

Ten Facts about Sherlock Holmes

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This post is the first part of a two-part bumper post featuring interesting facts about Sherlock Holmes. If you like these facts, have a read of the sequel to this post which gathers together further little-known facts about the great sleuth. For more great facts about popular fictional characters, check out our pick of the most interesting Harry Potter facts and our fascinating facts about Romeo and Juliet.

1. Sherlock Holmes was originally going to be called Sherrinford. The name was altered to Sherlock, possibly because of a cricketer who bore the name. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who created Holmes (of course), was a fan of cricket and the name 'Sherlock' appears to have stuck in his memory. Doyle was also a keen cricketer himself, and between 1899 and 1907 he played ten first-class matches for the Marylebone Cricket Club – quite fitting, since Baker Street is situated in the Marylebone district of London. For more on the creation of Holmes, see the detailed 'Introduction' in *The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes*.

2. The first Sherlock Holmes novel was something of a flop. The detective made his debut in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), written by a twenty-seven-year-old Doyle in just three weeks. Famously, Doyle was inspired by a real-life lecturer of his at the University of Edinburgh, Dr Joseph Bell, who could diagnose patients simply by looking at them when they walked into his surgery; the other important influence on the creation of Sherlock Holmes was Edgar Allan Poe's fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin, two of whose adventures we include in our pick of Poe's best short stories. Doyle wrote the book while he was running a struggling doctor's surgery down in Portsmouth. The novel was rejected by many publishers and eventually published in Beeton's Christmas Annual (named after the husband of Mrs Beeton, of the book of cookery and household management). It didn't sell well, and more or less sank without trace.

3. The second Sherlock Holmes novel was the result of a dinner party with Oscar Wilde. One person who had admired the first novel was the editor Joseph Stoddart, who edited Lippincott's Monthly Magazine. He convinced Doyle, at a dinner party in 1889, to write a second novel featuring the detective, for serialisation in the magazine. Wilde, who was also present, also agreed to write a novel for the magazine – his only novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which appeared in 1890, the same year as *The Sign of the Four*, Doyle's novel.

4. Sherlock Holmes didn't wear a deerstalker. Much. The famous image of Holmes wearing a deerstalker hat is a product of the celebrated images which accompanied the short stories, which appeared in the Strand magazine from 1891 (beginning with the wonderful story 'A Scandal in Bohemia'). It is when the stories began to appear that Sherlock Holmes became a worldwide sensation. Sidney Paget, who drew the illustrations, had Holmes wearing a deerstalker when the detective went into the

country to investigate mysteries at country houses and in small rural villages, but most people think of the detective as always donning the hat when off to investigate a case.

5. Sherlock Holmes is the most-filmed fictional character. According to IMDb, Holmes has appeared in 226 films and been played by dozens of different actors since the advent of cinema in the late nineteenth century. It's hardly surprising that the sleuth's popularity inspired a raft of other writers to create rivals to Sherlock Holmes.

6. Sherlock Holmes is not the most-filmed fictional character. That is, not if you include non-humans (or partial humans). Dracula has been filmed more times than the great sleuth, at 239 times, but since Dracula is part-man, part-vampire, Holmes is the most-filmed fully human character.

7. Sherlock Holmes didn't make deductions. At least, not most of the time. Instead, and if we want to be technically accurate, he used the logical process known as abduction. The difference between deductive and abductive reasoning is that the latter is based more on inference from observation, where the conclusion drawn may not always necessarily be true. However, in deduction, the conclusion drawn from the available data is always necessarily true. But then again, since Holmes's reasoning always seems to be correct, perhaps it is deduction after all!

8. Holmes never says 'Elementary, my dear Watson'. Not in the 'canon' of original Conan Doyle novels and stories. Holmes says 'Elementary!' and 'my dear Watson' at various points, but the idea of putting them together was a later meme, which possibly arose because it neatly conveys Holmes's effortless superiority to his 'dear' friend and foil. The first recorded use of this exact phrase is actually in a P. G. Wodehouse novel of 1915, *Psmith, Journalist*.

9. The Sherlock Holmes Museum both is and isn't at 221B Baker Street. Although the museum in London bears the official address '221B', in line with the celebrated address from the stories, the museum's building lies between 237 and 241 Baker Street, making it physically – if not officially – at number 239.

10. There's more to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle than Sherlock Holmes. Much more, in fact. Among other achievements, his legal campaigning led to the establishment of the Court of Criminal Appeal. He was knighted for his journalistic work during the Second Boer War, not for his achievements in fiction, law, or medicine. We owe the word 'grimpen' to him (from Grimpen Mire, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*). He wrote historical novels (such as *The White Company* and *Sir Nigel*, set during the fourteenth century) which he prized more highly than his detective fiction. Winston Churchill agreed, and was a devoted fan of the historical novels. Doyle also wrote science fiction romances, such as *The Lost World* (1912), which would inspire Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*, and, subsequently, Steven Spielberg's film (the

sequel to the novel and film being named, in homage to Doyle, *The Lost World*). Doyle also took up legal causes himself: read Julian Barnes's novel *Arthur and George* for his most famous real-life case. We've detailed some of Conan Doyle's other extraordinary achievements in this post all about Doyle and his writing.

If this post has whetted your appetite, why not get hold of some of the greatest detective stories ever written? We recommend *Sherlock Holmes Boxset* (containing 10 Titles), which includes all five volumes of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes short stories, the four full-length novels, and a collection of other Sherlock-inspired fun. In other words, the entire Sherlock Holmes 'canon'. Well worth reading. We also have more about Sherlock Holmes, and a host of other literary curiosities, in our book *The Secret Library: A Book-Lovers' Journey Through Curiosities of History*.

Fans of detective fiction might also enjoy our fascinating Agatha Christie facts, featuring an interesting anecdote involving a hedgehog.