

Myths & Tales:

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who first appeared in publication in 1887. He is the creation of Scottish-born author and physician Arthur Conan Doyle. A brilliant London-based "consulting detective", Holmes is famous for his intellectual prowess, and is renowned for his skillful use of astute observation, deductive reasoning and inference to solve difficult cases.

Doyle wrote four novels and fifty-six short stories that feature Holmes. The first two stories, short novels, appeared in 1887 and 1890. The character grew tremendously in popularity with the beginning of the first series of short stories in *The Strand Magazine* in 1891; further series of short stories and two serialized novels appeared until 1927. The stories cover a period from around 1875 up to 1907, with a final case in 1914. All but four stories are narrated by Holmes's friend and biographer, Dr John H. Watson; two are narrated by Sherlock Holmes himself, and two others are written in the third person.

Conan Doyle said that the character of Holmes was inspired by Dr Joseph Bell, for whom Doyle had worked as a clerk at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Like Sherlock Holmes, Bell was noted for drawing large conclusions from the smallest observations.

An estimate of Holmes' age places his year of birth around 1854. Holmes states that he first developed his methods of deduction as a university student. His earliest cases came from fellow university students which he pursued as an amateur. According to Holmes, it was an encounter with the father of one of his classmates that led him to take detection up as a profession and he spent the six years following university working as a consulting detective, before financial difficulties led him to take Dr Watson as a roommate, at which point the narrative of the stories begins.

From 1881, Holmes is described as having lodgings at 221B Baker Street, London, from where he runs his private detective agency. Until the arrival of Dr Watson, Holmes works alone, only occasionally employing



Sherlock Holmes!

agents from the city's under classes, including a host of Informants and a group of street children he calls the Baker Street Irregulars.

Little is said of Holmes's family. He merely states that his ancestors were "country squires". In "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter", Holmes claims that his great uncle was Vernet, the French artist. He has an older brother, Mycroft Holmes, a government official, who appears in three stories. He is also mentioned in a number of others. Mycroft has a unique civil service position as a kind of memory-man or walking database for all aspects of government policy. Mycroft is described as even more gifted than Sherlock in matters of observation and deduction. Mycroft, however, lacks Sherlock's drive and energy. It is unclear whether Holmes has any other siblings.

Holmes is a habitual cocaine user and also an occasional user of morphine, but expressed strong disapproval when he visited an opium den. All three were legal in late-19th-century England. Dr Watson reflects Victorian medical orthodoxy by having no medical objection to Holmes' drug use. Morally, however, he disapproves of his friend's drug use.

The only woman in whom Holmes ever showed any interest that verged on the romantic was Irene Adler. According to Watson, she was always referred to by Holmes as "The Woman". She is often thought to be the only woman who broke through Holmes' reserve. She is possibly the only woman who has ever "beaten" or outwitted Holmes in a mystery.

Although Sherlock Holmes isn't the original fiction detective (he was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and Emile Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq), his name has become a by-word for the part. His stories also established several detective story trope such as the loyal but less intelligent assistant, a role for which Dr Watson has become the archetype. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sherlock_Holmes]

