“Sherlock Holmes: Who He Knew and Where He Knew Them From

Expanding the Use of Sherlock Holmes Stories in the Teaching of Criminal Justice”

Michael L. Qualls

Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice

LTC, USAR, Ret.         CHS-V, ABIA

Fort Valley State University

1005 State University Drive

Fort Valley, GA 31030

qualls@fvsu.edu

In 2009, I presented a paper to this body entitled: “Elementary, My Dear Watson. The Merest Child’s Play of Deduction- Using Sherlock Holmes in Criminal Justice Education.” During this presentation I stated that it was not a statistical study but a series of observations on a progressive attempt to integrate this material into courses of study.

I now intend to expand upon those observations with ones from the intervening years and place more emphasis on the development of the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes in relation to the real world surrounding him and his creator. The late 1800’s and early 1900’s was a time of invention, innovation, and progression in all fields of human endeavor, but most importantly, for us in the fields of crime, criminal theory, investigations and forensics.

By evaluating and studying the history and cases of Sherlock Holmes and applying the insights in those cases we, as educators, may be able to inject some excitement and imagination into the normal course of study for our students. They will benefit from having an understanding of the historical development of criminal justice and the art of investigations from the purview of an outstanding historical fictional figure.

**Beginnings**

So, for the purposes of this presentation, let us set some limits on the time frames that we might be most interested in.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1844  | Siger Holmes and Violet Sherrinford marry |
| 1845 | Sherrinford Holmes is born |
| 1847 | Mycroft Holmes is born |
| 1852 | John Hamish Watson is born |
| 1854 | William Sherlock Scott Holmes is bornHolmes early life is spent between England and Europe traveling |
| 1874 | Case of the Gloria Scott; Holmes first recorded case |
| 1879 | The Musgrave Ritual; second recorded case |
| 1881 | Holmes and Watson are introduced resulting in the case entitles “A Study in Scarlet” |
| 1886 to 1891 | Most active cases until “The Final Problem” and Holmes supposed death at the Reichenbach Falls |
| 1894 to 1903 | Holmes returns in “The Adventure of the Empty House” Second round of cases  |
| 1903  | Holmes Retires to Sussex to tend bees and write his magnum opus’ “The Whole Art of Detection” and “The Handbook of Bee Keeping With Some Thoughts on the Segregation of the Queen”. |
| 1917 | Holmes comes out of retirement to duel with a German spy in his final case.  |
| Unknown | Although when Holmes passed has been speculated at we do not know for sure |

Sources of information about Holmes’ life have been studied by many Holmesian scholars. These include William S. Baring-Gould, Andrew Jay Peck and Leslie S. Klinger.

Holmes had little in the way of formal schooling. He was mostly schooled by his mother while she was alive. He was enrolled as a day boy in our equivalent of high school. He studied at college (dispute as to which college he actually studied at) for a while to gain some comprehensive knowledge of chemistry and other sciences but then left the formal education to continue his own fields of study.

In “A Study In Scarlet” Dr. Watson was introduced Sherlock Holmes. During the course of the story Watson listed Holmes qualities and his limits.

1. Knowledge of Literature: Nil

2. Knowledge of Philosophy: Nil

3. Knowledge of Astronomy: Nil

4. Knowledge of Politics: Feeble

5. Knowledge of Botany: Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening

6. Knowledge of Geology: Practical but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their color and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

7. Knowledge of Chemistry: Profound

8. Knowledge of Anatomy: Accurate but unsystematic

9. Knowledge of Sensational Literature: Immense; He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.

10. Plays the violin well

11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.

12. Has a good practical knowledge of British Law

Holmes himself has attributed other skills to his resume including Baritsu, acting, and the Japanese system of wrestling.

**Criminal Investigations, Investigators, and Forensics that Holmes would have known:**

In thirteenth century (1248) China, the book Hsi Duan Yu (The Washing Away of Wrongs) was published and is considered to be the first known guide pathology.  The work describes, among other things, how to determine whether a victim drowned or was strangled as a cause of death.  It also detailed how the criminal investigator identified the type of blade used in a murder by examining the corpse and how to determine whether a death was accidental or murder.

**Mathieu Orfila**

One of the first celebrated cases in forensic science involved the 'father of toxicology', Mathieu Orfila (1787-1853), who worked in Paris and testified in an arsenic poisoning criminal trial in 1840. Orfila and others had developed a chemical test to detect arsenic, the poison of choice for the period because the symptoms, violent stomach pains and vomiting, were similar to cholera (a common disease of the times) and often went undetected

**Alphonse Bertillon's** (1853-1914) personal identification system using a series of body and facial measurements for individualization, developed in 1882.

 **Dr. Francis Galton's** (1822-1911) Fingerprints, published in 1892, was another pioneering contribution to the emerging field of forensic science (Beavan, Colin Fingerprints)

**Alexandre Lacassagne** (1844-1921) has been called the founder of modern forensic science.

Lacassagne made many contributions including the first to recognize the significance of the striations etched on a bullet extracted from a murder victim and their link to the gun from which it was fired, thus beginning the science of ballistics. He also was the first to study the relationship between an attack on a victim and the shape and configuration of bloodstains, and was first to recognize the need for adequate means of identifying criminals through a police filing system

**Charles Meymott Tidy** (1843–1892) was an English medical man and sanitary chemist, a barrister who wrote also on legal matters. Books include *A Handy Book of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology* (with William Bathurst Woodman), 1877 and Legal Medicine, 2 vols. 1882–3. This work perpetuated the myth of growth of nails after death.

**Hans Gross** 12/26/1847–1915

Austrian professor and judge Hans Gross is often considered one of the founders of criminalistics for his research on the subject and the release of his 1891 book, Criminal Investigation. It was the first work of its kind to be published. He also opened the first criminological institute in the world, at the University of Graz, Austria

**Cesare Lombroso** was an Italian university professor and criminologist, born in Nov. 6, 1835, in Verona, who became worldwide renowned for his studies and theories in the field of characterology, or the relation between mental and physical characteristics. Lombroso tried to relate certain physical characteristics, such as jaw size, to criminal psychopathology, or the innate tendency of individuals toward sociopathy and criminal behavior. He died Oct. 19, 1909.

**Edmond Locard**

Born in 1877, Dr. Edmond Locard was a French criminalist renowned for being a pioneer in forensic science and criminology, often informally referred to as the “Sherlock Holmes of France”. He passed the bar in 1907 and went on to study alongside anthropologist Alphonse Bertillon, famous for his anthropometric system of identifying criminals.

In 1910, Lyon police department finally offered Locard the opportunity to form the first police laboratory in the form of a few small attic rooms, where evidence collected from crime scenes could be scientifically examined. It was not until 1912 that the police department officially recognized the laboratory, and so the first forensic science laboratory was officially formed.

Locard is perhaps most well-known for his formulation of Locard’s Exchange Principle, a theory relating to the transfer of trace evidence between objects, stating that “every contact leaves a trace”. The theory dictates that when two objects come into contact with one another, each will take something from the other object or leave something behind.

During the First World War, Locard worked with the French Secret Service as a medical examiner, attempting to identify cause and location of death by examining the stains and damage of soldiers’ and prisoners’ uniforms.

Edmond Locard died in 1966.

**Dr. Joseph Bell**, Dec 1837 to Oct 1911. He was a lecturer at the Medical University in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was renowned for his ability to develop diagnosis from the mere observation of a patient. One of his students was Arthur Conan Doyle. Doyle has said that he used the powers and deductive faculties shown by Bell as the basis for his character Sherlock Holmes. And he may have based the character of Dr. Watson upon Bell’s friend and confidant, Professor Harvey Littlejohn, a renowned Pathologist in his own right.

**Allan Pinkerton** was born in Glasgow, Scotland, on August 25, 1819 and died in 1884. After first being appointed a Deputy County Sheriff, he became Chicago's first full-time detective. In 1850, Pinkerton left this post to start his own detective agency the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. He served President Lincoln during the Civil War as an agent but returned to his business by the end of the civil war. By 1870, the Agency was reported to have the largest data base of criminal information and mug shot in the USA.

**Conclusion**

These are but a few of the individuals who proceeded, lived alongside, or followed in the footsteps of the famous fictional detective. Assign one of Holmes’ cases to a student and have them research the techniques he uses and where those techniques originated and the lives of the relevant persons that devised them.

So now I leave you with three quotes from the master detective:

“You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”- The Boscombe Valley Mystery

“How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however Improbable, must be the truth?”-The Sign of Four

“Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last.”-The Adventure of the Red Circle