

## Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle was born on May 22, 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland. (22 May 1859 – 7 July 1930) He was most noted for his stories about the detective Sherlock Holmes, which are generally considered a major innovation in the field of crime fiction, and the adventures of Professor Challenger. He was a prolific writer whose other works include science fiction stories, historical novels, plays and romances, poetry, and non-fiction.



Arthur pursued a career as a physician, and while awaiting patients to arrive, he began to write. Thank goodness for us! It was during these years that Conan Doyle began writing The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes stories.

Conan Doyle's interest in Spiritualism (*a religious movement that began in the United States and was prominent in the 1840s–1920s, especially in English-speaking countries. The movement's distinguishing feature is the belief that the spirits of the dead can be contacted by mediums*) began when he was still an almost penniless young doctor living in Southsea in the United Kingdom. It was during a time when science was just starting to question the idea that another world might exist beyond our own and Doyle became caught up on the study, as well as in the burgeoning Spiritualist movement. He avidly followed the research that was being done and even attended a number of séances and kept detailed notes of what occurred there. Early in his research, he began to consider the idea that a great amount of the phenomena that he witnessed was genuine and that the knocks, raps, horn-blowing and messages from the dead were worthy of at least a cautious belief.

During the years 1885 to 1888, he was invited to participate in table turning sittings at the home of one of his patients, General Drayson, a teacher at the Greenwich Naval College. The medium was a railway signalman, and some amazing phenomena and apparitions took place. The phenomena were, quite frankly, too amazing for Sir Arthur, and he underrated both the honesty of the medium and the intelligence of the sitters. Nonetheless, his interest was aroused.

Shortly thereafter, he joined the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and carried out a series of experiments with a Mrs. Ball. From these experiments, Sir Arthur was convinced that telepathy was genuine. As far as survival and mediumship were concerned, in 1902, when he first met Sir Oliver Lodge, he had not arrived at any definite conclusions. However, Myers' classic, **Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death**, made a deep impression upon him.

In 1885, Doyle married Louise Hawkins, the older sister of a patient of his who had died. Their daughter Mary was born. In 1890, a strange event occurred that may have only been a coincidence but in later years, many would wonder. Not long after Mary's birth, Doyle received word of a demonstration that was taking place in Berlin by a doctor who

claimed to be able to cure consumption (tuberculosis). Doyle became obsessed with going to the conference, even though he did not specialize in consumption at all. He could not explain his interest and so went to Berlin to see what was occurring. Unfortunately, the trip turned out to be fruitless for he arrived too late to get into the presentation. Doyle's interest in the lecture was never fully explained but tragically -- three years later -- his wife would be diagnosed with consumption would be given only a few months to live. Was it merely a coincidence or was Doyle's keen interest in the subject matter, as some have suggested, a foreshadowing of things to come?

After the death of his wife Louisa in 1906, and the deaths of his son Kingsley, his brother, his two brothers-in-law, and his two nephews in World War I, Conan Doyle sank into depression. He found solace supporting Spiritualism (and its alleged scientific proof of existence beyond the grave. One of the reasons for this could be that he remembers seeing his mother in his bedroom (after her passing) adjusting his pillow. Whatever the catalyst, Conan Doyle became involved with Spiritualism after the death of his own son during the First World War. Kingsley Doyle died from pneumonia in October 1917, which he contracted during his year plus convalescence after being seriously wounded during the 1916 Battle of the Somme. One of the odder aspects of this period of his life was his book *The Coming of the Fairies* (1921). He was apparently totally convinced of the veracity of the Cottingley fairy photographs, which he reproduced in the book, together with theories about the nature and existence of fairies and spirits. In 1917, two teenage girls in Yorkshire produced photographs they reportedly had taken of fairies in their garden. Elsie Wright (age 16) and her cousin Frances Griffiths (age 10) used a simple camera and were said to be lacking any knowledge of photography or photographic trickery.

Some thought Conan Doyle crazy, but he defended the reality of fairies with all the evidence he could find. He counters the arguments of the disbelievers eloquently and at great length. In fact, his arguments sound surprisingly similar in every respect to present-day books touting the idea that alien beings visit us in UFOs.

A short time after the death of Malcolm Leckie (Doyle's brother-in-law), a sick friend of Lady Jean Doyle came to stay at the Conan Doyle home. Her name was Lily Lauder-Symonds and she had a reputation for being a gifted medium. While she was there, she offered to conduct a séance for the family and delivered a message from Lady Jean's brother, Malcolm. He had been killed during the Great War and he and Conan Doyle had been close friends. Years before, the two men had shared a private joke about a guinea that Leckie had had given to Sir Arthur as his first "fee" when he became an Army doctor. Doyle had cherished the small token and wore it on his watch chain. The message that Conan Doyle was given by Lauder-Symonds concerned the guinea, an item that most people, including the medium, knew nothing about. This was likely the incident that finally convinced Sir Arthur of the legitimacy of Spiritualism. Shortly after, he began his full-fledged conversion to the movement, although he did not go public with his beliefs right away.



Conan Doyle plunged into Spiritualism with a great deal of vigor. Despite some set backs and the exposure of frauds, Doyle could not be shaken from his beliefs. He was firmly convinced of life after death and the possibility of making contact with the spirit world. After 1918, because of his deepening involvement into the occult, Conan Doyle wrote very little fiction, writing arduously about Spiritualism instead. Their subsequent trips to America, Australia and to Africa, accompanied by their three children, were also on psychic crusades, some less than well received than others.

A Spirit Photograph that Sir Arthur posed for that purports to have the spirit "extra" of his son, Kingsley, who was killed in the Great War

Conan Doyle also collected a huge number of spirit photographs, most of which he believed to be genuine, including one of a ghostly woman that was taken at a haunted inn in Norwich. In 1922, he penned a book on the subject called *The Case for Spirit Photography*. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the photos that Conan Doyle championed appear blatantly fake today, the obvious results of fraud and double exposure. He became particularly involved with a group of spirit photographers led by William Hope of Crewe.

The so-called "Crewe Circle" produced several hundred alleged spirit photographs during its heyday and Doyle posed for a number of them. Not surprisingly, all of the developed plates portrayed spirit "extra" lurking over his shoulder. The credulous author believed all of them to be authentic.

Doyle began lecturing for the Spiritualist cause in October 1917, appearing in Bradford and London. In the years that followed, he visited almost every town in Britain. After storming through London, Doyle and his family also visited Australia and the United States, all on behalf of Spiritualism. He also lectured all over Europe and in South Africa, Kenya and Rhodesia. In 1926, he published a spiritual adventure story called *The Land of the Mist*, which featured the popular Professor Challenger character from his earlier book, *The Lost World*. He also wrote a massive; two volume book called *The History of Spiritualism* and throughout the 1920's spent a quarter of a million pounds advancing the Spiritualist cause.

In his *The History of Spiritualism* (1926) Conan Doyle highly praised the psychic phenomena and spirit materializations produced by Eusapia Palladino and Mina

"Margery" Crandon, based on the investigations of duped scientists and conjurers who deeply desired to encounter psychic phenomena and refused to listen to skeptical and well-informed scientists and conjurers. (In the preface, Doyle mentions these titles for himself: President D'Honneur De La Federation Spirite Internationale, President of the London Spiritualist Alliance, and President of the British College of Psychic Science.)

For nearly 30 years, Sir Arthur continued his studies and investigations. Finally, at the peak of his literary career, at approximately the age of 58, he took a decisive step and wrote **The New Revelation** and **The Vital Message**. In these books, he firmly associated himself with the cause of Modern Spiritualism.

Until his final days, Conan Doyle clung tenaciously to his belief in the afterlife and to the reality of the Spiritualist movement. In fact, he believed that his final hours in 1930 were the beginning of perhaps his greatest adventure. Throughout the 1920's, Doyle had suffered several small heart attacks and his doctors warned him about his excessive travel and speaking engagements. The robust author ignored them however, maintaining that he simply had too much to do. Eventually though, it all caught up with him and he was diagnosed with serious heart disease in the spring of 1930. He began a decline that ended in July and worsened after he caught a serious cold while lecturing about Spiritualism in Scandinavia.



On the morning of July 7, his family gathered around him and held on to the slight pressure that he still had in his hands. Around half past eight, Conan Doyle revived himself a little but did not speak. He looked at each of his loved ones and then settled back and closed his eyes forever. His son Adrian Doyle gave the anxious public a short account of his father's last moments: "His last words to us were to my mother and they show just how much he thought of her. He simply smiled up at her and said that she was wonderful. He was in too much pain to say a lot, his breathing was very bad and what he said was during a brief flash of consciousness. I have never seen anyone take anything more gamely in all my life. Even when we all knew that he was suffering great pain, he always managed to keep a smile for us."

Conan Doyle's death caused an immediate sensation among the world's Spiritualist community. Mediums everywhere waited anxiously for his first message from the other side and while it took some time, they never gave up hope. Soon, he became a frequently reported presence as séances the world over and also began appearing in a number of questionable spirit photographs as well.

The Doyle family never had any doubts that he would return. When asked if he would, Adrian Doyle replied: "Why, of course! My father fully believed that when he passed over he would continue to keep in touch with us. All of the family believes so too. There is no question that my father will speak to us just as he did before he passed over."

True to his ways, even death did not silence him. On July 13, 1930, a large reunion was held in Albert Hall, London. A chair was left empty in honor of Sir Arthur. Estelle Roberts, one of England's finest and most respected mediums, said that she saw clairvoyantly Conan Doyle in the chair and offered a personal message from the great writer to his family; they accepted the message as evidential.

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