

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

It is a particular irony that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's birthplace in Edinburgh's Old Town, long since demolished, is not marked with a statue of the writer himself, but by a statue of his most famous creation – Sherlock Holmes – the character Conan Doyle came to believe was responsible for destroying his reputation as a serious literary figure. But perhaps it is understandable; after all, Sherlock Holmes is the most famous man who never existed.

His aquiline profile, with deerstalker and pipe, is instantly recognisable, even in countries where people have difficulty pronouncing his name. Everyone knows his catch phrase "Elementary my dear Watson!" (even though it's nowhere to be found in the stories) and his Baker Street address. People still write to him at his consulting rooms there in the hope that his genius will solve their problems.

More has been written about Sherlock Holmes than any other fictional character and, and much more than Conan Doyle wrote himself. The 54 short stories and 4 novels have been translated into almost every living language, including Esperanto, have never been out of print and have been plagiarised, serialised, analysed, and dramatised for screen, radio, television, stage and even a ballet.

Conan Doyle had no notion at the start that when he created Holmes he was creating a colossus amongst cultural icons, but when realisation dawned, it gave him no pleasure at all – as we shall see.

A bit of detail about his family:

Conan Doyle's grandparents - John Doyle and Marianne Conan - were poor Irish Catholics. Both *believed* that they were descendants of nobility but they had none of the trappings of wealth and a couple of years after their marriage in 1822 and birth of their daughter Annette in 1823, John decided that a better future could be found across the water in London. He was a talented artist who specialised in painting horses but he started to paint portraits to try and increase his income. This wasn't terribly successful and he realised he couldn't support a growing family – two sons had arrived after the move to London – so he began visiting the gallery of the House of Commons, taking a sketch book with him.

By 1827 he was selling caricatures to a number of publications, most notably the Times. His work was different from the cruel, bawdy style of his predecessors, he produced elegant, beautifully drawn and intelligent cartoons that satirised leading political and society figures. Some of them are now kept in the Print Room at the British Museum.

Things were looking up and in 1833 John and Marianne, and their brood of children moved to a large comfortable house on a tree lined avenue north of Hyde Park. They now had 2 more sons and 2 more daughters. Cambridge Terrace became the place where John Doyle entertained his growing circle of friends – among them Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens and Sir Edwin Landseer.

Marianne died suddenly of heart disease in 1839 and John was left to bring up their seven children alone. Sadly, 2 of them would also be dead within a couple of years. The remaining children were all artistically talented but the most enigmatic of these was the youngest - Charles Altamont Doyle – Sir Arthur's father.

Charles had a happy childhood but his father realised that he was the least talented of his sons, and arranged for him to take a menial job in the civil service at the age of 17. He became one of 3 assistants to one Robert Matheson who was Her Majesty's Clerk of Works in Edinburgh. Things weren't all bad though – accommodation was found for him in the heart of the elegant New Town at 6 Scotland Street and, at first, he seemed perfectly happy writing illustrated letters home about his life and work, and including “interesting observations on Scottish society”. By the summer of 1880 Charles, then 18, was proudly raising the flag on the roof of Holyrood Palace - where his office was – during Queen Victoria's visit to the city.

In 1855, when he was 22, Charles married Mary, his landlady's 17 year old daughter at St Mary's Roman Catholic cathedral. Their first child, Annette, was born in 1856 and was followed by 8 more children 2 of whom died in infancy.

Family life was hard with so many mouths to feed on very little money. Charles painted in his spare time but was rarely able to sell his work. He would rather give it away than haggle over a price. So the family struggled to survive on his salary which never rose above £250 a year plus an occasional bonus if he managed to sell an illustration. He contributed to the Illustrated Times, London Society and illustrated an edition of Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

His unhappy lot was probably not helped by letters from his most successful brother, Richard, who wrote describing his glamorous life in artistic circles in London. Charles often replied asking about the possibility of getting a job there but he was in a rut and he knew it.

Pathologically withdrawn, dogged by disappointment and a sense of failure, and burdened by a house of children he could barely afford to feed Charles turned to the bottle. His descent was rapid and when he was only 30 he suffered such an attack of the DT's that he was incapacitated and put on half pay for a year. Mary would later tell doctors that for months at a time her husband could only crawl, was perfectly idiotic and could not tell his own name.

He went from one drunken crisis to another and in his desperation to have drink he sold everything in value in the home, he ordered goods from local merchants and sold them to buy alcohol. He once took off all his clothes in the street and tried to sell them. He even drank a bottle of furniture polish. He was institutionalised in 1881 and was sent to Blairerno House in Aberdeenshire. One can get a fairly good idea of the dramatic circumstances which surrounded the confinement of his father to a lunatic asylum in a story Arthur Conan Doyle wrote in 1880 called *The Surgeon of Gaster Fell*.

He didn't take well to either sobriety or confinement and in 1885, he somehow managed to find alcohol and became violent when restrained by staff. This seems to have been the last straw for the owner of Blairerno and he had him certified for lunacy. He was committed to the Royal Lunatic Asylum at Montrose where, six months later, he had the first of a series of epileptic fits. He stayed there for 7 years, spending much of his time drawing, painting and writing that he felt abandoned by his family. In 1891 he was transferred to the Royal Edinburgh Asylum for a change of scene and a year later to the Crichton Royal Lunatic asylum in Dumfries where he died a week after arriving. He was 61. A generous obituary was published in the Scotsman with a brief mention that his son was the able novelist Dr A Conan Doyle.

So, Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was born at 11 Picardy Place in Edinburgh on 22 May 1859 and baptised 2 days later in St Mary's Cathedral. He was Charles and Mary's third child and first son – one daughter had died from hydrocephalus but another was healthy. Not long after his birth the family moved to Portobello where another sister died at the age of 2 after an attack of laryngitis.

Mary was the one who counted the pennies, somehow ensured that there was food on the table and tried to stop their father's drinking from blighting the children's young lives.

His mother was a natural story teller and both thrilled and terrified her children on long winter evenings around the fire and, in later life, Arthur said that it was in an attempt to emulate these stories that he first began weaving dreams himself. He wrote his first story – about a man who was eaten by a tiger - at the age of 6.

Arthur was enrolled at Newington Academy when he was 7. He had been sent to live with a family friend at Liberton Bank House by his mother who probably wanted to protect him from an increasingly difficult family life but returned to live with them a couple of years later when they moved to a gloomy tenement at Sciennes Hill Place.

By this time his godfather, who took his duties very seriously, suggested that he should be sent to a Jesuit school and managed to secure a scholarship for him at Stonyhurst in Lancashire.

He was in tears all the way to England, where he spent seven years at Stonyhurst. Arthur loathed his time there and rebelled at corporal punishment, which was prevalent and incredibly brutal in most English schools of that epoch.

During those gruelling years, Arthur's only moments of happiness were when he wrote to his mother, a regular habit that lasted for the rest of her life, and also when he practised sports, mainly cricket, which he was very good at. It was during these difficult years at boarding school that Arthur realized he also had a talent for storytelling. He was often found surrounded by a bevy of totally enraptured younger students listening to the amazing stories he would make up to amuse them.

By 1876, graduating at the age of 17, Arthur Doyle, (as he was called, before adding his middle name "Conan" to his surname), was a surprisingly normal young man. With his innate sense of humour and his sportsmanship, having ruled out any feelings of self-pity, Arthur was ready and willing to face the world.

Years later he wrote, "Perhaps it was good for me that the times were hard, for I was wild, full blooded and a trifle reckless. But the situation called for energy and application so that one was bound to try to meet it. My mother had been so splendid that I could not fail her."

Family tradition would have dictated the pursuit of an artistic career, yet Arthur decided to follow a medical one. This decision was influenced by Dr. Bryan Charles Waller, a young lodger his mother had taken in to make ends meet. Dr. Waller had trained at the University of Edinburgh and that is where Arthur was sent to carry out his medical studies.

The young medical student met a number of future authors who were also attending the university, including James Barrie and Robert Louis Stevenson. However the man who most impressed and influenced him was without a doubt, one of his teachers, Dr. Joseph

Bell. The good doctor was a master at observation, logic, deduction, and diagnosis. All these qualities were later to be found in the persona of Sherlock Holmes.

A couple of years into his studies, Arthur decided to try his pen at writing a short story. The result entitled *The Mystery of Sasassa Valley* was very evocative of the works of Edgar Allan Poe, his favourite author at the time. It was accepted in an Edinburgh magazine called *Chamber's Journal*, which had published Thomas Hardy's first work.

*Some of you might have been at the talk about this very journal at one of last year's meetings of the Tweeddale Society – it's a small world!*

That same year, Conan Doyle's second story *The American Tale* was published in *London Society*, making him write much later, "It was in this year that I first learned that shillings might be earned in other ways than by filling phials."

Arthur Conan Doyle was twenty years old and in his third year of medical studies when a chance for adventure knocked on his door. He was offered the post of ship's surgeon on the *Hope*, a whaling boat, about to leave for the Arctic Circle. The *Hope* first stopped near the shores of Greenland, where the crew proceeded to hunt for seals. The young medical student was appalled by the brutality of the exercise. But apart from that, he greatly enjoyed the camaraderie on board the ship and the subsequent whale hunt fascinated him. "I went on board the whaler a big straggling youth" he said, "I came off a powerful, well-grown man". The Arctic had "awakened the soul of a born wanderer" he concluded many years later. This adventure found its way into his first story about the sea, a chilling tale called *Captain of the Pole-Star*.

Without much enthusiasm, Conan Doyle returned to his studies in the autumn of 1880. A year later, he obtained his "Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery" degree. On this occasion, he drew a humorous sketch of himself receiving his diploma, with the caption: "Licensed to Kill". This became the tagline for James Bond!

Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle's first gainful employment after his graduation was as a medical officer on the steamer "*Mayumba*", a battered old vessel navigating between Liverpool and the west coast of Africa.

Unfortunately he did not find Africa to be as seductive as the Arctic, so he gave up that position as soon as the boat landed back in England. Then came a short but quite dramatic stint with Dr George Budd, an unscrupulous GP in Plymouth of which Conan Doyle gave a vivid account of forty years later in *The Stark Munro Letters*.

Conan Doyle and Budd were classmates at Edinburgh and both rugby players. After graduating from the medical program Budd initially established a practice in Bristol. However the cost of his plush lifestyle exceeded his income. On Conan Doyle's advice, Budd persuaded his creditors to give him additional time to meet his debts while he tried to establish a practice elsewhere. Budd's flair for public relations and marketing were evident at the presentation to his creditors. Some people shed tears after hearing Budd's stirring tale of a young man's struggles in a hard world.

Next, Budd moved to Plymouth. Things seemed to turn around for him there and in 1882 he sent word to Conan Doyle asking him to come and join the practice.

Conan Doyle had mixed feelings. As a rugby player Conan Doyle found Budd to be “rather handicapped by the Berserk fury with which he would play.” Also, when Budd was a student he created a scandal by eloping with a girl who was under age and a ward of the court. On the other hand, Conan Doyle respected Budd’s intellect and passion.

Conan Doyle asked three people for advice in the matter— his mother, a family friend and fellow physician and a former employer. The vote was unanimous. Everyone he consulted advised Conan Doyle against joining Budd’s practice but he did it anyway.

Budd’s marketing and public relations skills helped make his second medical practice a success. He developed a plan for making money at medicine. His plan? The medical consultation was free but the pharmaceuticals that he prescribed and sold were not.

Budd prescribed a lot of medicine.

Conan Doyle would later say that Budd distributed medicine in a “heroic and indiscriminate manner.”

When the partnership was about two months old Budd told Conan Doyle there was a problem. Profits had fallen and there wasn’t really room for two doctors in the practice.

After that debacle, and on the verge of bankruptcy, Conan Doyle left for Portsmouth, to open his first practice.

He rented a house but was only able to furnish the two rooms his patients would see. The rest of the house was almost bare and his practice was off to a rocky start. But he was compassionate and hard-working, so that by the end of the third year, his practice started to earn him a comfortable income.

During the next years, the young man divided his time between trying to be a good doctor and struggling to become a recognized author. In August of 1885, he married a young woman called Louisa Hawkins, the sister of one of his patients. He described her in his memoirs as having been "gentle and amiable."

In March 1886, Conan Doyle started writing the novel which catapulted him to fame. At first it was named *A Tangled Skein* and the two main characters were called Sheridan Hope and Ormond Sacker. Two years later this novel was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, under the title *A Study in Scarlet* which introduced us to the immortal Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Conan Doyle much preferred his next novel, *Micah Clark*, which though well received, is by now almost forgotten. This marked the start of a serious dichotomy in the author's life. There was Sherlock Holmes, who very quickly became world famous, in stories its author considered at best "commercial" and there were a number of serious historical novels, poems and plays, for which Conan Doyle expected to be recognized as a serious author.

During that time, he also wrote a very strange and confusing tale about the afterlife of three vengeful Buddhist monks called *The Mystery of Cloomber*. This story illustrates the start of Conan Doyle’s fascination with the paranormal and spiritualism.

Surprisingly, at that time, Conan Doyle was better known as a writer in the United States of America than in Britain. In August of 1889, Joseph Marshall Stoddart, managing editor of

Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in Philadelphia, came to London to organize a British edition of his magazine. He invited Conan Doyle for dinner in London at the elegant Langham Hotel which was to be mentioned later in a number of Holmesian adventures, and he also asked Oscar Wilde, who by then was already quite well known.

Oscar Wilde appeared to be a languorous dandy whereas Conan Doyle, in spite of his best suit, looked somewhat like a walrus in Sunday clothes. Yet Oscar and Arthur got along famously. "It was indeed a golden evening for me." Conan Doyle wrote of this meeting. As a result of this literary soiree, Lippincott's commissioned the young doctor to write a short novel, which was published in Britain and the US in February of 1890. This story, *The Sign of Four* was instrumental in establishing Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle once and for all in the annals of literature.

Thirty years later, he told a journalist, "I was young and full of the first joy of life and action, and I think I got some of it into my pages. When I wrote the last line, I remember that I cried: 'Well, I'll never beat that' and threw the ink pen at the opposite wall."

In spite of his literary success, a flourishing medical practice and a harmonious family life enhanced by the birth his daughter Mary, Conan Doyle was restless.

He decided the time had come to leave Portsmouth, and go to Vienna, where he wanted to specialize in Ophthalmology. Communications problems and a foreign language turned that trip into somewhat of a fiasco and after a visit to Paris; Conan Doyle hurried back to London followed by the gentle Louisa. Conan Doyle then opened a practice in elegant Upper Wimpole Street where, if you read his autobiography, not a single patient ever crossed his door. This inactivity gave him a lot of time to think and as a result, he made the most profitable decision of his life, that of writing a series of short stories featuring the characters from the Sign of Four. By then, Conan Doyle was represented by A. P. Watt, whose duty was to relieve him of "hateful bargaining." Hence, it was Watt who made the deal with The Strand magazine to publish the Sherlock Holmes stories. The "image" of Holmes was created by the illustrator Sidney Paget who took his handsome brother Walter as a model for the great detective. This collaboration lasted for many decades and was instrumental in making the author, the magazine and the artist, world famous.

In 1891, while writing some of the early Sherlock Holmes short stories, Conan Doyle was struck by a virulent attack of influenza which left him between life and death for several days. When his health improved, he came to realize how foolish he had been trying to combine a medical career with a literary one. "With a wild rush of joy," he decided to abandon his medical career. He added, "I remember in my delight taking the handkerchief which lay upon the coverlet in my enfeebled hand, and tossing it up to the ceiling in my exultation. I should at last be my own master."

In 1892, Louisa gave birth to a son they named Kingsley, which the proud father called "the chief event" of their life.

A year later, in spite of everyone's pleas, the amazingly prolific but very impulsive author decided to get rid of Sherlock Holmes.

During a trip to Switzerland, he found the spot where his hero was to come to his end. In *The Final Problem*, published in December 1893, Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty

plunged to their deaths at The Reichenbach Falls. As a result, twenty thousand readers cancelled their subscriptions to The Strand Magazine. Now freed from his medical career and from a fictional character that oppressed him and overshadowed what he considered his finer work, Conan Doyle immersed himself into even more intensive activity. This frenzied life may explain why the former physician didn't notice the serious deterioration of his wife's health.

By the time he finally became aware of how sick she was Louisa was diagnosed with Tuberculosis. Although she was given only a few months to live, her husband ministrations kept her alive well into the New Century. Writing incessantly, looking after Louisa, no longer a wife, but a patient, and then losing his father, deeply troubled Conan Doyle. It may well have been his resulting depression which caused him to become more and more fascinated by "life beyond the veil". He had long been attracted to Spiritualism, but when he joined the Society for Psychical Research, it was considered to be a public declaration of his interest and belief in the occult. As Sherlock Holmes said to Watson, "Work is the best antidote to sorrow..." Conan Doyle accepted to go to the United States to give a series of lectures.

He sailed for New York in September of 1894 with his younger brother Innes. He was booked to give talks in more than thirty cities. The tour was a huge success, judging by an article in the Ladies Home Journal. "Few foreign writers who have visited this country have made more friends than A. Conan Doyle. His personality is a peculiarly attractive one to Americans because it is so thoroughly wholesome..." The author returned to England in time for Christmas, as well as for the publication in The Strand Magazine, of the first of the "Brigadier Gerard" stories, which was an instant hit with the readers.

A trip with Louisa during the winter of 1896 to Egypt, where he hoped the warm climate would do her good, produced another of his novels: The Tragedy of the Korosko.

It is believed that Conan Doyle, a man with the highest moral standards, remained celibate during the rest of Louisa's life. That didn't prevent him from falling deeply in love with Jean Leckie the first time he saw her in March of 1897. Aged twenty-four, she was a strikingly beautiful woman, with dark-blond hair and bright green eyes. Her many accomplishments were quite unusual for those times: she was an intellectual, a good sportswoman as well as a trained mezzo-soprano. What further attracted Conan Doyle was that her family claimed to be related to the Scottish hero Rob Roy.

During that same period, Conan Doyle wrote a play about Sherlock Holmes. It was not to give him new life but to shore-up his bank account. The very successful American actor William Gillette having read the script, asked for permission to revise it. Conan Doyle agreed, and when the actor asked permission to alter the Holmes persona, he replied, "You may marry him, murder him, or do anything you like to him." By the time Gillette's revisions were sent back, there was little left of Conan Doyle's original script. The author's laconic comment to Gillette was: "It's good to see the old chap again."

After a triumphant tour in the United States, the play opened in London at the Lyceum Theatre in the fall of 1901. The British critics panned it, but as it often happens, vox populi prevailed, and the play was a huge success.



When the Boer War started, Conan Doyle declared to his horrified family that he was going to volunteer. Having written about many battles without the opportunity to test his skills as a soldier, he felt this would be his last opportunity to do so. Not surprisingly, being somewhat overweight at the age of forty, he was deemed unfit to enlist. Without losing an instant, he volunteered as a medical doctor and sailed to Africa in February of 1900. There, instead of fighting bullets, Conan Doyle had to wage a fierce battle against microbes. During the few months he spent in Africa, he saw more soldiers and medical staff die of typhoid fever, than of war wounds. He described all of this in his book "The Great Boer War", a five hundred-page chronicle, published in October of 1900. It was considered to be a masterpiece of military scholarship. It was not only a report of the war, but also an astute and well-informed commentary about some of the organizational shortcomings of the British forces at the time.

Exhausted and disappointed, Conan Doyle opted for yet another change of direction when he returned to England. He threw himself head first into politics by running for a seat in Central Edinburgh as a Liberal Unionist. To his credit, he lost the election by only a narrow margin. He then returned to London and continued writing.

The inspiration for his next novel came from a prolonged stay in the Devonshire moors, which included a visit to Dartmoor prison. At first, it was based mainly on local folklore about an inhospitable manor, an escaped convict and a huge black sepulchral hound. As the novel progressed, he came to realize that his story lacked a hero. He is quoted as having said, "Why should I invent such a character, when I already have him in the form of Sherlock Holmes." However, rather than resurrecting the detective, the author wrote the story as if it was a previously untold adventure.

To the delight of thousands of frustrated fans, The Strand magazine published the first episode of The Hound of the Baskervilles in August of 1901.

A year later, King Edward VII knighted Conan Doyle for services rendered to the Crown during the Boer War. Gossip has it that the King was such an avid Sherlock Holmes fan, that he had put the author's name on his Honours List to encourage him to write new stories. Be that as it may, His Majesty and several hundred thousand of his subjects must have been very pleased when in 1903 The Strand Magazine started serialising The Return of Sherlock Holmes.

Writing, looking after Louisa, seeing Jean Leckie as discreetly as possible, playing golf, driving fast cars, floating in the sky in hot air balloons, flying in early archaic and rather frightening airplanes, spending time on "muscle development," as body-building used to be called, kept Conan Doyle active but not really contented. His lingering deep desire for public service made him go for a second attempt at politics in the spring of 1906. He stood in Hawick but lost once more.

After Louisa died in his arms on the 4th of July 1906, Conan Doyle slipped into a debilitating state of depression lasting many months. He extricated himself from his misery by trying to help someone in a worse condition than he was. Playing Sherlock Holmes, he got in touch with Scotland Yard to point out a case of miscarriage of justice. It involved a young man called George Edalji who had been convicted of having slashed a number of

horses and cows. Conan Doyle had observed that Edalji's eyesight was so poor that it was proof the convict couldn't possibly have done the awful deed. Edalji was pardoned a year later

Finally, after nine years of clandestine courtship, Conan Doyle and Jean Leckie got married very publicly in front of 250 guests, on September 18, 1907.

With his two children with Louisa, they all moved to a new home called "Windlesham", in Sussex. He would spend the rest of his life living in that lovely house which is a private residential home nowadays.

Arthur Conan Doyle was so happy to share many of his wife's activities that his literary output slowed down considerably after his marriage. During the next years, he tried his hand at a number of plays, one based on Brigadier Gerard, the other on The Tragedy of the Korosko. Neither of them did well. Not one to give-up, he wrote a third play about boxing, he named The House of Temperley. That one closed after three months. To make-up for his considerable financial losses, Conan Doyle set out to write a fourth play, but this time with Sherlock Holmes. At first he called it The Stonor Case but later reverted to calling it The Speckled Band, which was well known and had been so successful. Happily, this play got rave reviews, and made the author a lot of money.

After the success of The Speckled Band, Conan Doyle chose to retire from "stage work," "Not because it doesn't interest me, but because it interests me too much," he said. The birth of his two sons, Denis in 1909 and that of Adrian in 1910, also contributed to keep the author from concentrating on fiction. A last child, their daughter Jean, was born in 1912.

A couple of years went by before the author's next creation, the delightfully outrageous Professor Challenger, whose own wife called "a perfectly impossible person." His new hero was quite the opposite of Sherlock Holmes; nevertheless, The Lost World was an immediate success. It involved the Professor in a delightfully humorous adventure, with a number of other highly personable characters, stranded in a mysterious region of South America, discovering prehistoric fauna and flora.

In those days, the term "Science Fiction" had not been coined, so when Conan Doyle wrote this story, in his mind it was a "boy's book". Another four novels about Professor Challenger's adventures followed The Lost World. This series stands out as a masterpiece of the genre authors have had no qualms to "borrow" from. In fact, it's sometimes thought of as the original "Jurassic Park".

The Valley of Fear the second full length Sherlock Holmes novel, was serialized in The Strand magazine in early 1914. But Conan Doyle's readers were not quite satisfied, for Sherlock Holmes was absent during a great part of the novel.

In May 1914, Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle sailed for New York, a city the author found unfavourably changed since his first visit twenty years earlier. Canada, where they spent a short time, the couple found enchanting. They returned home a month later, probably because for a long time Conan Doyle had been convinced of a coming war with Germany. He had sent articles to newspapers about organizing "Military readiness," many years before World War I broke out. In 1913 he wrote to the Fortnightly Review, expressing his views about new untested warfare: "These new factors are the submarine and the airship".

He foresaw the possibility of a "Blockade" by enemy submersible ships, long before anyone in the British navy did. The only solution he added would be to build a Channel Tunnel. But this intelligent man's warnings were judged to be "Jules Verne fantasies" by most naval experts.

As soon as the war broke-out, Conan Doyle then fifty-five, offered to enlist again. He was denied his wish once more but set out to organize a civilian battalion of over a hundred volunteers. When the navy lost more than a thousand lives in a single day, his brilliant mind never at rest, Conan Doyle made suggestions to the War Office to provide "inflatable rubber belts," and "inflatable life boats." He also spoke of "body armour" to protect soldiers on the front. Most government officials found him irritating at best but one of the exceptions was Winston Churchill, who wrote to thank him for his ideas.

In late 1914, the author made up for the lacklustre reception of his second Sherlock Holmes novel, with the publication of His Last Bow. In this tale, Sherlock Holmes infiltrates and vanquishes a German spy-ring, a timely war propaganda story.

Two years later, Conan Doyle's acute sense of justice was awakened again and made him rise to the defence of Sir Roger Casement, an Irish diplomat accused of being "the foulest traitor who ever drew breath." Conan Doyle had known and liked the diplomat several years before, as the man had alerted him to awful injustices committed against the Congolese. The author had even based the character of Lord John Roxton in *The Lost World* on Casement. Now, the "traitor" was found guilty of having tried to get Germany's support for the Irish independence movement.

Conan Doyle almost succeeded in sparing the convicted man's life, on grounds of insanity, had it not been for the discovery of Casement's diary. It chronicled in detail his homosexuality, which at the time was also a criminal offence. Conan Doyle's feelings about homosexuality were more liberal than the norm, which may have been the reason why, he later was not elevated to sit in the House of Lords.

The toll of the war was cruel on Conan Doyle. He lost his son, his brother, his two brothers-in-law and his two nephews.

After the death of his son and the horrors of World War I, Conan Doyle progressively became attracted to spiritualism and the occult. While researching the topic of fairies he came across some pictures belonging to a family in Cottingley, rural Yorkshire. These images seemed to show several diminutive fairies dancing in the presence of two teenage girls. The pictures seemed not to have been tampered with. Conan Doyle championed the photos and eventually included them in his 1922 book, *The Coming of Fairies*.

## **SHOW PHOTO**

He was compulsive in his new passion for the occult and pursued it with the same dogged energy he had shown in all his endeavours when he was younger. As a result, the Press mocked him and the Clergy disapproved of him. But nothing deterred him.

His wife, reputed to be such a level-headed woman, came to share his beliefs and developed the talent of "trance-writing."

After 1918, because of his deepening involvement into the occult, Conan Doyle wrote very little fiction, writing arduously about Spiritualism instead. Their subsequent trips to America, Australia and to Africa, accompanied by their three children, were also on psychic crusades.

As years went by, having spent over a quarter of a million pounds in the pursuit of his esoteric dreams, Conan Doyle was faced with the necessity to earn money. In 1926, Professor Challenger and his colourful friends appeared again in *The Land of Mist*, a novel of Psychic adventures followed by *The Disintegration Machine* and *When the World Screamed*. Two years later, his last twelve stories about the exploits of the immortal detective were compiled in *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*.

In the autumn of 1929, in spite of having been diagnosed with Angina, Conan Doyle went off for his last Psychic tour to Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. He was in such pain by the time he returned, that he had to be carried ashore. Bedridden from that time on, he managed to have one last quixotic adventure on a cold spring day in 1930. He rose from his bed, and unseen went into the garden. When he was found, he was lying on the ground, one hand clutching his heart, the other holding a single white snowdrop.

Arthur Conan Doyle died later that year, on 7 July 1930, surrounded by his family. His last words before departing for "the greatest and most glorious adventure of all," were addressed to his wife. He whispered, "You are wonderful."

## SOME RANDOM FACTS ABOUT DOYLE

Doyle was one of the earliest motorists in Britain

He reportedly bought a car without ever having driven one before. In 1911, he took part in the Prince Henry Tour, an international road competition organised by Prince Henry of Prussia to pit British cars against German ones. Doyle paired up with his second wife, Jean, as one of the British driving team

Doyle was on the same cricket team as Peter Pan writer JM Barrie . They also worked together on a comic opera, *Jane Annie*, which Barrie begged his friend to revise and finish for him.

He was a goalkeeper. Under the pseudonym AC Smith, the writer played as a goalkeeper for amateur side Portsmouth Association Football Club, a precursor of the modern Portsmouth FC.

As well as composer Richard Wagner, Doyle also shares his birthday with actor Laurence Olivier, singer Morrissey, model Naomi Campbell and tennis player Novak Djokovic.