

# The New York Times

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## Entering World of Literature's Great Sleuth

By KAREN JONES MARCH 19, 2014



*Sherlock Holmes talking to Dr. Watson in a train carriage, from "The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes." Sinister blood splatters, concealed clues and murder most foul are just part of the fun at "The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes" now at the Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, Ohio.*

**S**INISTER blood splatters, concealed clues and murder most foul are just part of the fun at "The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes," now at the Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, Ohio. The 10,000-square-foot traveling exhibition is an ambitious and multifaceted presentation of the most famous detective of English literary fiction, his creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and more than 125 years of Sherlockian lore.

Sherlock Holmes's scientific method of crime-solving and his enduring popularity as a literary and pop culture favorite make him an ideal subject for science museums. "Many institutions are looking for a way to pique interest in their visitors with topics such as Sherlock Holmes or Titanic while ensuring they stay on mission as an educational experience," said Geoffrey M. Curley of Geoffrey M. Curley & Associates, creators of the exhibition along with the Exhibits Development Group. Partners include the Conan Doyle Estate, the Museum of London and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry.

From original manuscript pages from “The Hound of the Baskervilles” to props from the current BBC hit “Sherlock,” the exhibition aims to engage all levels of enthusiasts. Galleries feature an examination of Conan Doyle and late 19th-century London, the science behind the Holmes stories and pop culture artifacts, past and present. There is also an immersive interactive Victorian-era murder mystery that visitors are asked to solve, clue by clue, after an introduction to Holmes’s scientific methods of crime-solving.

Careful not to confuse young visitors about reality and fiction, galleries are clearly delineated as containing actual artifacts and scientific data. “We separated the science lessons from the interactive mystery so the mystery was a place to practice and use the information you already learned, not a place to learn the science and history itself,” Mr. Curley said.

Observation and deduction are synonymous with the Holmes method, which makes him a natural to introduce forensics to museum visitors, said Josh Keller, project manager at the Center of Science and Industry. “We are a hands-on science museum and are attracted to shows that present hands-on science in concert with authentic artifacts, he said. “That put this exhibition right in our sweet spot.”

Mr. Keller said he believed that Holmes’s mythic ability to identify a problem and solve it through intellect and reason made him a superhero figure for some — but also a figure that people might aspire to be. “I am never going to be bitten by a radioactive spider and be able to climb walls like Spider-Man,” Mr. Keller said. “But there is a possibility if I use my powers of deduction and observation and take in what’s around them, I might become a person like the Holmes character.”

Sherlock Holmes has rarely strayed from pop culture consciousness since he first appeared in “A Study in Scarlet” in 1887. Each generation embraces its own vision of the supersleuth, but it was the success of Robert Downey Jr.’s 2009 steampunk movie, “Sherlock Holmes,” that confirmed a younger demographic was interested again, said Mr. Curley.

Early production reports of what would later become CBS’s “Elementary” and BBC’s “Sherlock” supported his belief that the timing was right to reboot Holmes for today’s museum visitors.

Critical to the exhibition was securing the blessing and collaboration of the Conan Doyle estate, Mr. Curley said. He contacted Jon Lellenberg, the American literary agent for the estate, who represented Conan Doyle’s daughter Dame Jean Conan Doyle. “She was very much her father’s daughter,” said Mr. Lellenberg, adding that Dame Jean was an air commandant in the Women’s Royal Air Force and honorary aide-de-camp to Queen Elizabeth II before her death in 1997.

The current estate directors, all family members, were interested in the exhibition because it took the canon seriously, Mr. Lellenberg said. They saw it as an opportunity to bring Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes “to new readers and showcase the science in the stories and their influence on forensics.”

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension provided factual information about modern-day forensics and consulted on the accuracy of the exhibition. “Many of the techniques used by the Sherlock Holmes character all those years ago are now real techniques used today by forensic scientists and crime scene personnel,” said Catherine Knutson, director of the bureau’s forensic science services.

Mr. Lellenberg said that with any new venture, the estate liked to see Holmes depicted with his stalwart friend Dr. Watson. “It’s one of the great friendships in literary history and a key to the success of the stories,” he said. “One complements the other.” The exhibition pays homage to the famous pair throughout and features a recreation of their 221B Baker Street sitting rooms.

Steeped in the singular milieu of late 19th-century Victorian England, which produced both Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper, the exhibition owes its immersive setting to Alex Werner, head of history collections at the Museum of London. He worked with exhibition designers to select “the most evocative and relevant photographs of London to help visitors imagine what London was like at the time Conan Doyle began writing his Sherlock Holmes stories,” Mr. Werner said.

Late 19th-century London was a hotbed of social and economic change and prime fodder for the Holmes stories and their popularity, Mr. Werner said. “There was a growing gap between the rich and the poor in the rapidly expanding industrialized western cities; this led to strikes and demonstrations,” he said. “There was fear of revolution, and levels of crime were a concern for many.” He added that newspapers and magazines like *The Strand*, which published the Holmes short stories, fed an insatiable appetite for content, while the telegraph allowed sensational news, like the Ripper murders, to circle the globe quickly.

The reasons for Sherlock Holmes’s continued appeal are routinely debated. His adaptability for science institutions, however, might be rooted in the fact that he is first and foremost a thinking man in search of the truth, something central to his creator, said Richard Doyle, grandnephew of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. “My great-uncle was always keen that people should not be afraid to think for themselves and be confident to seek the truth in life, whatever that may be.”

The exhibition made its debut at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in 2013 and is traveling internationally through 2017.

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