

“He has the collection mania in its most acute form,” said Sherlock Holmes of Baron Adelbert Gruner. While he thankfully does not share the many undesirable traits of the repugnant baron, Glen S Miranker is, according to Leslie S Klinger, “unquestionably maniacal about collecting.”

The esteemed scholar makes the remark in the foreword to the catalogue produced to accompany Glen's exhibition, *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects*, which is made up of some of the finest objects from his collection of close to 8,000 books, manuscripts, letters, posters and other Sherlockiana.

He stresses that Glen's mania is not the kind “that leads to straitjackets”; rather, his mania “is to be admired, even encouraged.”

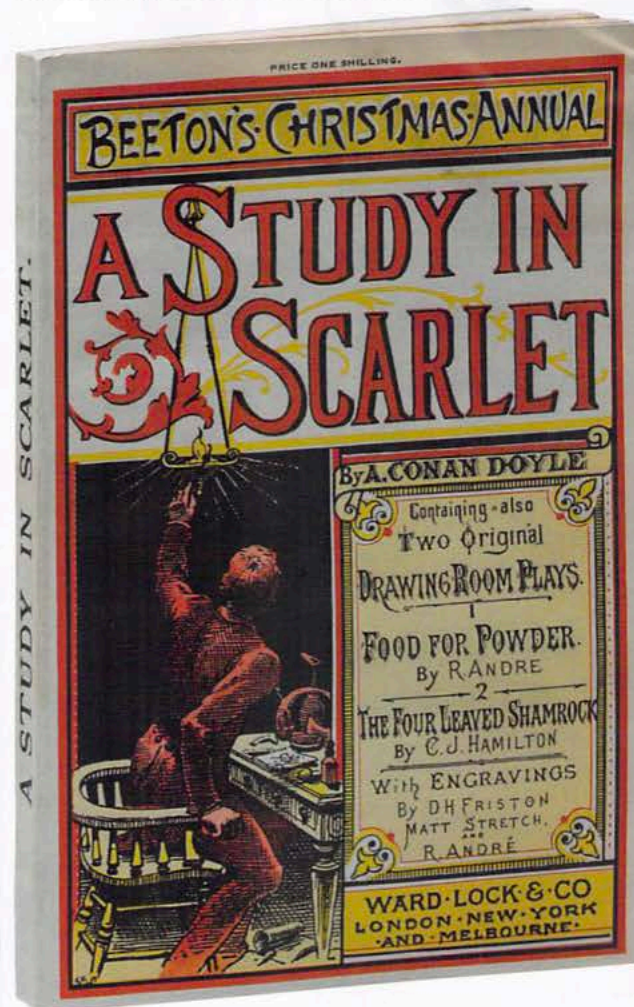
The results of that mania can currently be seen at the historic Grolier Club. As the club is situated more than 5,300 miles from my desk, I sadly won't get to gaze in wonder at the delights on display, but its genial co-curator readily agrees to talk me through the highlights via a transatlantic Zoom call.

As the web camera focuses, I see that the former Apple executive is seated at a table in the middle of a large hall at the club, where the assembly of the exhibition is nearing its completion. He gives me a quick 360-degree view of the gallery before we head to a quieter spot for our chat.

Glen begins by telling me how his love of Holmes began when he was at university in the 1970s. “I was in a terrible funk one afternoon. Who knows, I thought I'd blown a test or maybe I'd been turned down for a date – it was one of those cosmic issues when you're an undergraduate. Anyway, my roommate came into the room and he grabbed this book, which turned out to be the *Complete Sherlock Holmes* – a big fat volume containing all fifty-six short stories and the four novels – and tossed it to me and told me to read it instead.

“I was immediately captivated. It wasn't the first time I had read the stories, because I read at least some of them as a small child, but that's what introduced me. And I'm not recalling how but pretty quickly thereafter I, shall we say, fell in with a bad crowd. I discovered that there were these groups of like-minded people who got together periodically and talked about stories and enjoyed each other's

Collector-extraordinaire Glen S Miranker tells Adrian Braddy some of the stories behind his vast collection of Sherlockiana and his New York exhibition, *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects*



Glen's copy of the world's most expensive magazine, *Beeton's Christmas Annual* containing *A Study in Scarlet*, left.



Yours Cordially
Arthur Conan Doyle

THE
SIGN OF THE FOUR

OR

THE PROBLEM OF THE SHOLTOS

One of the complete collection of Frederic Dorr Steele's original artwork for *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge* used in *Collier's Weekly*, above. Conan Doyle's signature in a copy of *The Sign of the Four*.

company and ate and drank to excess. And so I joined a couple of Sherlock Holmes societies.”

While at grad school, Glen's collection consisted of that 1954 Doubleday edition of the complete works, but a surprise gift from Cathy, who he had recently married, was the beginning of the “mania.”

“Cathy had gone out for a walk on a Saturday and by chance had stumbled into a small antiquarian book fair. And she comes back with a book and says, ‘I got you a present to cheer you up.’ It was an American first edition of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*. I opened the book and, like in the cartoons, a lightbulb went off.”

Glen eagerly headed to the fair the very next day and by luck met Peter Stern, one of the leading antiquarian dealers in detective fiction, and a specialist in Sherlock Holmes literature.

“At the time, he just had a little folding card table and three or four fistfuls of books, as he was just starting out in business,” Glen recalls.

Objects of desire

"I also happened to bump into a fella named Dan Posnansky, who's a gifted collector, a phenomenally generous fellow, and one of those who is scarily knowledgeable about the canon."

"Those two chance encounters pretty much cemented my interest in going out and collecting books about the stories."

"These men became lifelong friends. I don't have closer friends than those two gentlemen. One of the things that I so value about collecting, and Sherlock, is your fellow travellers – the people you get to meet, the people who you have, conversations with, many who become your friends. And, overwhelmingly, I have found that the people who tend to be drawn into this tend to be people with interests and passions which are not just casual hobbies, but the things that they're intellectually invested in and study and think about and so forth. And I like that kind of people."

I mention an article I had read in *The Guardian* that described Glen

“The thought of folks coming to blows over a book in a dusty old shop is absolutely foreign in my experience”

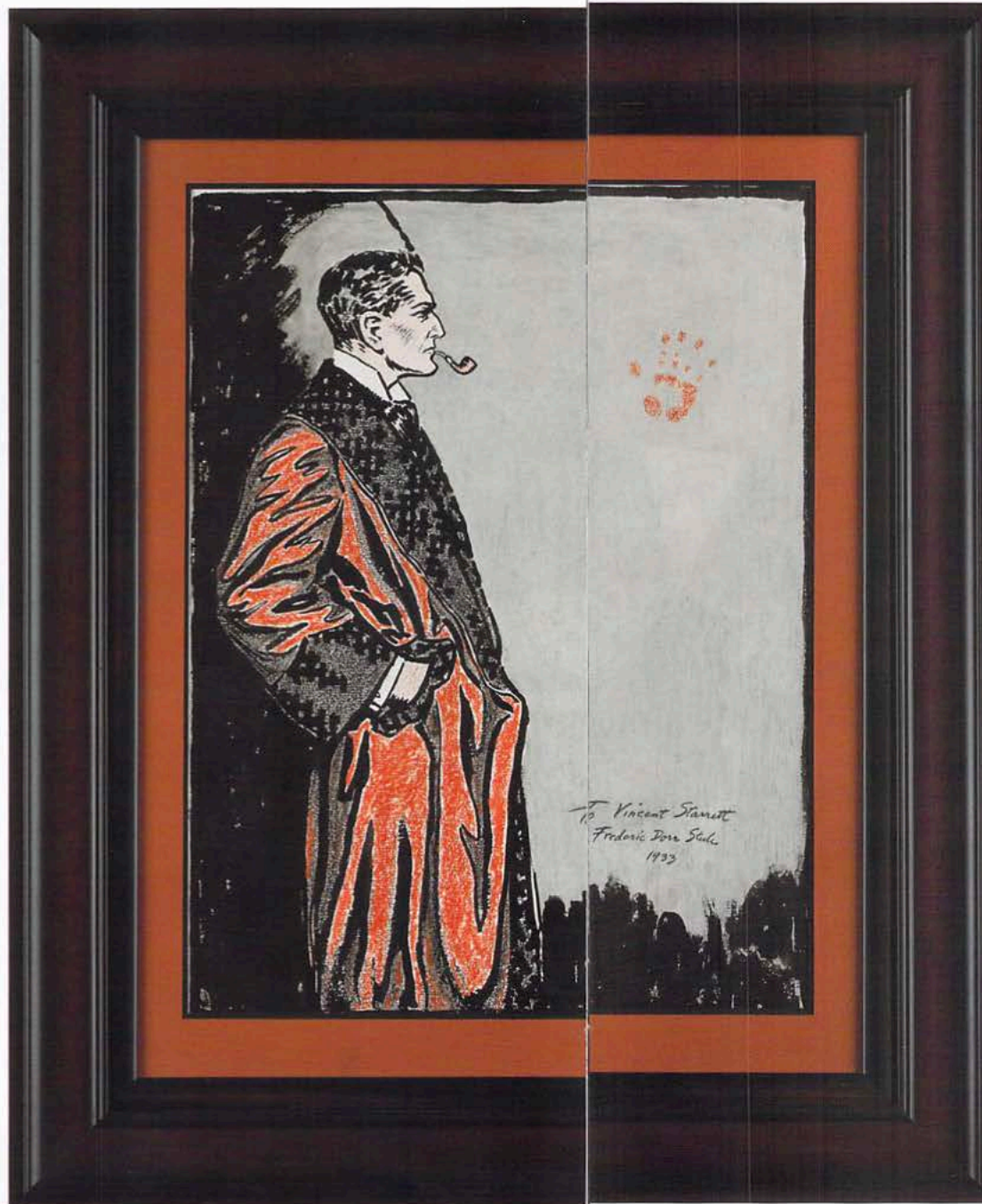
as a “rival” to a fellow collector of Sherlockiana. Does he really perceive fellow hobbyists as rivals?

"I have found the collecting world, and particularly that of serious collectors, remarkably collegial," he insists. "It's not a competition. We all happily coexist and enjoy each other's stories and collections. I certainly don't feel any rivalry with anyone. The thought of folks coming to blows over a book in a dusty old shop... I have no doubt that exists, but it's absolutely foreign in my personal experience."

In his exhibition catalogue, Glen says he is "especially excited by bibliographic rarities and oddities which goes beyond the two-dimensional text on the page". So, is that the driving force behind his collecting?

"One doesn't collect books *per se* for the books themselves. Take *The Sign of Four*, for example. Except for some typographical changes, or changes when they adapted it into American English, any copy you find has got

An original artwork by Frederic Dorr Steele showing William Gillette as Holmes in a reworking of the cover originally created for *The Norwood Builder*. The piece is inscribed by the artist to Vincent Starrett, one of the earliest Sherlockians and a long-standing admirer of Gillette's work. The picture was embellished for Gillette's Farewell Tour, far right.



Farewell to the Stage
WILLIAM GILLETTE
IN HIS FAMOUS CREATION
"SHERLOCK HOLMES"

By WILLIAM GILLETTE and
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

SETTING FORTH AN ORIGINAL
AND STIRRING ADVENTURE
OF THE GREAT DETECTIVE
WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN TOLD
IN PRINT OR ON THE SCREEN

SEASON
1929-1930

Direction:
A. L. ERLANGER
GEORGE C. TYLER

the same words in it. You can even download the PDF for free.

"So, the interest is in the history and the story of the artefact itself. *The Sign of Four*, which I just picked at random, is a good example. It was the second Sherlock Holmes story and there are several notable things about its publication. The first is that Conan Doyle at this point in his career still didn't have a literary agent. So, he was still peddling his own wares. Second, he was very sensitive to how he got burnt with the sale of his first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, which he had spent almost a year trying to get placed somewhere, until he eventually received the very nominal sum of £25 for the entire copyright.

"The other interesting thing is the US at this time was still not a part of any effective international copyright law.

"In 1890, the US copyright law did not allow copyrights if you weren't a US citizen. So Conan Doyle did not have copyright protection. And so, as you might imagine, there were

these printers and, sometimes, in a more meaningful sense, publishers who publish these books without the author's permission. They are, I think, quite properly called pirated copies. An attorney might argue no law was broken, but they did not have the copyright holder's permission; they didn't have the author's permission. They just printed the darn books.

"Of course, in the US market, the folks that they most liked to exploit were British authors as there were no translation problems. And [in the case of Sherlock Holmes] the popularity of the work had already been established. The market has already tested that this is something we should borrow, to put a polite word on it.

"So this one story fits into an interesting transitional part of Conan Doyle's life, an interesting part of the publication history. And as a consequence of that, some interesting artefacts. For example, the very first copy of *The Sign of Four* not in a magazine but in a book is a US pirated copy. It beat the US authorised publication by almost three years.

So, that's one of the pirates which has some bibliographic importance."

Tracking the first publication of each Holmes story can be quite a difficult task for a collector, thanks to the intricacies of publishing schedules. Many "were published roughly simultaneously in the US by *Collier's* and in the UK by *The Strand*", Glen explains. "And the publication schedules were such that, far more often, the *Collier's* was the first out by a few months. But if you're lunatic and want to have the very true first appearance for those stories, they are in the *Collier's* magazine and not *The Strand*. Of course, I have both. I mean, I want to keep all my bases covered."

As Glen built up his collection over more than four decades, I remark that it must be much more difficult now to find objects worthy of inclusion.

"Oh, it's vastly more difficult," he agrees. "But just for a moment, I'm going to dwell on the positive."

"The other rewards and items that are interesting to me come up

"I get a visceral satisfaction from reading the books I have in manuscript. In my mind I can hear Conan Doyle scratching away at the paper"

often enough that I'm as excited and stimulated as in the good old days when any randomly selected antiquarian bookstore likely had something that was a good addition.

"Delving into these other things that I talked about, that are not the acquisition of books, but the understanding of them, understanding the historical setting. Finding out about this is what makes it fun and fascinating."

"Sometimes we forget that authors don't write books. They write, depending on what era we're talking about, manuscripts, typescripts, computer files... And the process of that creative process to a book is rich and involves lots of people and lots of technologies."

For instance, Glen is fascinated by the technological changes that made cheap mass-market fiction books possible, including the introduction of the rotary printing press and

the development of plentiful and inexpensive wood pulp paper. And also, the "cleverness or skulduggery of the American pirates", including John Lovell, who "petitioned the Postmaster General in the United States, for a scheme by which books could be characterised as periodicals for postage. So, if any publisher 'played the game', they could mail their books for a few pennies, as opposed to a goodly number of dimes. The confluence of those three things, plus stealing from the authors, is books – and I have examples of these – which were available by post for two cents. And so, folks who a generation before had been confined to newspapers and the Bible could now afford to own popular literature."

Although this pulp fiction was produced in large numbers, good-condition copies are hard to find these days, partly because they were so cheaply made.

"Not only were they made on wood pulp paper, but in the early days, no care was taken to minimise the methods used to thoroughly wash the paper after the pulp had loosened up. You have highly acidic paper and very inexpensive bindings, so they tend to be very tender."

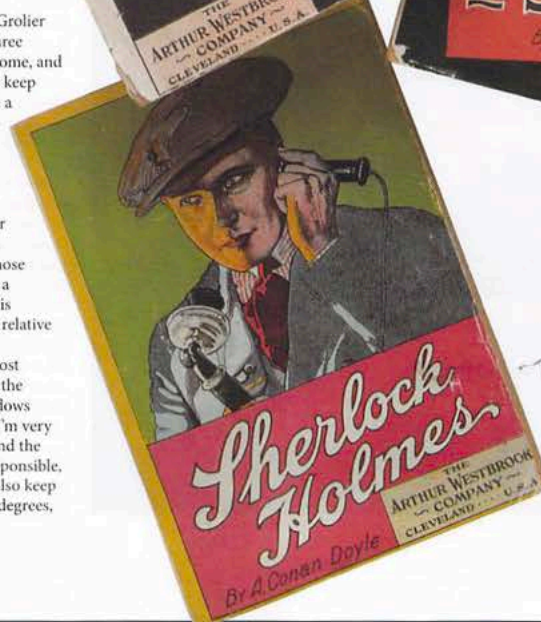
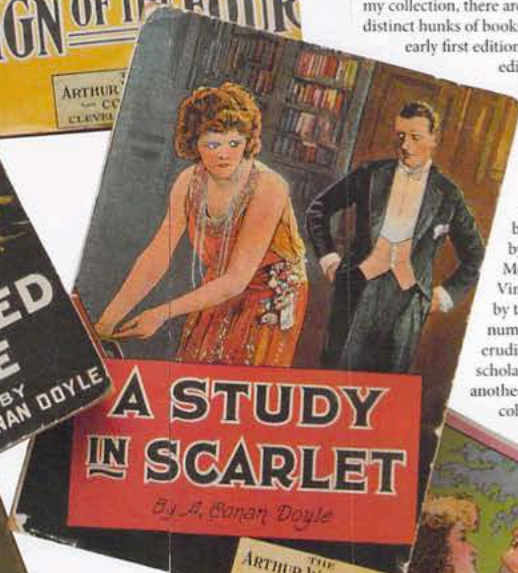
When not on show at the Grolier Club, Glen's collection fills three rooms at his San Francisco home, and I wonder how he manages to keep such often fragile artefacts in a stable condition.

"They are kept in a humidity-controlled room. Humidity is important for two reasons. One is the need to be within a particular range to condition the paper. And you've seen books get those brown splotches? Well, that's a mould, that's a fungus and it is dormant below fifty per cent relative humidity."

"And the windows are almost invariably closed, and I keep the curtains closed, and the windows are made from UV glass, so I'm very careful about the humidity and the light. Now, if I were more responsible, and could afford it, I would also keep the room at fifty or fifty-five degrees,

but it's actually not much of a problem in San Francisco. I just don't turn on the heat in those rooms. And most of the year here is between fifty and sixty degrees anyway."

Given the need to keep them in a good condition, I wonder how often Glen gets to read the stories in his collection.



"Oh, with some frequency. I really do get a visceral satisfaction from reading the books I have in manuscript. It's a different experience. I get magic off the story. In my mind I can hear Conan Doyle scratching away at the paper."

"You know, with respect to his methods of work, he was very frugal. I don't know about all of his works but essentially all of the Sherlock Holmes stories were done on school exercise books. The handful that were not done in these exercise books were done on foolscap. So very, very modest. I get a great deal of pleasure out of reading from those."

"Now, of the gazillion books in my collection, there are three fairly distinct hunks of books. There are the early first editions, important editions, of the stories."

"The second area is writings about the writing: critical essays by SC Roberts, by Christopher Morley, by Vincent Starrett, by the uncountable number of articulate, erudite British scholars. This is another part of my collection I'm particularly fond of."

and I can't say I've read absolutely all of those."

"And then the third category is pastiches – either it's comedic or a serious attempt to reproduce the style, or it may be a reasonably serious attempt but an unlikely setting, as in Sherlock Holmes meets Jack the Ripper or Sigmund Freud. And that's an area which I very much like and that I would say I have certainly read, although I don't generally revisit them."

Glen likes to collect in "clumps", as he puts it in his catalogue, "objects that are more significant in a group than they are individually."

"For example, I have several letters that Conan Doyle wrote to publishers outside of London, where book publishing perhaps wasn't their main line of business, trying to place *The Sign of Four*."

Other clumps in the collection include a copy of the Newnes Sixpenny edition of *The Hound*, which Glen owns alongside Conan Doyle's note agreeing to its publication and the original artwork for its cover.

He also owns a clump of objects that attest to the frenzy that accompanied the return of the great detective, years after Conan Doyle had attempted to kill him off. This includes a "playful" letter the author wrote to PF Collier, after *Collier's* magazine made him an offer he could not refuse.

Similarly, the exhibition is made up of clumps, which has allowed Glen to squeeze in rather more than the 221 advertised objects.

The exhibition is co-curated by Cathy Miranker, the woman who sparked his collecting mania in the first place.

"She certainly started it all when she gave me the first book, though I am confident she had no idea what she was starting. I still have that book. Even in its most glorious manifestations, it's a reasonably ordinary book, but it's in a very nice slipcase and it has this very fancy leather label on it, which says 'the world's most expensive book'."

"As I started preparing for the exhibition, I was gathering my thoughts and gathering samples and trying to try to settle on literary or bibliographic themes. I wanted the exhibit to

tell a story or set of stories, and fairly quickly I became consumed."

"I had written rough drafts, maybe a third of the pieces in the catalogue entries, which, of course, I gave to her to turn into English. She was a reporter for a substantial part of her life and is a wonderful writer and editor. And after that experience, we mutually decided that it would be much more effective and fun if she interviewed me for the balance of the written material and then wrote it up, rather than starting with my screeds."

"And, perhaps because of her journalistic background, she also

"One of the well-worn jokes in the biblio-sphere is that the wife is the natural enemy of the bookseller. But that's not the case in this household"

absolutely insisted that the things that I knew from my experience, that I claimed everybody knows, were researched and we found the reference which proved that the fact was a fact and not a speculation.

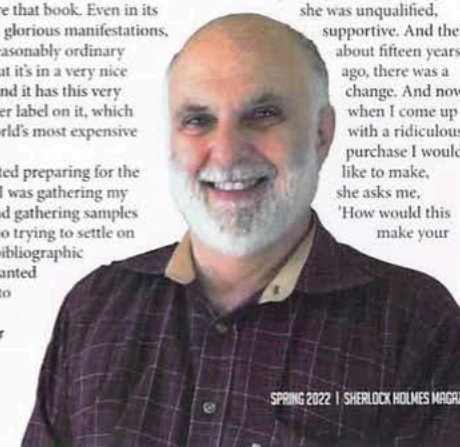
"Her involvement became so pervasive and so profound that I said, 'you need to be recognised as co-curator'."

"Now, I will claim all the credit, except for the first book, for the collection, but in terms of writing the story that the exhibit tells, it is absolutely a partnership."

But does Cathy moderate the excesses of Glen's collecting at all?

"I would say that for a very long time for up to, say, fifteen years ago, she was unqualified,

supportive. And then about fifteen years ago, there was a change. And now when I come up with a ridiculous purchase I would like to make, she asks me, 'How would this make your



Glen Miranker

Pirated copies of Conan Doyle's books often used colourful covers and illustrations that bore no relation to the characters or storylines.

collection better? It's a perfectly fair question. And I have to say only nine out of ten times do I have a satisfactory answer.

"So, if you call that moderation, fine, I still think that's unexpectedly supportive. One of the well-worn jokes in the biblio-sphere is that the wife is the natural enemy of the bookseller. But that's not the case in this household."

It must have been difficult, I suggest, to narrow down which objects to put on display.

"I wanted to tell a story, not just, 'here are all the first editions and then here are beautiful copies of that...' It's not what interests me; that's not why I collect."

"I wanted to capture the story of the history of the publication of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories and it quickly became obvious that I couldn't do everything – not treated properly."

"To me, by far the most interesting part is from the first story, *A Study in Scarlet*, in 1887, to the completion of the publication of *The Return*, which only encompasses, in round numbers, about half of the Sherlockian canon. Post-World War One, the story that I wanted to talk about is fairly thin and so I did not feel badly about omitting that."

"And then within that, I certainly had a goodly number of bright spots that I was excited about, and those were easy to pick, and then I just fleshed the story out around them."

Those bright spots include a copy of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which is inscribed by Conan Doyle, along with the date of 4 October. "Well, that's fascinating because the official publication date is the 12th. Now you have all the facts, I have my speculation, which is that he got a pre-printed copy and had given it to a friend. So, to me, that's an interesting backstory there."

"I have my copy of Beeton's *Christmas Annual*, including *A Study in Scarlet*, the very first Sherlock

Holmes story. They're very scarce." (They are indeed scarce. There are only thirty-four recorded copies – most held in libraries and universities.

Described as "the most expensive magazine in the world," a copy sold for \$156,000 at Sotheby's in 2007.)

"Fine, it's an extraordinary rarity. But my copy has this very curious purple stamp in it, which says the Mechanics Institute and Lending Library of Coburg. So I said, 'Gee, what is this about?' I did a bunch of research and it turns out that there's only one likely place for this to come and that's Coburg, Australia."

After a little more detective work, Glen got hold of a member of the local historical society in Coburg, who confirmed that a Mechanics Institute was established there in the 1890s, but he said that although they had gathered the funds to build a library, one had never been built: something seemingly contradicted by the stamp in Glen's copy.

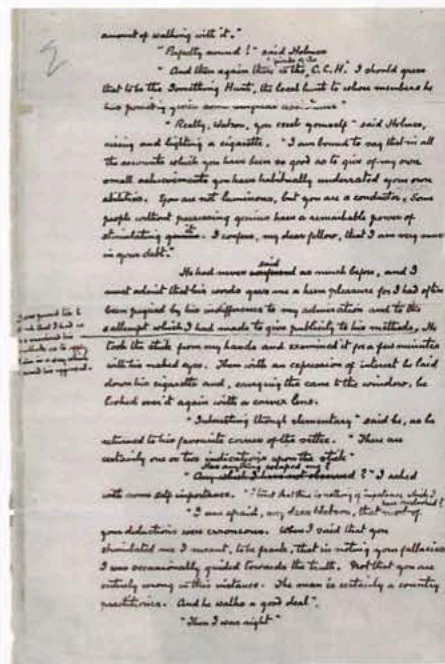
After further research, Glen's contact found the annual reports for the Mechanics Institute, which showed that although they never built the library, they did acquire some books, including a copy of Beeton's *Christmas Annual* for 1887.

"That's all the concrete evidence I have, but I insist that's where this book came from. I have no idea how it made it from London to Coburg, Australia, from Coburg, Australia, to New York. But it did."

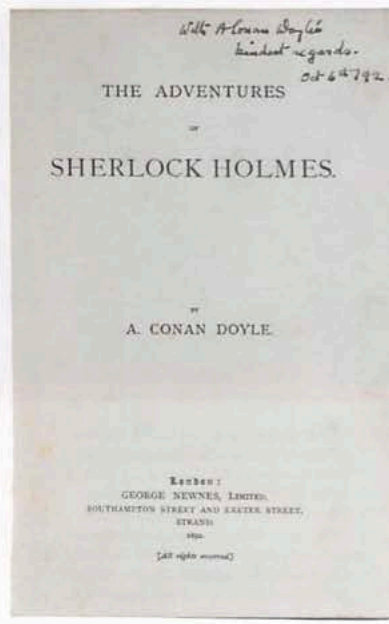
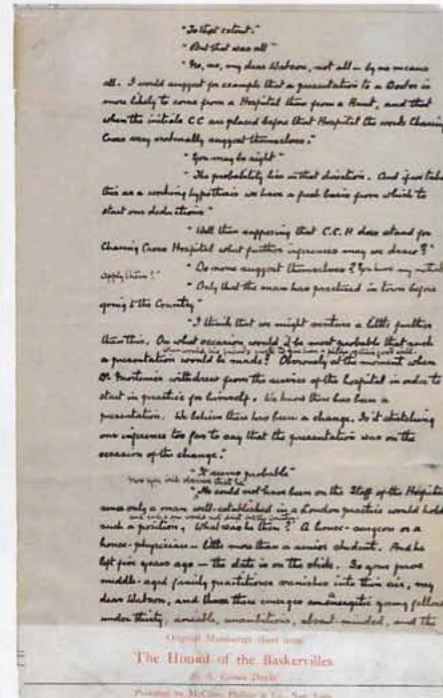
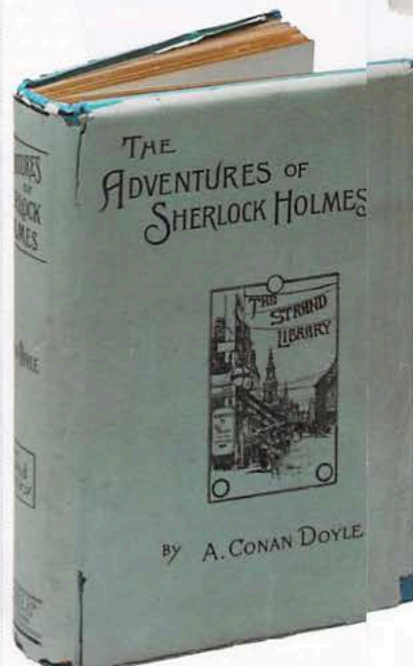
"These are the things that I find interesting and dazzling. And during my research I learn a great deal about things that matter to me along the way, about how books are printed, how books are published, how Conan Doyle did financially, and so on."

I observe that some collectors may be unhappy that their copy of the annual carries a library stamp, because that may make it seem imperfect.

"No, I enjoy – and I'm about to put a caveat on this – I enjoy books with character."



The second and third leaves of the manuscript of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, above. Conan Doyle's "idea book", known as the Norwood Notebook, which contains the famous words "Killed Holmes", above right. The only known copy of the first edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* with dust jacket, right. A signed page from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, dated ahead of its publication, far right. A library stamp in Beeton's *Annual*, left.



"Now, that said, I have the only known copy of the UK *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in a dust jacket. And even the jacket itself doesn't show much evidence of sunning, so you can imagine the book looks brand new, like it came off the shelf."

It is clear that Glen enjoys both the thrill of finding a new addition for his collection, and also researching the story behind the book. But which, for him, is the more pleasurable?

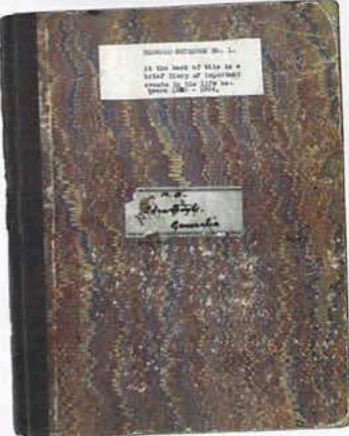
"I'm sorry, I'm going to give you a real wimpy answer," Glen laughs. "The pleasures are so different that they're incomparable to me. They're probably just as intense, but they're extremely different."

"When we're talking about acquiring a book, it is a moment, an event. These research projects can take weeks, sometimes months, of applied effort. They're not comparable."

Of course, no collection is ever complete – even one as amazing as Glen's – and I ask what he'd like to possess that has so far remained elusive.

"I would love to have the first page of the manuscript of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I have pages two and three. And the issue is not to have page one per se. But the *Hound* story starts in the most beautiful archetypal Baker Street studies. It's in Baker Street, Holmes and Watson return from a walk that Watson's complaint compelled Holmes to go on. When they return, they discover they have missed a client. Holmes chastises Watson for having made them leave Baker Street. The client has left his walking stick behind, and then Watson to little effect, and then Holmes to great effect, make deductions about who the client was, and what the case was on the basis of the walking stick that he left behind. So, this dialogue is ninety per cent complete, but ten per cent of it is on page one. I would love to have that exchange in its entirety. That's why I'm so eager. But there's no sign that it exists."

"So, that's one. And then the other, which is equally unlikely, is to get a copy of the UK *Hound* in the dust jacket. I have all the other UK first editions and jacket. And besides the fact that *The Hound* is overwhelmingly my favourite story, to have all of them in jacket... Well, there are two known copies in jackets. One is in the Bodleian, so it's not going anywhere. And the other is with a collector in the Midwest, who has already made it publicly known he's giving his collection in its entirety to his alma



mater. So, it's not to say there isn't one in somebody's attic someplace, but I'm not optimistic."

"Nevertheless, new finds are not plentiful, but they do show up occasionally. And when I find them it is thrilling and exciting."

Visitors to Glen and Cathy's exhibition, and readers of the remarkable accompanying catalogue, may well be inspired to begin collections of their own. I ask what he hopes they will take away from seeing the objects on display.

"I would say that I hope you come away with a realisation that the publication of books, the bringing of stories to life, and the bringing of stories into the hands of a reader, is a remarkably interesting and varied history process, and that you don't have to be a collector but they are areas that are definitely worthy of examination and study by themselves."

"Secondly, and this is a kind of a personal subgoal: Generally speaking, I think pirated editions as an object of study, as a collectible, get their due respect. I think it's a remarkable area of publishing history and a remarkable area to collect. Plus, it's still relatively affordable."

"The obvious things to collect – the first editions and so on and so forth – which were, twenty-five years ago, merely expensive – are now ridiculous. And not accessible for normal human beings. Pirates are still affordable. And I think definitely worthy." ♡

Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects is showing at The Grölier Club, New York, until 12 April 2022. For details, see sherlockin221objects.org

A STUDY IN SCARLET.