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Works Cited

Edwards, Owen Dudley. "Doyle, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan 1859 – 1930." *Oxford Dictionary Of National Biography* (2010): 1. *Biography Reference Center*. Web. 7 Jan. 2017.

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Doyle, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan 1859 – 1930

Doyle, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan 1859 – 1930, writer, was born at 11 Picardy Place, Edinburgh, on 22 May 1859, the eldest son and third of the nine children of Charles Altamont Doyle 1832–1893, an artist and draughtsman in the Edinburgh office of works, and his wife Mary, *née* Foley 1838–1921, daughter of Catherine Foley, *née* Pack. Mary and her mother were immigrants from Ireland and were descended from landed Irish Catholic and protestant stock. They supplemented their meagre income by taking in lodgers, one of whom was Charles Doyle. In 1864 Charles's growing alcoholism led to a temporary breakup during which Arthur was domiciled at Liberton Bank with sisters of the historiographer-royal for Scotland, John Hill Burton, who influenced the young Doyle's development as historian and bibliophile.

Early life and education

In 1867 the Doyle family reunited and inhabited the overcrowded tenement flats at 3 Sciennes Place, Edinburgh, the poorer half of a Newington cul-de-sac. Arthur headed a local street gang of boys, from whom he later evolved Sherlock Holmes's youthful allies, the Baker Street Irregulars. Funded by wealthy uncles, he attended Hodder preparatory school from 1868 to 1870 and then its senior school, Stonyhurst College, from 1870 to 1875. He was happy at Hodder, less happy at Stonyhurst, but developed talents as a story-teller and sportsman. Homesickness increased his love of Sir Walter Scott, possibly the greatest single literary influence on his work in general. The school grounds in the Ribble valley later reappeared in his fiction, notably the building, yew walk, observatory, and mists which transferred to the Dartmoor terrain of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Loneliness was offset by a close friendship with a fellow Scot, James Ryan of Glasgow, presumably the initial basis for the Holmes–Watson companionship. He spent a final year of schooling at Feldkirch, Austria, in 1875–6, which added to his remarkable ability to view the past from non-British perspectives. Yet he lost his belief in Catholic doctrine while at Stonyhurst, although he later regained some of its attendant cults (guardian angels, the communion of saints) when fashioning his spiritualist faith.

Conan Doyle, as he became known, entered Edinburgh University medical school in 1876 and witnessed a variety of medical characters, chief among them his mentor, Joseph Bell. Bell was a master of deduction from minutiae of evidence, such as gravel on a shoe conveying a patient's route to work, the better to impress the patient and his own attendant students. Otherwise, Bell was austere and scientific with students and patients, in contrast to Sir Patrick Heron Watson, of whom it was said that 'nobody in Scotland was ready to die until they had first seen Watson'. The contrast between Bell's and P. H. Watson's manners survives in Holmes's cold-bloodedness contrasted with John Watson's humanity.

First writings and medical practice

During his student days Conan Doyle sent his earliest surviving fictional work, 'The Haunted Grange of Goresthorpe' (unrelated to a similar title published in 1883), to Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, but it was not used. His first published story was a mock-authentic South African yarn, 'The Mystery of Sasassa Valley', which appeared in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal on 6 September 1879. Later that month, on 20 September, he published his first non-fictional article, 'Gelsemium as a poison' in the British Medical Journal. Neither was noteworthy in itself, but each presaged fine work to come. His university studies were interrupted by work as a

doctor's assistant in Birmingham where he passed an examination in pharmacology extramurally and by service as a ship's doctor on the Greenland whaler *Hope* of Peterhead from February to September 1880. Conan Doyle graduated MB CM in 1881. From October 1881 to January 1882 he was surgeon on the steamer *Mayumba* to west Africa, where he met and treated the dying African-American anti-slavery leader Henry Highland Garnet, who inspired his hostility to the Ku Klux Klan and sympathy for racial intermarriage as expressed, unfashionably at the time, in the Holmes stories of 1891 and 1893, 'The Five Orange Pips' and 'The Yellow Face'. To his other degrees, he added his MD, also from Edinburgh, in 1885 (on aspects of syphilis, using literary as well as medical evidence).

After an ill-fated partnership in Plymouth general practice with George Turnavine Budd, Conan Doyle settled in Southsea, Portsmouth, and built a successful practice. One of his patients, Major-General Alfred Wilks Drayson, fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, exposed him to theosophy. While Conan Doyle became suspicious of the Blavatsky cult, it nevertheless gave him the plot of his first novel, *The Mystery of Cloomber* (not published until 1888). He also built up a fine portfolio of short stories, particularly two derived from his seafaring. 'The Captain of the Pole-Star' takes place on a whaler haunted by the ghost of the captain's dead love while his ship is temporarily cut off from further voyage by icebergs. 'J. Habakuk Jephson's Statement' offered a solution to the sea mystery of the *Mary Celeste*. The latter was so successful that posterity has always employed its orthography, '*Marie Celeste*'. Its explanation of an ex-slave's vengeance derived from Garnet's passionate account of his people's suffering under slavery. The homicidal Septimius Goring supplies Conan Doyle's most memorable narrator up to that time—a black voice. It won a place in Thackeray's old magazine, *The Cornhill*, in January 1884.

On 6 August 1885, Conan Doyle married Louisa (Louise) Hawkins 1856/7–1906, sister of one of his patients, John Hawkins, who died while in residence at Conan Doyle's Southsea surgery. Charles Doyle had by now succumbed to alcoholism and epilepsy. Confined in a number of Scottish mental institutions, he nevertheless was given some commissions for illustrations for his son's books. Mary Doyle continued to live in a cottage on the estate of their former lodger, Bryan Charles Waller, at Masongill, on the Yorkshire border.

Conan Doyle's fiction made astonishing progress in the early 1880s. He learned the economics of the short story from the work of Guy de Maupassant and from the Edinburgh medical journals with their logical progress from case-statement to collection of symptoms, rival diagnoses, and finally to ultimate conclusion and explanation. His first translation of these techniques into fiction ended in what is now called *A Study in Scarlet*. The story brought together Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson for the first time and a lifelong series was launched. Both *A Study in Scarlet* and *Micah Clarke*, Conan Doyle's historical novel set during the Monmouth rebellion, struggled to find publishers. *A Study in Scarlet* found a badly paid home with Ward Lock, who gave Conan Doyle £25 for all his rights on 20 November 1886. The story was published a year later in Beeton's Christmas Annual and was singled out for enthusiastic review in *The Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald*. A sequel, *The Sign of the Four*, was commissioned and published by Lippincott's Magazine in co-operation with Ward Lock (February 1890) but Conan Doyle's anger against Ward Lock for exploiting the innocence of a struggling author left book publication to Spencer Blackett. Meanwhile Ward and Downey had published *The Mystery of Cloomber* in December 1888, after serialization in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The *Cornhill* serialized and Smith Elder published his medieval romance, *The White Company*, a remarkable piece of research on fourteenth-century English mercenary warfare in France and Spain. *Micah Clarke* was taken on by Longmans in 1889 after a recommendation from Andrew Lang. The *Captain of the 'Pole-Star'* and other *Tales* appeared in 1890, as did his partly autobiographical long thriller *The Firm of Girdlestone*.

Success with Holmes and the Strand Magazine

It was still medical ambition that took Conan Doyle and his family (now including his daughter Mary, born in 1889) from his successful Southsea practice to residence in London, first at Montague Place and then at South Norwood in 1891. His attempt at eye specialization foundered, partly because of his success in transferring Watson and Holmes to the short story in the newly founded *Strand Magazine* edited by H. Greenhough Smith. Introduced into the July 1891 number towards the back, it rapidly won its way to the front and the magazine's circulation nearly doubled. Conan Doyle had now perfected the formula of a series of stories featuring the same characters but without continuous plot, so that the occasional number might be lost without injury to the suspense. The new arrangement, positing a Watson married since the love interest of *The Sign of the Four*, increased audience identification. They were radical stories in the ways in which they singled out social wrongs, a king's betrayal of an opera singer, a stepfather's deception of his ward as a fictitious lover, an aristocratic crook's exploitation of a failing pawnbroker, a beggar's extensive estate in Kent. The early stories in particular are sharply critical of official incompetence and aristocratic privilege, and at least two in the first dozen short stories ('*A Scandal in Bohemia*' and '*The Beryl Coronet*') are thinly disguised versions of the amorous and financial chicanery of Albert Edward, prince of Wales. Against that, the stories praised a new professionalism: the struggles of the well-qualified aspirant in an unjust world reflected the anxieties of both author and readers.

But now Conan Doyle faced the danger of too much success. The *Strand Magazine* demanded another six stories after the first series and then a further twelve. Conan Doyle twice raised his rates, without demur. Holmes became

so famous that the author feared that he would be known only as the detective's creator. He therefore confronted Holmes with the evil genius of Professor Moriarty, a confrontation which resulted in their apparent mutual destruction in 'The Final Problem' (Strand Magazine, Dec 1893). The author left himself a slight loophole, but the death story itself was a miniature epic of such dramatic force that it consolidated Holmes's hold over the public.

It was essentially to realize his capabilities in historical fiction, particularly with a view to mastering the era of Napoleon, that Conan Doyle ditched Holmes. His first attempt here had been founded on medical experience: 'A Straggler of '15', the last days of a Waterloo veteran, was published in Black and White (21 March 1891). It became a roaring success on the stage as Waterloo, starring Henry Irving (1895). A novel, The Great Shadow (1892) gave a Scottish boy's impression of the crisis leading to Waterloo, with a cameo appearance of Walter Scott as literary homage. Conan Doyle published collected medical stories in 1894 as Round the Red Lamp, which ranged from elegant defence of elderly unscientific medical wisdom in 'Behind the Times' and of woman doctors ('The Doctors of Hoyland') to horrific manoeuvre, where a surgeon unwittingly mutilates his adulterous mistress ('The Case of Lady Sannox'). The Brigadier Gerard stories, which looked at Napoleon's Europe through the eyes of a besotted, somewhat absurd, but profoundly heroic and unquestionably lovable French devotee, replaced Holmes in the Strand Magazine. All save one were composed between 1894 and 1903. The Gerard stories are distinguished achievements in intellectual no less than military and social history. They were later collected in The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard (1896) and Adventures of Gerard (1903), with the late story 'The Marriage of the Brigadier' included in The Last Galley (1911). Even without Holmes, Conan Doyle successfully invaded historical fiction using deductive methods and mistakes for Gerard and others.

For all of Holmes's identification with London, Conan Doyle's time there was short. His son Alleyne Kingsley Conan Doyle was born in 1892, but Louise, his wife, contracted tuberculosis and, after visits to Switzerland, the family moved from 12 Tennyson Road, South Norwood, to the therapeutic neighbourhood of Hindhead, Haslemere, Surrey. He accepted a lecturing tour in the United States for much of 1894 in company with his younger brother Innes. He took his wife on a recuperative journey down the Nile, which stimulated The Tragedy of Korosko (1898), about the adventures of a band of travellers during a Muslim rising. In 1898–9 he produced 'Round the Fire Stories' for the Strand Magazine, a mystery series worthy of recognition alongside the best of the Holmes cycle. They were not given book publication until 1908 on an absurd plea of inadequacy: it is more likely that they were withheld because of content. Charles Doyle died in 1893, and passages echo details of his certification ('The Beetle Hunter'), alcoholism ('The Japanned Box'), and incarceration ('The Sealed Room'). Furthermore, 'The man with the Watches' deals with homosexuality and cross-dressing and culminates in a man's saving the gambler who has debauched and accidentally killed his brother.

War, social issues, and personal grief

Conan Doyle enthusiastically supported the British effort in the South African War and served as a doctor in the volunteer-staffed Longman Hospital in 1900, after which he defended British policy if not always British practice in The Great Boer War (1900) and in The War in South Africa: its Cause and Conduct (1902). The latter, translated into many foreign languages and braille, became the major international advocate of the British case in the controversial war, and bowing to his mother's insistence a somewhat reluctant Conan Doyle accepted a knighthood for it in 1902. Hitherto his finest work on warfare in modern fiction had been 'The Green flag' and 'The Lord of Chateau Noir', short stories portraying Irish mutiny in British imperial ranks in the 1880s and French guerrilla resistance after German conquest in 1870. The Hound of the Baskervilles, supposedly an overlooked adventure of Holmes from before his death, was published in 1902. In response to an offer of \$45,000 from McClure's Magazine in the United States, Conan Doyle revealed that his famous creation had not died when Moriarty was killed at the Reichenbach Falls. The Return of Sherlock Holmes, a collection of thirteen new stories, appeared in 1905 after Strand serialization (1903–04).

Conan Doyle celebrated martial virtues, notably in Sir Nigel (1906), a violently anti-clerical account of the youth of his medieval hero in the thick of the Hundred Years' War. But he was no bellicose warmonger in the years before the First World War, being converted to the belief in a German threat only two years before its outbreak: he had cherished the memories of his schooldays among German speakers and drew on Goethe and Heine. Yet his stories published in the last years of peace reflect a disintegrating world. He confronted this in his crusade against the Belgians' continuation of Leopold's slave state in Congo, in his support for the legalization of divorce, and in his part in the exposure of grave miscarriages of British justice, namely those of George Edalji, convicted of a series of horse and cattle mutilations, and Oscar Slater, imprisoned for the murder of an elderly Edinburgh spinster, Marion Gilchrist. Conan Doyle also championed Irish home rule after two Unionist candidacies in Scotland in 1900 and 1906. His sense of the glory and nonsense of scientific advance found happy resolution in The Lost World (1912), where academic vendetta at its most ludicrous continually punctuates a thrilling quest to establish the survival of dinosaurs.

Louise Conan Doyle succumbed to tuberculosis on 4 July 1906. On 18 September 1907 Conan Doyle married Jean Blyth Leckie 1872/3–1940, daughter of James Blyth Leckie of Glebe House, Blackheath, whom he had known for over ten years. Each year he marked their anniversary by presenting Jean with a single snowdrop.

They had three children: Denis *b.* 1909, Adrian *b.* 1910, and Jean Lena Annette 1912, later Air Commandant Dame Jean Conan Doyle, head of the Women's Royal Air Force.

Conan Doyle's most valuable piece of reminiscence is *Through the Magic Door* (1907), his appreciation of some of the major literary influences, including Scott, Macaulay, Carlyle, Boswell, Stevenson, Melville, and Froissart. In it he evangelizes for great literature; he believed his works stood in a great tradition but also that they were accessible rather than élitist. He read, as he wrote, for everybody. The last long Holmes story, *The Valley of Fear*, was serialized in 1914–15. Conan Doyle also served as military correspondent and pro-ally historian in the First World War, with several volumes culminating in *The British Campaign in France and Flanders* (1920), the original six volumes recording each year of war as soon as possible thereafter, with two volumes for 1918.

Champion of spiritualism and last years

Death had been an unobtrusive but lifelong companion for Conan Doyle. His memoirs, *Memories and Adventures* (1924–30), describe his grandmother's corpse as his first memory. His Jesuit schooling reinforced his hope for a life after death, which his loss of faith undermined; his medical training exposed him to scientific scepticism, but left him critical of what seemed to be professional callousness. His first marriage evidently originated in his sorrow—and possibly his guilt—at the death of John Hawkins, and much of it was overlaid by the battle to save his wife from tuberculosis. His fiction became death-obsessed, beyond the detective story norm. Death in his writing is not the occasion of a puzzle but the inevitability of an adventure. His son Kingsley died in 1918 from influenza aggravated by war wounds in the British army, where he had won the rank of captain. His brother Innes Doyle, a general, died of pneumonia in the wake of the war. Like other war propagandists, he had to measure the magnitude of the slaughter against the reality of its justification. Spiritualism—denial of death—gave him some degree of peace. The 1920s were dominated for him by a world crusade to evangelize for spiritualism, resulting in most of his last books, including *The Wanderings of a Spiritualist* (1921), *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), and *Pheneas Speaks: Direct Spirit Communications in the Family Circle* (1927). *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927) made no attempt to interfere with Holmes's scepticism, but sexual themes were handled much more vigorously than hitherto, and Holmes denounced human cravings for artificial prolongation of life as well as rejecting suicide.

Conan Doyle's *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) showed an endearing credulity for fairy phenomena which now appear to have been faked by two little girls at Cottingley, Yorkshire, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths. His gallantry and enthusiasm may have prevented their confession at the time. Belatedly but firmly the verdict that his novels have 'no claim to literary distinction' (DNB) has been overturned. While he was no remarkable poet, his three volumes of verse, collected as *Poems* (1927), include judicious economic instruction ('Advice to a Young Author') as well as self-analysis ('The Inner Room'), as he lists the many contrasting personalities within himself.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle died at his home, Windlesham, Crowborough, Sussex, on 7 July 1930, and was buried on 11 July 1930 in the rose garden of Windlesham. He was reinterred with his wife in Minstead churchyard in the New Forest, Hampshire.

Posthumous reputation

Edmund Wilson, in 'Mr Holmes, they were the Footprints of a Gigantic Hound' (*Classics and Commercials*, 1950), observed that 'Sherlock Holmes is literature on a humble but not ignoble level ... by virtue of imagination and style'. While Conan Doyle most wanted to be remembered as a champion of spiritualism and as a historical novelist, it is Sherlock Holmes who has continued to capture the imagination of the public. The stories have inspired numerous imitators and have lent themselves to stage and screen adaptation. The first Holmes film was made in 1908, and a number of actors have become forever associated with 'the Great Detective'. The American William Gillette played Holmes on the stage from 1899 to 1932. Basil Rathbone starred as Holmes alongside Nigel Bruce as Dr Watson in fourteen films between 1939 and 1946, while Jeremy Brett recreated the role in the Granada television series between 1984 and 1993. The Holmes character has equally inspired parodies, musicals, and even a Disney film. Countless Holmes societies exist all over the world, from the Société Sherlock Holmes de France to the Baker Street Irregulars, an exclusive, invitation-only club founded in London in 1934. In the United States regional groups pay homage to the detective, from the Diogenes Club of Dallas to the Noble and Most Singular Order of the Blue Carbuncle in Portland, Oregon.

Recent biographies and critical studies have gone some way to presenting a more rounded view of Conan Doyle, his work, and his beliefs. The Arthur Conan Doyle Society was founded in 1989.

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Likenesses

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E. O.Hoppé, photograph, 1912, Curatorial Assistance, Inc., Los Angeles, E. O. Hoppé Trust

H. L.Gates, oils, 1927, NPG

B.Partridge, pencil, ink, and wash caricature, NPG; repro. in *Punch* (12 May 1926)

J.Russell & Sons, photograph, NPG

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Wealth

£63,491 3s. 1d.: probate, 13 May 1931, *CGPLA Eng. & Wales*

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By Owen Dudley Edwards

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