

Holmes memorabilia

Sherlock Holmes lives in New York

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One of the exhibits: Glen Miranker has collected thousands of Sherlock Holmes memorabilia, 211 of which are now on display in New York. (Photo: Collection of Glen S. Miranker courtesy of The Grolier Club, NYC)

Glen Miranker calls himself a "gently insane" collector. He owns around 8000 objects related to the character of the British detective. A visit.

By Christian Zschke , New York

Little did Cathy Miranker know what would trigger her when, in the fall of 1976, she gave her husband Glen an American first edition of stories about British detective Sherlock Holmes. Difficult to describe exactly what it was, Glen Miranker says today, but somehow he knew right away

that he was going to start a collection of Holmes memorabilia, and since he's becoming what he calls a "gently mad collector ", he now owns around 8,000 objects that have something to do with Holmes and his inventor Arthur Conan Doyle. A collection that is second to none in the world.

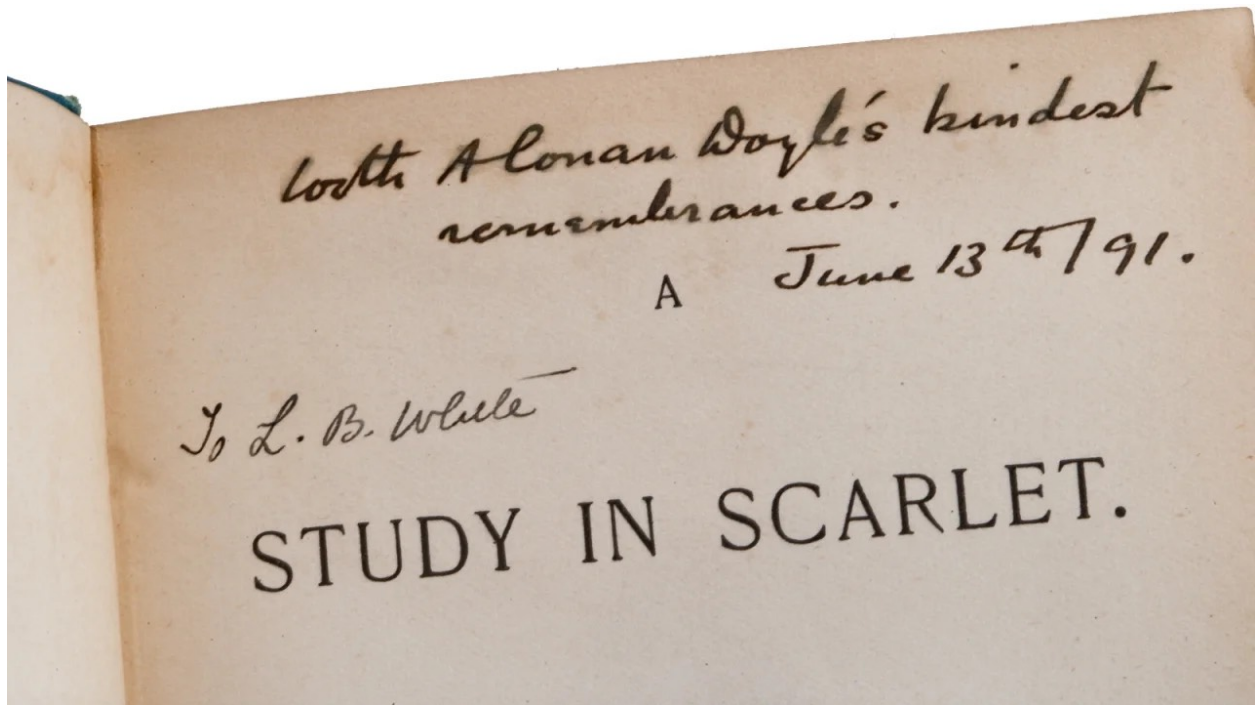
It is well known that one of the greatest pleasures of earthly existence is to talk to slightly crazy people about their passions. So you make an appointment with the 67-year-old Miranker in New York's Grolier Club, founded in 1884 and according to his own statements the oldest existing club of book lovers in North America. Miranker is actually based in San Francisco, but these days he's often in New York because the Grolier Club is exhibiting some of his treasures. The show is called "Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects" and, of course, Miranker chose this number because Sherlock Holmes lives in London at 221b Baker Street.

It is, in short, also one of the pleasures of being that places like the Grolier Club actually exist. It is an association of people who are interested in reading books, praising them, showing them and letting other people participate in them. All exhibitions are free of charge. In normal times you could always stroll through the madness of the pompous luxury shops on Fifth Avenue, then make a quick right onto 60th Street and see what they'd just put on display at the club. Due to the pandemic, you currently have to register on the website for a specific time, but the visit is still free.

The first Holmes story was published in Beeton's Christmas Annual magazine

As befits a New York club, which of course is a slightly neurotic book lover, the members sometimes go on "field trips", on bibliophilic journeys of discovery. A few years ago, one of those trips took her into the world of Glen Miranker, who keeps his Holmes collection at his home in San Francisco in a library where light and humidity are controlled at all times. The club members asked whether it might not be possible to bring a tiny part of this collection from the west to the east coast. Miranker agreed.

Arthur Conan Doyle's work on Sherlock Holmes is manageable. He has written 56 short stories about the detective and four novels. The first story appeared in 1887, the last in 1927. Before he invented the character of Holmes, he had written a few other stories, but the manuscripts came back from publishers with negative reviews as reliably as carrier pigeons, he once said. His first Holmes story was called "A Study in Scarlet" (in German: Late Revenge). It was published in a magazine called *Beeton's Christmas Annual* and yes, Miranker owns an original issue of that magazine which is now on display in New York. He says that Doyle then ceded all rights to the story to the magazine. A mistake he should not repeat.



Open detailed view

Doyle ceded all rights to "Study in Scarlet" to a magazine - a mistake he was not to repeat. (Photo: Collection of Glen S. Miranker courtesy of The Grolier Club, NYC)

Doyle was born in Scotland, in beautiful Edinburgh, where he studied and learned from the legendary medical professor Joseph Bell, among others. Bell was known for being able to draw far-reaching conclusions about what his patients had done and what they were suffering from the demeanor and appearance of his patients. The anamnesis began with a look.

The widely underestimated Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote Doyle a letter praising him for the character of Holmes.

Reading these stories, he wrote, even alleviated his toothache. And, he asked, could the character of Holmes be a homage to one of his old friends from Edinburgh? Joseph Bell, the professor? That's how it was, of course.

Much of the University of Edinburgh looks exactly as it did when Stevenson and Doyle visited. It's fortunate, however, that the two literary greats didn't see the university slamming a library onto campus in the late 20th century that looks like a parking garage you wouldn't even want to park a flat-bottomed Fiat Panda in.

The exhibition begins with the greatest hit, the Baskerville Hound

In New York, Miranker organized the exhibition as if it were a performance by a solidly aged rock band that is about to play their biggest hit. That's why the first thing you see is his exhibits on "The Hound of the Baskervilles", which is the most successful Holmes book. He thought long and hard about structuring the show chronologically, he says, but then decided to start with the book that everyone knows.

The story of the Hound of the Baskervilles appeared in 1901, seven years after Holmes' supposed death. She sold brilliantly. A little later, Doyle therefore decided to bring the detective back to life for further stories and to send him on new adventures.



The evidence is clear: a Sherlock Holmes memorabilia is collected here. (Photo: Collection of Glen S. Miranker courtesy of The Grolier Club, NYC)

That is well known. Miranker can also tell wonderful stories. For example this one.

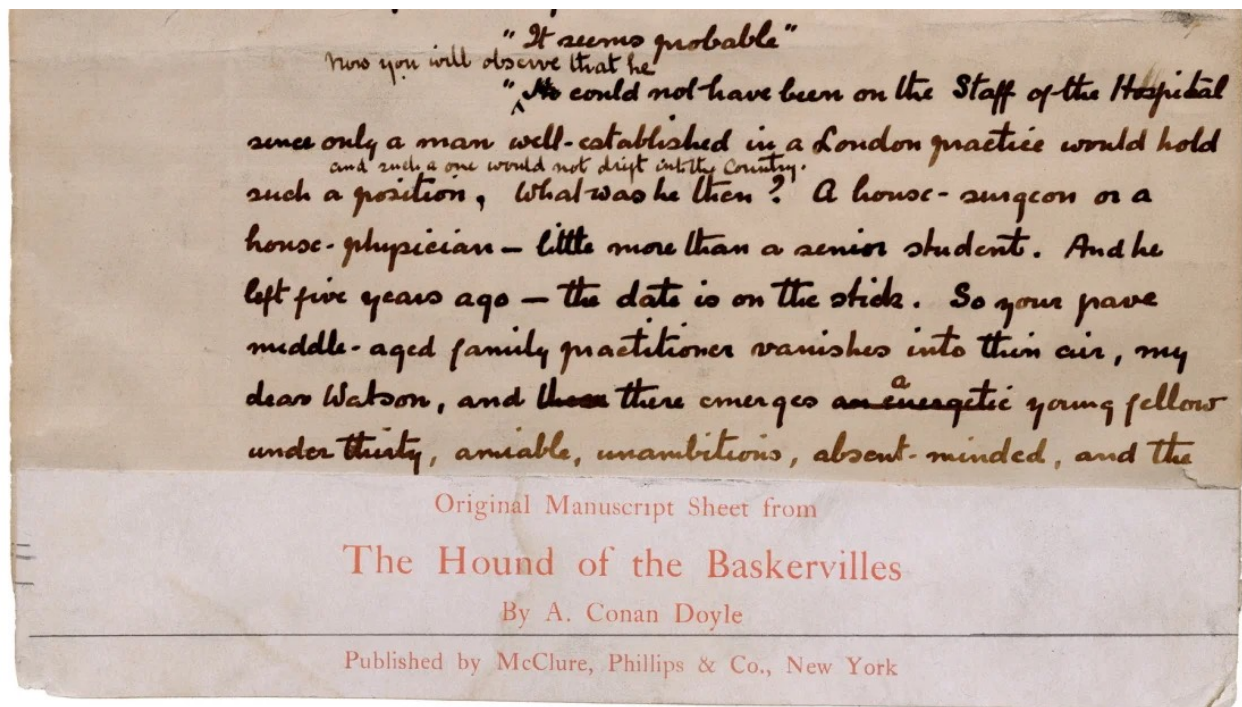
In 1889, the American publisher Joseph M. Stoddart invited two authors to dinner in London, Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle. During the meal, he offered to pay them both a substantial sum of money to write a novel. A few months later, the Holmes novel *The Sign of Four* was published. A few more months later, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was released.

The exhibition features both editions that emerged from that evening, and if you like books and their history, that's moving. Doyle later called

the meeting his "golden evening" and of Oscar Wilde he said: "He towered over us all, but at the same time he mastered the art of giving us all the impression that he was interested in everything we said. "

Finally Miranker shows his favorite piece and the whole, the gentle mad man shakes with happiness as he tells this story.

In the 19th century, many American publishers had not bothered to obtain copyright rights from Europe. They just reprinted the books and made money. That was covered by US law at the time. Arthur Conan Doyle, aware that he had a large following in the US and how much money that could have cost him, has said over and over again that he despises the practice.



The original manuscript of the "Hound of Baskerville". (Photo: Collection of Glen S. Miranker courtesy of The Grolier Club, NYC)

When he went on a reading tour of the United States in 1894, many of his wealthy fans also wanted to meet him. In Chicago, entrepreneur HN Higinbottom is hosting a dinner in his honor. At the end he asked Doyle to autograph a copy of The Sign of Four. It was pirated. Maybe Doyle didn't see it right away, maybe he was being polite. He signed.

Today this example is owned by Glen Miranker and he considers it perhaps the most spectacular in his collection.

"Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects", Grolier Club, 47 East 60th Street, Free Admission, Manhattan, New York. Until April 16, 2022.