The University of Minnesota Libraries present

Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas: The Riddles of the Rooms of 221B Baker Street

An Exhibition of Materials from the Sherlock Holmes Collections

Elmer L. Andersen Library, University of Minnesota

June 11 – August 20, 2007
The Sherlock Holmes Collections at the University of Minnesota Libraries constitute the world’s largest gathering of material related to Sherlock Holmes and his creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The Collections consist of over 15,000 items including books, journals, and a wide variety of other items. The Holmes Collections are part of the Special Collections and Rare Books unit of the University of Minnesota Libraries.

The Sherlock Holmes Collections began in 1974 with the purchase of James C. Iraldi’s library of first editions. In 1978, Philip S. Hench, a Mayo Clinic consulting physician and recipient of the Nobel Prize for medicine (1950), and his wife Mary Kahler Hench, built one of the more remarkable Sherlockian libraries. It consists of approximately 1,800 books and 1,500 issues of periodicals, as well as unique material related to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; William Gillette, the famous portrayer of Holmes on the stage; and Frederic Dorr Steele, the preeminent American illustrator of the adventures. The Hench collection has been a magnet for other gifts, such as the Frederic Dorr Steele Memorial Collection in 1986, and Edith Meiser’s scripts and broadcast recordings in 1987. The library and papers of the late Vincent Starrett were purchased in 1988. Starrett was a prolific author and journalist, a notable bibliophile, and a celebrated Sherlockian. The Howard Haycraft collection, consisting of his working library and papers, came to the University by bequest in 1992. Haycraft wrote Murder for Pleasure and edited The Art of the Mystery Story, the first comprehensive history and analysis of the detective story. John Bennett Shaw, of Santa Fe, New Mexico, built the largest collection in the world relating to Sherlock Holmes. He began collecting in 1937, at the age of twenty-three, and collected vigorously until his death in 1994. His library, acquired by the University in 1993, holds around 9,000 books; thousands of magazines; photographs, films, recordings, and tapes; art and craft works; toys and games; articles of clothing; and other ephemera. A number of other collections and assemblages of Sherlockiana have been (and continue to be) received by the Libraries.
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PROJECT PERSONNEL
Curator: Timothy J. Johnson
Exhibit Design: Darren Terpstra
Communications Director: Christopher James
Graphic Design: Susan Gangl
Life in London and the Origins of 221B

A man’s first residence in London is a revolution in his life and feelings. He loses at once no small part of his individuality. He was a man before, now he is a “party.” No longer known as Mr. Brown, but as (say) No. XXI, he feels as one of many cogs in one of the many wheels of an incessantly wearing, tearing, grinding, system of machinery. His country notions must be modified, and all his life-long ways and takings-for-granted prove crude and questionable. He is hourly reminded “This is not the way in London; that this won’t work here,” or, “people always expect,” and “you’ll soon find the difference.” Custom rules everything, and custom never before seemed to him half as strange, strong, or inexorable.¹

So begins an anonymous account on London life in the 1870s, published the year before James Hamish Watson matriculated at the University of London and began work in St. Bartholomew’s Hospital.² Nine years later Watson was back in London, his “health irretrievably ruined” by wound and fever—the result of his military sojourn on the sub-continent—facing his own revolution of life and feelings.³ He relates that

I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air—or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought.⁴

This twenty-eight-year-old doctor’s “comfortless, meaningless existence” threatened to crush him beneath “the many wheels of an incessantly wearing, tearing, grinding, system of machinery.” “In London,” our anonymous chronicler wrote, “man rubs out, elsewhere he rusts out. No doubt the mental stimulus of London staves off much disease, for idle men eat themselves to death and worry themselves to death.”⁵ Watson, aware of the threat, “soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.”⁶

Where was Watson to look? In the “Housekeeping in Belgravia” section of London Characters and the Humourous Side of London Life—again by an anonymous writer—we find some assistance with Watson’s question of domicile.
The question arises, In what does the superiority of one district over another consist? Without entering into the reasons that induce people to prefer one to the other, we may briefly describe them as follows:---Grosvenor Square and its immediate environs as the most aristocratic, Belgravia the most fashionable, Tyburnia the most healthy, Regent’s Park the quietest, Marylebone and Mayfair the most central, and Bayswater and Eccleston Square quarters as the most moderate. People’s views and means may be guided, in a general manner, by these leading features. The man of small income finds he must locate himself in a region verging upon what in former years one would have called Shepherd’s Bush, or in a quarter uncomfortably near Vauxhall and the river; if a family man, solicitous for the health of his children, he decides in favour of the former, where he finds a choice of houses, from £60 a year and upwards to £200, and the rates moderate.

It is unknown whether or not Watson had access to this volume and the benefit of its counsel, but fortune smiled on him in another way, in the person of “young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Bart’s. The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man.” This sense of loneliness echoed the sentiment penned by the writer of “Life in London.”

Men soon discover they have no longer the friend, the relative or the neighbour of their own small town to fall back on. To sink or swim is their own affair, and they had better make up their minds to depend wholly upon themselves; for London is like a wilderness, not as elsewhere because there are no people at all, but because there are so many people, that one is equally far from helping another save on rare occasions.

Watson had been “trying to solve the problem as to whether it [was] possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price.” The auspicious meeting of Stamford in the Criterion Bar brought the young doctor a step closer to the solution of his problem and a step away from the wilderness.

The unknown factor in this domestic equation was a person also known to Stamford, “[a] fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get someone to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse.” The fellow was Sherlock Holmes. Stamford accompanied Watson to the hospital and introduced him to Holmes—probably one of the more momentous encounters in history—real or imagined. Watson continues the story:

We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meet-
ing. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bedrooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

221B and the Sherlockians

On August 20, 1940—in the midst of the Battle of Britain—Winston Churchill delivered a speech in the House of Commons that included this phrase: “Never has so much been owed by so many to so few.” It is a phrase, often taken out of context, which lends itself to imitation or caricature. Christopher Morley, the godfather of American Sherlockians, cleverly used the phrase to sketch a word picture of what he saw in the early writings (or pseudo-scholarship) of Holmes devotees: “Never has so much been written by so many for so few.”

This observation might well be applied to the riddle of the rooms. The arrangement and description of the rooms at No. 221B (not to mention the exact location of the building itself) has become something of an industry for Sherlockians (or Holmesians, as they are named across the Atlantic). It is a pleasant pastime as evidenced by the many floor plans and articles produced by authors from

Ernest H. Short’s floor plan of 221B Room

*Victorian Secrets*
around the globe. (A selected bibliography of the articles is given at the end of this essay.) Chris Redmond, on his Sherlockian.Net web site, offers us links to a number of sites with additional information, commentary, speculation, and artistic renderings of the rooms. He notes that “[p]robably the most elegant re-creation of the sitting-room and adjacent rooms in Holmes and Watson’s lodgings is the floor plan drawn by Ernest H. Short, circa 1948, and published in the Strand magazine in 1950.” A link from that notation gives us the delightful drawing seen on the previous page.

Short’s conceptualization of the rooms at 221B is one of many. Redmond’s web page also directs us to Peter Liddell’s analysis on the location of the rooms, David Richardson’s re-visitation to Baker Street, and a bird’s-eye view from Stutler Comics. Not only are we (for I consider myself one of these enthusiasts) fond of writing and drawing about the room, we delight in our own recreations.

Again, there is a small industry in recreating the sitting room at 221B. Doyle’s son, Adrian, had one such space, possibly the first of many. It is unknown to me who created the very first sitting room. They exist, both in full-sized reproductions and in miniature.

Bird’s-eye view of 221B. Courtesy Stutler Comics.
221B: Replica or Simulacrum?

On the matter of full-sized reproductions, I once posted a query to colleagues in an online discussion list that provided at least one humorous response (or respondent). In my initial query I stated that I was “trying to pull together information on a particular type of permanent exhibit, i.e., an exhibit (or room) that is dedicated to a particular author or genre.” I went on to note that my search through the literature had not turned up anything of use and that my particular interest involved creating (or accepting) an exhibit relating to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes. Concluding my note, I indicated that we were interested in “a complete replica of Holmes’ 221B sitting room.”

It was the word “replica” that turned the cranks of a few of my colleagues and gave me some small moments of delight as I read their responses. One of the rejoinders I received was in the form of a question, short and to the point: “How, exactly, does one create a ‘complete replica’ of an apocryphal place?” My response was a bit longer.

Ah, that is part of what Sherlockians call “playing the game.” If, according to the rules of the game, Holmes is considered a real person, who has never died (no obituary having appeared in The Times), and Doyle is merely the “literary agent,” then one looks at all the descriptions of the room as provided in the stories and creates a replica. There’s a whole little industry in the Holmesian world that has spent time and ink describing...
the exact location of 221B Baker Street and the contents of the room.

Further evidence on the reality of Holmes might be found in the thousands of letters that have been written to Holmes at 221B asking for his assistance. Over the years staff members at the Abbey National Bank (which apparently has the closest address to 221B) have replied to these various missives that Holmes is enjoying his retirement, keeping bees in Sussex, and therefore unable to assist with the particular matter at hand.

This was met by another question: “Presumably, you are also considering a donation of the hatchet with which George Washington chopped down the cherry tree?”

Another correspondent offered the following:

Though its literary merit may be debatable, L. Ron Hubbard’s Study is in EVERY ONE of the Scientology churches throughout the nation, and I presume, the world. This of course includes buildings which the Scientologists purchased after Hubbard died, such as the ‘Founding’ Washington DC church. Our guide informed us that this was still his study, obstinately glossing over the fact that he could never have used it. The furniture, books and other furnishings are all identical from study to study.

This seems to be a variation on the Holmes-fictional architecture case. They can’t possibly all be Hubbard’s, but they are each called his study in all seriousness. Some parallels might even be drawn to the early proliferation of contact relics!

To which my first correspondent replied:

The variation between the Hubbard study replicas and the Holmes—namely the fact that an original L. Ron Hubbard study could (and probably did) actually exist—makes all the difference. Hubbard couldn’t possibly have used all of ‘his’ studies (and I couldn’t possibly care if he did), but Holmes ‘actual’ study can be nothing of the sort, however the acolytes attempt to read the clues about it from Conan Doyle’s novels.

The point that I only obliquely alluded to earlier is this: a library may accept the donation of a “complete replica” of Sherlock Holmes’ study or not, but it ought to be labeled as a simulacrum, not a replica. Shelve it under fiction.

Such is the understanding of “playing the game” in the mind of at least one of my colleagues. I think he may be in the minority. And he takes nothing away
from the sport.

**The Mackler Room and the Shaw Miniature**

We come, then, to the heart of the matter and the centerpiece of the exhibit “Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas.” The Sherlock Holmes Collections of the University of Minnesota Libraries hold two versions of that famous sitting room—a full-size reproduction and a miniature rendering, both exhibited here. The miniature came into our possession first, in 1993. It was the creation of the late Dorothy Rowe Shaw, wife of the collector John Bennett Shaw, and has been a source of amazement and joy to many visitors of the Holmes Collections over the years. The second, a full-scale rendition, was acquired within the last year. It was a gift to the Collections from the estate of the late Allen Mackler, who died on December 29, 2005, at the age of 62.

In my office, just to the right of my computer on a window ledge looking into the reading room, I have a photograph that is both memorable and playful.

Entrance to Allen Mackler’s 221B Room
It was taken about a month after I began my position at the University of Minnesota, in the ballroom of the Holiday Inn Metrodome, at the “Founder’s Footprints” conference. It is remarkable in so many ways, but for me one of the most lasting and good-natured parts of that picture is the individual pictured in the center—Allen Mackler. Dr. C. Paul Martin, Allen’s long-time friend, towers over the diminutive Mackler with a comical look and a playful pat on the head. Allen has a bemused look on his face, perhaps wondering what the good-humored doctor is up to as Allen waits to pay his respects to the guest of honor at the dinner, Dr. E. W. “Mac” McDiarmid.

In many ways that photograph—and that memory—seem so fresh in my mind. And at the same time, so much has happened since that snapshot was taken. Time took “Mac” from our midst, and now the same has happened with Allen. We never had the chance to have a dinner in his honor, to celebrate his many accomplishments, and to thank him for all his work in support of the Holmes Collections. Yet Allen has done us an honor worthy of long remembrance. He remembered the Collections through the provisions of his estate. For that final action we are forever grateful.
Allen Mackler’s estate, as it will be realized by the University of Minnesota and the Sherlock Holmes Collections, is the largest bequest ever received by the Collections. Allen provided that his entire book collection, some five to six thousand volumes, will become part of the Collections. Allen, like the Collections, was interested in content as much (or more) than condition. His was a reading collection with strengths not only in Sherlockiana, but in other aspects of Victorian and Edwardian England. Noteworthy among his books are materials on Jack the Ripper, Victorian London, contemporary literary figures, and Gypsies. In addition to the books, Allen had a significant collection of video tapes and DVDs. These, too, are part of his gift to the Collections.

Beyond his books, Allen had some significant original pieces of Sherlockian art, including a rare drawing by Sidney Paget. Allen provided that these important items would also be added to the Collections. The Paget original shows Holmes seated in the stalls at St. James Hall, listening to music—a portrait of Allen as much as Holmes. “All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes, the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive.” (The Red-Headed League) I don’t know that Allen possessed long thin fingers, but he was most certainly relentless in his hunt for books through the many shops he frequented. And those who went up against Allen in any quiz knew, by his long string of victories, the keenness of his wit. And, of course, there was his love of music.

Another view of the Allen Mackler room.

Victorian Secrets
More noteworthy yet, and a sure memory to anyone who visited Allen in his home in Osseo, is the gift of the 221B room. This room was a special place and source of pride for Allen. He spent time, energy, and study in faithfully recreating the sitting room of the world’s most famous consulting detective. There was a special moment during a visit to Allen’s house, when one stood outside the door, awaiting the invitation to enter this special space. Each item was meticulously placed—there for a reason.

Beyond the gift of his collections and his room, Allen remembered the University and its Holmes Collections with a substantial supporting gift...[I]t is clearly a testament to Allen’s championing of the Collections, made manifest first in his Sigerson Society giving while he was still with us....His gift will help move the Collections to a new level of excellence.

This exhibit is offered, with thankfulness, to the life and memory of Allen Mackler.

Tim Johnson
Curator, Special Collections & Rare Books
The Sherlock Holmes Collections
University of Minnesota Libraries
THE EXHIBIT CASES:

Letters from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Recent Acquisitions
• Undated from The Reform Club to Miss Tristram
• Undated from Undershaw to Mr. Reeves
• February 7, 1907 from the Grand Hotel to Mr. Humphry
• Undated from Undershaw to “my dear Richard”
• Undated from Salford House to Mr. Lawson Tait
• Undated from Undershaw to unidentified man
• May 15 from Bignell Wood to unidentified man
• May 2, 1899 from The Reform Club to unidentified man
• Undated from Windlesham to Mr. Tweedie
• March 8, [1928] from Champreys to unidentified man
• May 11, 1911 from Windlesham to Mr. Cosgrave
• February 14, 1890 from Bush Villa to unidentified man

“Dear Mam” Letters
• Fifteen letters, primarily from Bush Villa, to “Mam.”

Publications bearing on the nature of 221B Baker Street
• Items from the Selected Bibliography given below.

Games, toys, and puzzles
• Parker Brothers Sherlock Holmes Game (1904)
• “Clue”
• “Cluedo”
• 221B Baker Street—The Master Detective Game, H. P. Gibson & Sons, Ltd
• 221B Baker Street—The Master Detective Game, John Hansen Co.
• Sleuth—A 3M Gamette
• Jigsaw Puzzle, “Scenes From 221B,” Ronald S. White
• Nested dolls
• Puzzling Pastimes Party Games

Artwork from the Mackler Collection
• Charles Schulz “Peanuts” cartoon panel
• Opening quotation from “The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge”
• Spy caricature of Sarasate
• Photograph & autograph of Sarasate
• Allen Mackler’s BSI Investiture as Sarasate
• Drawing of Sherlock Holmes by Jackie L. W. Geyer (1976)
• Portrait of Sherlock Holmes by Yannie Jebo
• Autographed photograph of William Gillette
• Cross-stitch sampler of Holmes adventures
• Groombridge Place, photographs/table mats
• Portrait of Sherlock Holmes by Frederic Dorr Steele
• Original drawing by Frederic Dorr Steele from “The Problem of Thor Bridge”, drawn for the Limited Editions Club
• Portrait of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle by Geo. Hutchinson
• Original drawing by Sidney Paget, “All afternoon he sat in the stalls.”
• Original drawing by Frederic Dorr Steele from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, drawn for the Limited Editions Club
• Original drawing by Frederic Dorr Steele for the 1939 film *The Hound of the Baskervilles*
• Original drawing by Frederic Dorr Steele for *His Last Bow*, *Collier’s Magazine*, 1917

**Selected Bibliography:**

**Annotations from *the Universal Sherlock Holmes***


An illustrated article on the chair designed and manufactured in 1866 by William Morris. The author states that Holmes probably had a “Morris chair” and that “it will be perfect for sitting back and reading a little `Sherlock Holmes.’” With a photograph of Dennis Cooney (Dr. Watson) sitting in a finely carved Morris chair.


A “trifling monograph” on the rugs that may have been used in 221b.


Speculation on the security devices used by Holmes to protect 221b.


A description of the Master’s bedroom.


A discussion of the bathing and toilet facilities, and the gasogene.


A reconstruction of the sitting room.


Lists the various items in the consulting room and quotes the Canonical references to them.


With a color illustration of the interior of 221b.

A follow-up article to “The Sherlock Holmes Center” (BSM, Winter 1984) in which Groves discusses how he utilized some of the concepts of a certain oriental discipline in preparing a layout of 221b.

Demonstrates that Holmes, with his “catlike” love of personal cleanliness, would have availed himself of the modern bathroom plumbing and appliances available in London before the turn of the century, and would have had them installed at 221b.

“Plans and a map, based on data in the stories, prepared by an enthusiast.”

Floor plans of 221 and a map of Baker Street, reprinted from The Strand, March 1950


“Sir Arthur Conan Doyle builds up the scene [of place] through a series of stories object by object, and the complete picture is one that the reader himself creates and furnishes in his own imagination from this accumulation of small details.”


A letter to Christopher Morley concerning the above-mentioned items.

A discussion of the transitory nature of furnishings and decor, including bullet-pock V.R.’s.


----------. “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes,” *Blackfriars* [Oxford], 1, No. 3 (June 1920), 154-172.


An architect’s view of the location and interior.

MacLachlan, Don. “Dr. Watson Takes a Chair ... and Another ... and Another...,” *Canadian Holmes*, 12, No. 3 (Spring 1989), 26-28.
Answers the question: How many chairs or seats were there in the rooms at 221b?

A detailed description of the interior, including floor plans, a photograph of the sitting room by Dr. Briggs, and drawings of the furnishings.

Martin, Tina. “Who Used the Hat-Stand at 221b?” The Ritual, No. 3 (Spring 1989), 4-5.
“It is obvious that not only do clients not use the 221b hat-stand, but there is nowhere upstairs for them to hang their coats. This seems a strange oversight on Holmes’ part and clearly Holmes and Watson take no interest in their visitors’ discomfort.”


A line-by-line search of the Canon revealed only one tantalus -- in Capt. Peter Carey’s cabin (Blac). Thus, Christopher Morley was wrong in claiming that one existed in the 221b sitting room.


A privately printed folder on the sanitary facilities.

A valuable and attractive miniature reference work for those who are merely musing or for those engaged in recreating miniature or full-scale versions of the rooms.

A description of the rooms and furnishings.

Because the bow window came to be altered, the absence of such a window should not be a fatal objection in identifying the true location.

Wilmunen, Jon V. “A Diagram of the Rooms at 221b,” The Gamebag, No. 2 (1966), 16.

---------. SOS Annual, No. 2 (January 1968), 9-11.
A description and detailed floor plan by the chief Sherlockian cartographer.

“Since bathrooms were used not only in ancient times, but also by contemporaries of Holmes and Watson, it does not seem illogical to believe that 221b possessed one.” Includes a photograph of a Victorian bathroom, a letter to Capt. Julian Wolff from Edgar Smith, dated May 31, 1944, and Dr. Wolff’s floor plan.
End Notes


4 Ibid., 4.

5 London Characters.

6 Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 4.

7 London Characters.

8 Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 4.

9 London Characters.

10 Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 5.

11 Ibid., 11.


To receive this information in alternative formats, contact Tim Johnson at 612-624-3552.

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The Last Adventure of
Sherlock Holmes

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