



Arthur Conan Doyle

Author, Journalist, Doctor (1859–1930)

Author Arthur Conan Doyle wrote 60 mystery stories featuring the wildly popular detective character Sherlock Holmes and his loyal assistant Watson.

Synopsis

On May 22, 1859, Arthur Conan Doyle was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. In 1890 his novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, introduced the character of Detective Sherlock Holmes. Doyle would go on to write 60 stories about Sherlock Holmes. He also strove to spread his Spiritualism faith through a series of books that were written from 1918 to 1926. Doyle died of a heart attack in Crowborough, England on July 7, 1930.

Early Life

On May 22, 1859, Arthur Conan Doyle was born to an affluent, strict Irish-Catholic family in Edinburgh, Scotland. Although Doyle's family was well-respected in the art world, his father, Charles, who was a life-long alcoholic, had few accomplishments to speak of. Doyle's mother, Mary, was a lively and well-educated woman who loved to read. She particularly delighted in telling her young son outlandish stories. Her great enthusiasm and animation while spinning wild tales sparked the child's imagination. As Doyle would later recall in his biography, "In my early childhood, as far as I can remember anything at all, the vivid stories she would tell me stand out so clearly that they obscure the real facts of my life."

At the age of 9, Doyle bid a tearful goodbye to his parents and was shipped off to England, where he would attend Hodder Place, Stonyhurst—a Jesuit preparatory school—from 1868 to 1870. Doyle then went on to study at Stonyhurst College for the next five years. For Doyle, the boarding-school experience was brutal: many of his classmates bullied him, and the school practiced ruthless corporal punishment against its students. Over time, Doyle found solace in his flair for storytelling, and developed an eager audience of younger students.

Medical Education and Career

When Doyle graduated from Stonyhurst College in 1876, his parents expected that he would follow in his family's footsteps and study art, so they were surprised when he decided to pursue a medical degree at the University of Edinburgh instead. At med school, Doyle met his mentor, Professor Dr. Joseph Bell, whose keen powers of observation would later inspire Doyle to create his famed fictional detective character, Sherlock Holmes. At the University of Edinburgh, Doyle also had the good fortune to meet classmates and future fellow authors James Barrie and Robert Louis Stevenson. While a medical student, Doyle took his own first stab at writing, with a short story called *The Mystery of Sasassa Valley*. That was followed by a second story, *The American Tale*, which was published in *London Society*.

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OCCUPATION

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Stonyhurst, Stonyhurst
College

bio.

During Doyle's third year of medical school, he took a ship surgeon's post on a whaling ship sailing for the Arctic Circle. The voyage awakened Doyle's sense of adventure, a feeling that he incorporated into a story, *Captain of the Pole Star*.

In 1880, Doyle returned to medical school. Back at the University of Edinburgh, Doyle became increasingly invested in Spiritualism or "Psychic religion," a belief system that he would later attempt to spread through a series of his written works. By the time he received his Bachelor of Medicine degree in 1881, Doyle had denounced his Roman Catholic faith.

Doyle's first paying job as a doctor took the form of a medical officer's position aboard the steamship *Mayumba*, travelling from Liverpool to Africa. After his stint on the *Mayumba*, Doyle settled in Plymouth, England for a time. When his funds were nearly tapped out, he relocated to Portsmouth and opened his first practice. He spent the next few years struggling to balance his burgeoning medical career with his efforts to gain recognition as an author. Doyle would later give up medicine altogether, in order to devote all of his attention to his writing and his faith.

Personal Life

In 1885, while still struggling to make it as a writer, Doyle met and married his first wife, Louisa Hawkins. The couple moved to Upper Wimpole Street and had two children, a daughter and a son. In 1893, Louisa was diagnosed with tuberculosis. While Louisa was ailing, Doyle developed an affection for a young woman named Jean Leckie. Louisa ultimately died of tuberculosis in Doyle's arms, in 1906. The following year, Doyle would remarry to Jean Leckie, with whom he would have two sons and a daughter.

Writing Career

In 1886, newly married and still struggling to make it as an author, Doyle started writing the mystery novel *A Tangled Skein*. Two years later, the novel was renamed *A Study in Scarlet* and published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. *A Study in Scarlet*, which first introduced the wildly popular characters Detective Sherlock Holmes and his assistant, Watson, finally earned Doyle the recognition he had so desired. It was the first of 60 stories that Doyle would pen about Sherlock Holmes over the course of his writing career. Also, in 1887, Doyle submitted two letters about his conversion to Spiritualism to a weekly periodical called *Light*.

Doyle continued to actively participate in the Spiritualist movement from 1887 to 1916, during which time he wrote three books that experts consider largely autobiographical. These include *Beyond the City* (1893), *The Stark Munro Letters* (1895) and *A Duet with an Occasional Chorus* (1899). Upon achieving success as a writer, Doyle decided to retire from medicine. Throughout this period, he additionally produced a handful of historical novels including one about the Napoleonic Era called *The Great Shadow* in 1892, and his most famous historical novel, *Rodney Stone*, in 1896.

The prolific author also composed four of his most popular Sherlock Holmes books during the 1890s and early 1900s: *The Sign of Four* (1890), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892), *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894) and *The Hound of Baskervilles*, published in 1901. In 1893, to Doyle's readers' disdain, he had attempted to kill off his Sherlock Holmes character in order to focus more on writing about Spiritualism. In 1901, however, Doyle reintroduced Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of Baskervilles* and later brought him back to life in *The Adventure of the Empty House* so the lucrative character could earn Doyle the money to fund his missionary work. Doyle also strove to spread his faith through a series of written works, consisting of *The New Revolution* (1918), *The Vital Message* (1919), *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921) and *History of Spiritualism* (1926).

In 1928, Doyle's final twelve stories about Sherlock Holmes were published in a compilation entitled *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

Death

Having recently been diagnosed with Angina Pectoris, Doyle stubbornly ignored his doctor's warnings, and in the fall of 1929, embarked on a spiritualism tour through the Netherlands. He returned home with chest pains so severe that he needed to be carried on shore, and was thereafter almost entirely bedridden at his home in Crowborough, England. Rising one last time on July 7, 1930, Doyle collapsed and died in his garden while clutching his heart with one hand and holding a flower in the other.

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Arthur Conan Doyle Biography

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