

## BOOKS &amp; ARTS | EXHIBITION REVIEW

# ‘Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects’ Review: Magnificent Obsession

A collector’s stunning holding of works related to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famed detective is now on view at the Grolier Club.



Installation view of ‘Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects’ at the Grolier Club

PHOTO: THE GROLIER CLUB

By [Edward Rothstein](#) [Follow](#)

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*New York*

Of all the singular cases it has been my privilege to come upon in the chronicles of Dr. John H. Watson —former army surgeon with the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers, and a devoted Boswell to the world’s “first consulting detective”—none has produced as many grotesque and intriguing relics as those now at the Grolier Club.

Here we find an allusion to severed ears in a cardboard box—a tale so lurid that it was omitted from the first British compilation (dated 1894) of the detective’s “Memoirs,” though that volume’s ordinary appearance seems to declare itself

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**Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects: From the Collection of Glen S. Miranker**

*The Grolier Club  
Through April 16*

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innocent of any excisions. And a London first edition of the detective's "Adventures" (1892) in a dust jacket is a bibliophilic rarity that was once owned by a 20th-century forger convicted of murder. Peculiarities must also be accounted for. A bank vault appears on a

cover of "The Sign of the Four" and an escape-on-horseback on "The Red-Headed League" even though these images have nothing to do with either case.



Original Illustration by Sidney Paget for the 'Hound of the Baskervilles'

PHOTO: THE GROLIER CLUB

Sherlock Holmes is behind it all, of course, as is his and Watson's creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This exhibition, "Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects" (the number alludes to the famed, nonexistent 221B Baker Street address of our heroes), may not seem, at first, as tantalizing as Holmes's baroquely titled cases

(or those unwritten but teasingly alluded to, like the case of “Ricoletti of the club foot, and his abominable wife”), but it is, nevertheless, remarkable.

Glen S. Miranker, former chief technology officer at Apple, has labored for 45 years, acquiring some 8,000 artifacts related to the “canon”—as devotees call the four Holmes novels and 56 stories. That canon might seem modest, but as the exhibition notes, “the opportunities and challenges for a gently mad collector are vast, often daunting, always irresistible.”

There is method in his gentle madness. The exhibition opens with “The Hound of the Baskervilles.” Among varied editions and artwork, we see the first of nine issues of the Strand Magazine in which it appeared, beginning in August 1901. It was a sensational return: Holmes had apparently plunged to his death in “The Final Problem,” published in 1893, and that was, Conan Doyle insisted, the end. “The Hound” got around the problem by being set before that cataclysm. There were lines at the magazine’s offices; bribes were reportedly offered for advance copies; the Strand went into seven printings.

Then we backtrack to the first Holmes appearance in “A Study in Scarlet,” a novel that no publisher wanted. The author had to sell the copyright for 25 pounds to get it published in 1887 in “Beeton’s Christmas Annual”; here is one of 34 known surviving copies.

After that, we sample rare publications as they appear, detouring for glimpses of Holmes’s life onstage, portrayed by the American actor William Gillette 1,300 times between 1899 and 1932. Interspersed are examples of Sidney Paget’s original artwork, which helped shape the popular image of Holmes with unsettling atmospheric precision, even inventing his trademark deer-stalker hat and Inverness cape. One of Frederic Dorr Steele’s illustrations of the bizarre events at Wisteria Lodge for Collier’s magazine was considered so frightening, with its image of a ghastly face and bulbous eyes suspended in the dark outside a window where Holmes sits, that one previous owner never displayed it; Mr. Miranker hid it from his young daughter under a dishtowel.



Sidney Paget, "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" Original artwork, 1892, Used in the Strand and UK book edition



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amount of walking with it."

"Perfectly sound!" said Holmes <sup>in a tone of</sup> "And then again there is the C.C.H. I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has probably given some unexpressed assistance."

"Really, Watson, you excel yourself" said Holmes, rising and lighting a cigarette. "I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. You are not luminous, but you are a conductor. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating genius. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt."

He had never confessed as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me a keen pleasure for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempt which I had made to give publicity to his methods. He took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eye. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette and, carrying the case to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.

"Inheriting though elementary" said he, as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. "There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick."

"Has anything escaped me?"

"Any which I have not observed?" I asked with some self-importance. "I trust that this is nothing of importance which I have overlooked?"

"I am afraid, my dear Watson, that ~~nothing~~ your deductions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal."

"Then I was right?"

*I was proud to find that I had so far exceeded his expectations as to apply them in a way which would be approved.*

"To that extent."

"But that was all."

"No, no, my dear Watson, not all — by no means all. I would suggest for example that a presentation to a Doctor is more likely to come from a Hospital than from a Hunt, and that when the initials C.C. are placed before that Hospital the words Charing Cross are naturally suggested themselves."

"You may be right."

"The probability lies in that direction. And if you take this as a working hypothesis we have a focal basis from which to start our deductions."

"Well then supposing that C.C.H. does stand for Charing Cross Hospital what further inferences may we draw?"

"Do more suggest themselves? You know my methods, apply them!"

"Only that the man has practised in town before going to the Country."

"I think that we might venture a little further than this. On what occasion would it be most probable that such a presentation would be made? Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start in practice for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has been a change. So it stretches our inferences too far to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change."

"It seems probable."

"How you will observe that he <sup>and seeing you would not doubt his ability</sup> could not have been on the Staff of the Hospital since only a man well established in a London practice would hold such a position. What was he then? A hono- surgeon or a hono- physician — little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago — the date is on the slide. So your grave middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there there emerges an energetic young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the

Original Manuscript Sheet from  
**The Hound of the Baskervilles**  
By A. Conan Doyle  
Published by McClure, Phillips & Co., New York

Second and third leaf of the manuscript for the story "The Hound of the Baskervilles"

PHOTOS: THE GROLIER CLUB(3)

And there is rampant piracy. As brought to yellowing life here with two-cent editions, and jackets designed to lure purchasers rather than illuminate content, these pirated copies offer uncommon insight into the era's American book trade. An 1896 copy of "A Study in Scarlet" still gives "product placement" novel meaning: The margins of every page are lined with a Chicago clothier's promotions like "Ladies' Silk and Cotton Waists in endless variety" or "We have Suits and Skirts to burn, but we would rather sell them to you."

But it is Conan Doyle's handwritten material that is most extraordinary. Here are three manuscript leaves of 37 known to survive from "The Hound." They are so neatly inked in so vigorous a hand, and so fluently produced with so few corrections, that they seem as crisp as Holmes's pronouncements. "You are not luminous," Holmes tells Watson, "but you are a conductor. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it." In pencil, the author inserts "of light" after "conductor," proving even Holmes could be

improved upon.

In the author's "Norwood Notebook No. 1" (1885-96), we can see the same hand testing questionable phrases ("Enough money to burn a wet dog") or suggestive ideas ("Holmes deductions from a stick – St. Bernard dog," used in "The Hound" with a "curly-haired spaniel"). And in a lovely, handwritten 1896 speech to fellow writers at London's Author's Club, Conan Doyle confesses with un-Holmesian modesty: "For a man who has no particular natural astuteness to spend his days in inventing problems & building up chains of inductive reasoning is a trying occupation."

Even amid such a wealth of material, I might gripe about the absence of any mention of Conan Doyle's late-life fanatical embrace of spiritualism or of any glimpse at varied attempts to extend the canon. But in deference to that 1896 speech, I silence myself: "When I read some cocksure critic laying down the law," the author says in another un-Holmesian proclamation, "I wish I was as sure of anything as he is of everything."

—*Mr. Rothstein is the Journal's Critic at Large.*

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