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The great detective and his city

The Museum of London's major exhibition of Sherlock Holmes provided a view to London in the late 19th century through the eyes of world's best-known and only consulting detective.

Sherlock Holmes is known around the world. The detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is easily recognized not only by name, but also by looks: the most clichéd image of detectives is to present them with a pipe, a magnifying glass and a deerstalker, all trademarks of Holmes. Holmes has a cultural legacy quite unlike any other literary character: his powers of deduction, keen sense of justice and peculiar eccentricities made him compelling to the readers and other authors apart from Conan Doyle himself. After his first appearance in the Beeton's Christmas Annual magazine in 1887, Holmes quickly travelled to different corners of the world and became one of the most famous people in the world.



The story of the Dancing Men can be read outside the museum. Picture by Katri Leikola. Museum of London.

‘Sherlock Holmes - The Man Who Never Lived And Will Never Die’ was the first major exhibition of the detective in London since 1951. The exhibition started before one even entered the building, as the drawings of the Dancing Men and the story of them could be read outside. When entering the exhibition itself, visitors were confronted by a secret door in a bookcase. Once they had found the

doorway, using their own powers of deduction, they were confronted by the Holmes we know best: his many incarnations on screen. Video screens and posters gave visitors a brief introduction to the audiovisual history of Sherlock Holmes, after which they were thrown back in time to the birth of the character. The first part of the exhibition presented, for example, original manuscripts of Conan Doyle and original drawings for Strand magazine by Sidney Paget. The only filmed interview of Conan Doyle from 1927 could also be watched. The interview was conducted three years before the author's death, and in it he reflected on his writings of Holmes and the cultural phenomenon his creation turned into.



The exhibition starts with video screens showing different screen incarnations of Holmes. Picture by Katri Leikola. Museum of London.



Original drawings by Sidney Paget and photographs of Arthur Conan Doyle show visitors the Holmes known by the Victorian public. Picture by Katri Leikola. Museum of London.

The second part of the exhibition presented another major character from the stories: London. For the great detective, London provided everything necessary for his trade. Watson describes Holmes' love for the city and its hustle and bustle: "He loved to lie in the very center of five million people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime" (Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Cardboard Box*, 1893). Because of the vivid description by Conan Doyle, London is a thrilling place to visit for many Sherlockians, and visitors of the exhibition were provided a glimpse into the late 19th century metropolis through paintings, photographs and old maps. The past and present met, when old maps and the routes all around London described in the Holmes stories were visualised in the modern city through videos. Postcards from the early 20th century were perhaps the quirkiest objects presented in the exhibition.



Past and present meet when Holmes's routes in London are illustrated by old maps and newly-made videos. Picture by Katri Leikola. Museum of London.

The Victorian London is left behind as visitors walked past the famous door of 221 B Baker Street. The third part of the exhibition comprised of set pieces, clothing and other artefacts related to Holmes and the different adaptations of him. The room was divided in five parts under headings describing different sides of Holmes: The Model Englishman, The Analytical Mind, The Forensic Scientist, The Master of Disguise, and The Bohemian. The first object visitors saw entering the room was the Belstaff coat worn by Benedict Cumberbatch in BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–). Video clips from various adaptations rounded up the audiovisual aspect of the exhibition: audiovisual incarnations have formed people's idea of the great detective since the early 20th century.

The exhibition ended in the waterfalls of Reichenbach, Switzerland. The idea of fictional Holmes, who never lived and can never die, was brought forward in words: Arthur Conan Doyle tried to get rid of his most famous creation, but even he couldn't, in the end, resist the draw of Sherlock Holmes. It can be thought that without *The Final Problem* and the furore it caused among the grieving readers Sherlock Holmes would have been a popular character, but not necessarily the

cultural phenomenon he is even today. The last words of the exhibition were uttered by Watson in The Empty House: "Is it possible that you succeeded in climbing out of that awful abyss?" (Arthur Conan Doyle: The Empty House, 1903.)

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