



Lives Beyond Baker Street: A Biographical Dictionary of Sherlock Holmes's Contemporaries

Christopher Redmond

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If you have ever read *A Scandal in Bohemia* and wondered what Watson's allusion to Mr. John Hare means if you aren't sure who was in charge in southeast Asia when Mycroft Holmes mentions the present state of Siam if you're wondering about Watson's portrait of General Gordon or Holmes's Vernet relatives or what Scottish expert on poisons Scotland Yard consulted when the Baker Street duo weren't available this is your book. It provides one-paragraph biographies of 800 real-life Victorians and Edwardians who strolled down Oxford Street near Holmes and Watson or figured in the newspapers they read. That mention of Blondin on the roof at Pondicherry Lodge? Arthur Conan Doyle's literary friends? The King of Scandinavia? The British commander at Maiwand? Enquire within."

Lives Beyond Baker Street: A Biographical Dictionary of Sherlock Holmes's Contemporaries Details

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From Reader Review *Lives Beyond Baker Street: A Biographical Dictionary of Sherlock Holmes's Contemporaries* for online ebook

Sherry says

I was recently asked to review Chris Redmond's new book *Lives Beyond Baker Street*. Mr. Redmond is well known for his scholarship in the Holmes universe. This work contains hundreds of biographical sketches of real people who lived during the time that Holmes and Watson 'lived' and meandered the streets of London and, in acknowledgement of the 'world stage' in 1895, includes many individuals who were not living in Britain at the time.

One of Mr. Redmond's comments in the Introduction grabbed my interest right away. He says that the character of Thaddeus Sholto in *The Sign of Four* is generally acknowledged to be based upon Oscar Wilde. Doyle and Wilde met in August of 1889 at a dinner party at the Langham Hotel, and it seems obvious that Doyle was most impressed with Wilde and utilized his physical attributes and personality in more than one character. Dr. Thaddeus Sholto, the son of Major Sholto, is an obvious effeminate caricature of Wilde and shows his bent when he says, 'Pray step into my sanctum. A small place ... but furnished to my liking, an oasis of art in the howling desert of London.' Wilde's physical description, his features and mannerisms found their way into other characters as well, to-wit: an effeminate Duncan Ross and John Clay appear, echoing the names of two of Wilde's close friends (Robert Ross and John Gray). After Wilde's death, Doyle published *The Adventure in the Empty House* (1903), in which Holmes attempts to foil his own murder by having a wax image of himself—a second self like Dorian Gray and his painting—sculpted by Oscar Meunier. There is also Colonel Sebastian Moran, an enemy of Holmes who appears in *The Adventure of the Empty House*...his initials "S.M." evoke Wilde's pseudonym, Sebastian Melmoth, adopted after his release from prison. It is not surprising that Doyle fashioned many of his characters after real people like Wilde. In addition to the 'write what you know' motto, the Victorians had a love affair with Phrenology and Physiognomy, and they believed that the shape of one's head and a person's facial features were keys to personality and emotions. This facet of the era is discussed in a recent issue of 'Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,' which mentions Toulouse-Lautrec's watercolor portrait of Oscar Wilde.

Though Redmond points out that this book is one of broad strokes, and admits to the deliberate omission of some well-known people, like Edgar Allen Poe (as much has already been written about him) and Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (with no explanation for doing so), he also states that he meant to include historical figures 'not specifically named but clearly reflected in [the Sherlockian canon].' In my own *Before Watson* series, I have referenced Oscar Wilde, Charles Bradlaugh, and other world figures Holmes and/or Watson may have read or heard about. I was hoping that Redmond would explore more obscure individuals, i.e., doctors at St. Bart's or people Mycroft Holmes rubbed elbows with in government. I love that Redmond discusses Joseph-Alexandre Lestrade and explains that Doyle may have borrowed the name of this fellow student at the University of Edinburgh and used it for Inspector G. Lestrade. But conspicuously absent are Richard Assheton Cross, who served as Home Secretary between 1874 and 1880 and 1885 and 1886, and Sir Charles Edward Howard Vincent, who was appointed by Cross in 1878 to the post of Director of the new Criminal Investigation Department.

Sherlock Holmes did not like to clutter his 'brain attic.' He says, in *A Study in Scarlet*, "A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has difficulty laying his hands upon it. Now the skillful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic . . . It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it, there

comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.”

So, it seems to me that a reference tool for writers of Sherlock Holmes pastiches would concentrate on those people who influenced Doyle and Holmes and Watson, or those in whom they would have been most interested. I understand, for example, the inclusion of Florence Nightingale, but why include Dorothea Dix, an Army nurse during the American Civil War? Why exclude Sir Charles Edward Howard Vincent, the Director of the new CID, who may have had a much more direct influence on Holmes and Watson? Holmes was a man who could identify 140 varieties of tobacco ash, and he was equally familiar with types of vehicles, everything from gigs to hansoms to dog-carts to landaus, and applied his deductive skills in identifying them. “I satisfied myself that it was a cab and not a private carriage by the narrow gauge of the wheels. The ordinary London growler is considerably less wide than a gentleman’s brougham.” - *A Study in Scarlet*. So I’m puzzled at the inclusion of Sitting Bull and the omission of René Panhard and Emile Levassor, who, in 1890 sold their first automobile and, in 1895, invented the first modern transmission, a 4-horsepower engine with a steering wheel, one of the earliest employment of this principle? Surely, Holmes would have taken an interest in a new and faster way to get from one case to another.

Also omitted are Dr. William Smith, a pioneer of British osteopathy and student companion of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the 1880s, and Surgeon-Major Alexander Francis Preston, who was injured during the Battle of Maiwand in 1880, where John Watson was allegedly injured. There is speculation that one of them may have been Doyle’s model for Dr. Watson, and it is from their existence, and that of other military personnel and Army doctors, that we know that Watson could not have been with the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers because they were never at the locations where Doyle placed them. [Watson could not have joined the 5th Fusiliers at Kandahar because that regiment was never stationed there. They were part of the Peshawar Valley Field Force and were employed in the Khyber Pass, the Bazar Valley, Landi Kotal and Jalalabad—all in the northern territories.]

Perhaps it is simply a personal preference, but for purposes of educating Sherlockians or to provide a useful tool to writers of Sherlock Holmes pastiches, I should like to have seen Redmond cull the world stage a bit and provide instead more information on the more obscure individuals who may have had a major impact on Doyle—and in turn on Holmes and Watson had they actually lived. Overall, however, the biographical sketches are a good springboard from which to dive into the great ocean of historical figures who peopled the world at that time.

Atlin Merrick says

"Lives Beyond Baker Street" offers exactly what it says on the tin: Hundreds of brief bios of the contemporaries of Sherlock Holmes and Arthur Conan Doyle, from commoner to queen, king to criminal.

Each entry is 150-200 words, perfect for background information to colour your fiction, or to sate a curiosity about who was making the news in Victorian times. Entries include luminaries known to Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as true-life high-fliers who appear in the Sherlock Holmes canon.

(Disclosure: I write for the same publisher as Mr. Redmond but if I didn't I'd still have relished this book.)

Narrelle says

Chris Redmond's *Lives Beyond Baker Street* is an incredibly useful book of the prominent, the famous, the influential and the infamous of the Victorian era. It's an especially useful resource for people writing in Holmesian canon, but it's also fun just to poke in to discover the personalities of the time.

Where personalities were either referenced as contemporary figures or were the inspirations behind names and characters, Redmond has made a note. Plenty of other figures appear - 800 in all - giving a textured *Who's Who* of the period.

Each potted biography is brief but packed with interest. Perhaps Wikipedia is quoted, rather than primary or more related sources, a bit too often for my preference, but the majority of entries have clear, related sources and the reader has plenty of information to go off on more indepth research as required.

The entries are clear, concise and cross referenced. Highly recommended as a research resource or just something to dip into if you have an interest in the real world that lived around the fictional Holmes.

Thomas Turley says

Canadian Chris Redmond, author of such books as *Sherlock Holmes Handbook* and *In Bed with Sherlock Holmes*, compiled a *Tin Dispatch Box* of Holmes' unpublished cases as early as his teens. Since 1994, he has edited that invaluable website for Canonical readers and scholars alike, Sherlockian.net.

The present volume, as its introduction notes, began as an attempt to link Conan Doyle's original stories to the historical events and personages on which they might be based. It lists several possible candidates for such characters as Irene Adler, the King of Bohemia, Lord Bellinger, and Professor Moriarty. However, Redmond's research quickly outgrew this limited conception, so his book amounts (if I counted them correctly) to no fewer than 806 entries.

To illuminate the ever-changing "society of late Victorian (and early Edwardian) Britain," Redmond assembles an array of "barons, knights, and tycoons"; but he also features actors, artists, bakers, courtesans, scientists, soldiers, shopkeepers, and writers. In short, almost every facet of Holmes' world is represented. Special emphasis is placed on aspects of Victorian life of interest to Chris Redmond and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: criminology, spiritualism, medicine, and sexuality.

Considering the broadness of its coverage (and my own erratic expertise), the dictionary seems consistently accurate and comprehensive within its stated limits. To be sure, there are occasional typos (Lvov, not "Lviv," on p. 111), omissions (Gustav Mahler?), or odd choices (e.g., Catherine "Skittles" Walters [p. 124] is mentioned as a mistress of the future Duke of Devonshire [p. 97]; the Duchess of Manchester, whom the duke married after a thirty-year affair, is not.)

Redmond's introduction is slightly coy about research; but the articles make clear that he consulted original works and traditional sources for the period (e.g., the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the *British Medical Journal*, and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) as well as Sherlockian tomes and useful websites. Best of all, the author's engaging and informal style makes his dictionary as delightful to browse as it is helpful to research.

In summary, Christopher Redmond has produced both an informative primer for readers with more than a superficial interest in the Canon, and a resource for writers of Sherlockian pastiches that will be well-nigh indispensable.

Marcia Wilson says

Essential for the shelf. Holmes' world was matter-of-factual in its use of world players and there were some amazing pseudonyms created by ACD's pen; Many of them are in here (I did not see the inspiration for Dixie, but that's ok! I'm sure Mr. Redmond needed to pick and choose!).

The really interesting thing that makes this book stand apart is how when you comb through the pages you often come to an "aha" moment, wherein a subtle thread will suddenly tie in with another. I lost count of the number of "so there they are" as I paged through. Imagine reading a society paper's pages for the first time and finally seeing celebrities you'd heard of but not seen until this point.

Buy this for your research shelf...or if you are feeling particularly thoughtful, your friend who loves the genre and has limited time for research. Neither of you will be sorry, but be warned. The mystery-writer may suddenly find an unexpected side effect of reading: ideas!
