



September 2019

I hope you will enjoy the issue of *Magic Door* which this letter accompanies. Instead of my usual Chairman's Piece, I want to address our Friends directly on a timely issue.

A recent posting on the Friends Facebook page, rejected the proposal that May 22, Arthur Conan Doyle's birthday, should be declared "Sherlock Holmes Day". Instead, the writer concluded "Don't relegate him. Elevate him." The day should be declared "Annual Arthur Conan Doyle Day". Which led me to muse on whether it is time to have more than just a day in his memory.

There are Sherlock Holmes societies in virtually every English-speaking country, as well as in many other countries in Europe and Asia. But there is no literary society anywhere dedicated to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This is an anomaly, since there are literary societies dedicated to most of his well-known contemporaries, including Rudyard Kipling¹, Oscar Wilde², Lewis Carroll³, Robert Louis Stevenson⁴, H.G. Wells⁵, George Bernard Shaw⁶ and P.G. Wodehouse⁷, to mention just a few. But there is no Arthur Conan Doyle Society.

Such a society did exist, but it has been dormant for many years and the link to its website is broken. It was founded in 1989 by Christopher Roden, then living in the U.K., and managed to produce 10 high-quality volumes of *The Arthur Conan Doyle Journal*, the last of which appeared in May 2000, from Ashcroft, British Columbia. The Society also published approximately 13 issues of *The Parish Magazine*, initially a newsletter, but eventually a "news magazine", the last of which appeared in 1997. The Society staged its April 1994 Convention in Toronto. But, despite announced intentions to revitalize the Society, it is now defunct.

Another society, the Conan Doyle Crowborough Establishment⁸, came into formal existence in 1989, headed by Malcolm Payne, who was succeeded by Brian Pugh.

¹ <http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/>

² <https://oscholars-oscholars.com/>

³ <http://lewis Carroll society.org.uk/>

⁴ <http://robert-louis-stevenson.org/stevenson-societies/>

⁵ <http://hgwellssociety.com/>

⁶ <https://shawsociety.org/>

⁷ <https://www.pgwodehousesociety.org.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.the-conan-doyle-crowborough-establishment.com/>

This society sponsored a number of activities in the Crowborough area, and published an annual Research File and Newsletter of anything related to Sir Arthur. Unfortunately, this organization has now become inactive and its future is uncertain. Although the Establishment is dedicated to Conan Doyle, its scope was limited and it never grew into a formal literary society.

A few websites are dedicated to Sir Arthur, including the excellent and very useful Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia⁹, with close to 6,000 pages of material. The Conan Doyle Estate¹⁰, established by members of his family, also has biographical and commentary material. But neither of these is a "literary society", with a journal, newsletter, conferences and an active membership. The Sherlock Holmes Society of London and the Baker Street Irregulars both have a journal, conferences and active memberships and both could be called literary societies. But both are unequivocally focussed on Sherlock Holmes and pay less attention to the rest of Conan Doyle's work.

Which leaves us with the Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at the Toronto Reference Library. Although we were established in 1997 with the specific goal of supporting the Library to maintain, enhance and publicize its wonderful collection, we also actively seek to sustain the memory of Sir Arthur, to bring public attention to his vast body of writing apart from Sherlock Holmes, and to act as a resource to those interested in his life and work. Our *Magic Door* newsletter is meant to be a vehicle for high-quality writing about Conan Doyle, his life and literature, and we are very proud of it. But to take the next step and become a full-blown literary society is both beyond our resources and would be a distraction from our main purpose.

The Friends are small, but mighty. *Magic Door* is read by many of the world's leading Sherlockian and Doylean scholars on at least four continents. It is time for the world to have an Arthur Conan Doyle Society dedicated to his life and literature. Is there someone out there who would be interested in getting it started?

Regards to all



⁹ https://www.arthur-conan-doyle.com/index.php?title=Main_Page

¹⁰ <https://conandoyleestate.com/>

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