his plan to be a consulting detective while at Montague Street. It was with immense satisfaction that I found that both men must have begun their University life at the same time, September 1872. And thus the colossal implication that they were both much of the very same age.

Another consideration was any actual age of a person stated in the Canon. In 'His Last Bow' set in

August 1914 Holmes is described as '60'. Thus accepting Baring-Gould birthdate of Holmes to be 6 January 1954 agrees with this: describing a person aged 59½ as 60 is acceptable. Another corroboration for the University dates is in the "Veiled Lodger" where it is stated Holmes was in active practice as a consulting detective for 23 years, 17 of which Watson was 'allowed to cooperate' and to chronicle. There are the three missing years from May 1891 (Reichenbach Fall incident) to April 1894 ("Empty House"), leaving 3 years that Holmes was active, and 3 without Watson. Thus, Holmes commenced his work as a consulting detective in 1878, and this fits with his having a truncated postgraduate degree at Cambridge. However, this reference from "Veiled Lodger" is not entirely to be trusted, the quotation reads in full 'I was allowed to cooperate with him and to keep notes of his doings', we can safely remove 3 years from total count of 23 because there were no cases that Watson could chronicle between 1891 and 1894 when Watson believed Holmes to be dead, the quotation states Watson 'was allowed to cooperate', and he certainly did not do this before Watson met Holmes in 1881. Also, while "Veiled Lodger" is clearly set 22 September 1896, it has Watson inexplicably not living at 221B Baker Street.

Holmes & Watson personal details

I have attempted not to dwell on these, as is the case in the Canon. I set Holmes's height at 6 feet 1 inch (185.5cm) and Watson as 'average height' at 5 feet 10 inches (178cm). Holmes must have been clean-shaven due to his propensity for disguises. Watson usually had a

moustache, it was practically compulsory for military officer, but his moustache was not flamboyant or waxed or in any way remarkable, there are references in “His Last Bow”, “The Naval Treaty”, and “Red Circle”. Watson’s rank in the Army would have been Captain, as in ‘Surgeon Captain’.

One important characteristic of Watson that must be commented upon is his wound, or wounds received in Afghanistan. ‘Study in Scarlet’ very clearly and precisely described the Jezail bullet wound to Watson’s shoulder, and yet in ‘Sign of the Four’ he nurses his leg stating ‘I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before’. Watson consistently refers to his wound in the singular, and its cause to be a singular Jezail bullet. Most likely the differing location of the wound is simply an error on Conan Doyle’s part, but I have chosen to follow a suggestion in Baring-Gould that the bullet hit just above but missing the left clavicle while Watson was bending over a patient, it then ricocheted off the left and down and came to rest in his leg. Quite a fanciful notion, but succinctly fitting the bill of one Jezail bullet but two wounds. I further expound this postulation, in that the nature of such a complex set of injuries Watson is wrong when he states about his leg that he ‘had a Jezail bullet through it some time before’, the bullet was not removed from his leg, and hence continued to cause Watson pain, such a second wound being overlooked by the major damage to the region near to his heart. There is proof in the Canon that bullet was still in his leg, see ‘Noble Bachelor’ where Watson states ‘the Jezail bullet which I had brought back in one of my limbs as a relic of my

Afghan campaign'. Watson later has the bullet removed after the urging of wife Mary, and thus after Holmes returns in 1894, Watson has no more problems with his leg.

I make two major personality changes for both Holmes and Watson. I felt there was a somewhat indefinable character change in the Canon to the men after they re-united in 1894, and I decided to assert this.

Watson ceased to be smoker. I decided that Mary Marston had persuaded him to stop smoking, no doubt as a very early appreciation that it was not a healthy example for a medical doctor to be a smoker. I can vouch as an ex-smoker myself, giving up is not overly difficult if you have the will, and the desire to please your wife. Unlike myself, Watson in his post-smoker times is more tolerant of tobacco smoke, although on occasions he does open a window. There are a few recorded incidents where Watson smokes after 1894, but I choose to simply ignore them.

Holmes returned from his travels to the East, to Tibet and Persia, and does not use cocaine again. He attributes this to the influence of the Dalai Lama which is more likely an attribution to the fanciful editing of Watson's manuscripts by Doyle. Nevertheless, it was probably the influence of Buddhism on Holmes that gave him the will to stop using cocaine. The reference in "Sign of the Four" where Watson queries is it 'morphine or cocaine' is glibly made, Holmes used a 7% solution of cocaine, he never used morphine, it is probable he used

opium. There are no references in the Canon to Holmes using cocaine after his return from the dead.

With regard to Holmes's life after 221B Baker Street there are only two canonical stories that refer to this period, the 'Lion's Mane' and 'His Last Bow' and these give few facts regarding either Holmes or Watson. Holmes retires to keep bees! I thought long and hard about this, this was not in character with a man who abhorred inaction and resorted to using drugs to relieve himself of the ennui of not having a case to solve. In 2011 when I published 'Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes' and at the book launch I announced my decision: while the move to Cuckmere Haven was real, and so was the keeping of bees, the real reason was that Holmes had been recruited to join the Secret Service and this was his cover. Powers in the Civil Service and the Police had conspired to limit the activities and influence of the Holmes brothers. If, as a secret agent Holmes had broken the Official Secrets Act and shared information about his activities with Watson, Watson would have known that he could never publish them in their lifetimes!

In the meanwhile, Watson had married again and started a dynasty. I created this future history of the Watson family to the present day, and by pure coincidence the ages of my own father and me fit into this dynasty, and so it is that Watson's son James Arthur fathered Allan Sherlock, who fathered John Benjamin, who fathered James Innes. In my world of Holmes and Watson, it is James Innes Watson who releases the 'lost' manuscripts to the world, a hundred or more years after

the events, not now bound by Official Secrets. In the real world, my father was Alan Cunningham Beckwith, and I am David Benjamin Beckwith (I was to have been named John until a very last minute decision made by my mother). So by a double reasoning, I am both Watson's great-grandson as John Benjamin Watson, and a modern day Conan Doyle acting as the literary agent to James Innes Watson who releases the manuscripts.

221B Baker Street

I have attempted to portray the rooms at 221B Baker Street as closely as I can from the accounts in the Canon. There are certain problems that arise in the Canon, such as on which floor was Watson's bedroom, and the improbable (impossible!) second door into Holmes's bedroom near the window to Baker Street. There are 3 steps up from the pavement to the entry, 17 steps up to first floor. Watson has a bedroom and dressing room on the second floor. Holmes has a bedroom, a dressing room, and a small store room on the first floor. The sitting room is quite large, spanning the entire width of the house with windows opening to Baker Street in the east, and the yard and back street to the west. There are toilets, but no bathrooms. Mrs. Hudson's domain is sacrosanct on the ground floor, however she has at least one room on the second floor, where occasionally one of the servants lives. There are normally a maid and a page as servants, but these change: no doubt due to the small salary afforded to young domestic staff, they advance their position in life by changing employer.

The building is owned by Mr. Oswald as described in my story “The Murdered Professor”, but is purchased by Holmes in early April 1891 in his preparations for confrontation with Prof. Moriarty. I expect the initial rental would have been about £200/year, but as Mrs. Hudson explains to Watson, there are extra costs for extra services. In February 1881 when Holmes and Watson moved in the rental may have included some form of breakfast, but unlikely any other meals.

The creak of the seventh step of the stair to the first floor is my own introduction. After gaining ownership of the house, Holmes attempts to have the creak fixed, but it comes back.

Inspector Lestrade

I have noted a single characteristic of the man that is given in the Canon and given it a place in my stories. In “Boscombe Valley” Holmes states ‘*That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place*’, if this were apparent in mud, then it must have been equally so in his gait.

That Lestrade’s given name commences with a ‘G’ is specified in “Cardboard Box”. I have chosen his given name to be Gerald, and on occasion his colleagues name him Gerry.

Strictly 100% not Canonical, I have made Lestrade a Cockney. His accent is pure London but without any use

of rhyming slang. This characteristic can be attributed to Dennis Hoey portrayal in the Rathbone depictions of Holmes.

Athelney Jones

In my stories Holmes has an aversion to double-barrel names. He names Conan Doyle as 'Doyle' – and quite rightly so. Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle had three given names, choosing to use Arthur as his preferred name, so he is Arthur Doyle, Dr. Doyle, or Mr. Doyle. It was an affectation of Doyle to name himself 'Conan Doyle' when he commenced tertiary education.

Athelney Jones could then be construed as something similar to 'Conan Doyle'. Athelney could be construed as a given name, but every reference in the Canon has Athelney paired with Jones. In my opinion the name should be hyphenated, and I have done so.

Given this interpretation of the man's name, I have made him a Welshman (by birth, but not by speech) and given him the first name of Owen, however his appearance showed no hint of Celtic blood.

Other Scotland Yard personnel

Principally this means Tobias Gregson, I have not made any changes or additions to the character as described in the Canon.

In “Jack the Ripper” the names of some real Policemen of the time are used, but their personalities are entirely fictitious, likewise in “Assassination Plot” names from the precursor to MI5 and MI6 were genuine people, but used fictitiously.

Mrs. Hudson

Nowhere is a clear description of the lady given, and never a hint as what became of her husband. There is a general impression that she is older than Holmes and Watson. In my stories I give her a birth place in Scotland and on occasion she lapses into the speech of her youth. She accompanies Holmes when he retires to Cuckmore Haven: in the ‘Lion’s Mane’ Holmes states he there with ‘my old housekeeper’. In his retirement Holmes’s servant is named Martha and by assumption that he had only one servant at the time, so Mrs. Hudson’s given name is Martha. There is also mixed appreciation of her culinary capabilities, I have expressed this by having Mrs. Hudson as a good cook, but by no means excellent, but better than Watson’s general expectations, while Holmes clearly had a more culinary varied history and no doubt also a more expensive one. I was influenced by Rosenblatt and Sonnenschmidt’s ‘Dining with Sherlock Holmes’, and so my stories contain references to actual meals that are appropriate to both the era and the capabilities of Mrs. Hudson. In general my references to food are there to enforce the recognition of the changing eating habits in Britain, and of course the differences between the cuisine of Britain and the USA that existed in Holmes’s era, and still does.

The Baker Street Irregulars

I have assumed the Irregulars to be an ever-changing group of young street urchins. They grow up and gain employment or otherwise cease to wander the streets. They are not necessarily homeless, and in my stories a few of them make a reference to homelife.

Their leader thus also changes as the years pass, but Wiggins is the leader in 'Study in Scarlet' and is still so a year later in the 'Finding of Geoffrey Hobson'.