

# THE MAGIC DOOR

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## Conan Doyle's Desert Drama

DOUGLAS KERR

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Lewis Waller

*The Fires of Fate*, "some of which," Conan Doyle wrote, "is certainly the best dramatic work that I have ever done," was first staged in 1909 in a burst of theatrical activity that would see three more of his plays appear within a year.<sup>1</sup> It is based on the earlier novella *The Tragedy of the Korosko* (1898),<sup>2</sup> about a group of Western tourists on the Nile in 1895, who are captured by forces of the Khalifa, the successor to the Mahdi.<sup>3</sup>

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## The Allure of the Fairies: Cottingley Episode Part of ACD's Spiritual Journey

JOANN ALBERSTAT

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Although Arthur Conan Doyle never saw fairies himself, the little creatures are forever attached to his name.

Fiction about little folk that includes Conan Doyle in the plot is still being written, such as this year's *The Cottingley Cuckoo*, by A.J. Elwood. Other historical figures, like theosophy leader Edward L. Gardner and even Harry Houdini, also crop up in these stories because of the link, major or minor, they had to the Cottingley Fairy Photos.



Frances Griffiths and the Fairies. Photo taken by Elsie Wright.

THE ALLURE OF THE FAIRIES: PAGE 8...

Conan Doyle himself had spent time in Egypt in 1895-96. His wife Louisa (Touie) was consumptive, and the dry desert air was thought to be good for her—at least until the hot weather started. In January, they took a tourist trip up the Nile, as far as Wadi Halfa, on the Thomas Cook paddle steamer *Nitocris*. Visiting the rock of Abousir, it had occurred to Conan Doyle how vulnerable the tourists were to attack and kidnap by raiding Dervishes (as they were inaccurately called). This idea was developed, two years later, into *The Tragedy of the Korosko*.<sup>4</sup> In March, with his wife's consent, he briefly accompanied Kitchener's expeditionary force up the Nile, at the start of the Sudan war which would culminate in the crushing defeat of the Khalifa's forces at the battle of Omdurman in 1898. On this journey, Conan Doyle had arranged to be appointed honorary correspondent for the *Westminster Gazette*. Before setting out, he had purchased a huge Italian revolver, a wooden water bottle, "a light khaki coat, riding breeches, a small valise, and the usual Christmas tree hung round" him.<sup>5</sup> Thus accoutred, he very much hoped to see some action, but he was to be disappointed: Kitchener himself informed Conan Doyle that there was no use in his waiting at the upriver post of Sarras, and that nothing could possibly happen until the camels for the expeditionary force were collected. He returned by river to Cairo, and was soon back in London with his family.<sup>6</sup>

But the four months that he spent in Egypt were memorable, and he devotes two chapters of *Memories and Adventures* to them. The time also bore fruit in *The Tragedy of the Korosko* and later *The Fires of Fate*. These works bear the traces of his own experience and observation: the desert, the river, the paddle steamer, the odd mixture of touristic enjoyment, and the *frisson* of a dangerous frontier. They also reflect Conan Doyle's sense of place in a wider aspect. While they contain plenty of contemporary orientalist and racist tropes, both novella and play reflect on the fortunes and obligations of empire.

Conan Doyle was interested in the history of pharaonic Egypt, and curious about the Egyptians he met, if not notably sympathetic. He admired the African soldiers, including the Sudanese and *fellaheen* people, who served in the Camel Corps under British officers.<sup>7</sup> But his view of the forces of the Khalifa was caricatural, and he adopted a demonizing attitude shared by the press and public at home who had been horrified by the sainted General Gordon's death at the hands of the Mahdist forces when they took Khartoum.<sup>8</sup> His time with the soldiers of the expeditionary force did nothing to change Conan Doyle's mind. "The Arab of the Soudan," he opined confidently though he may never have met one and certainly never saw them in action, "is a desperate fanatic who rushes to death with the frenzy of a madman, and longs for close quarters where he can bury his spear in the body of his foeman, even though he carries several bullets in him before he reaches him."<sup>9</sup> The fictional Arab people he writes, in novella and play, conform to and perpetuate this bloodthirsty and racist stereotype.

*The Fires of Fate* has never been published, but the script submitted for approval to the Lord Chamberlain's office is lodged

in the British Library. We intend to publish the play script along with *The Tragedy of the Korosko* in a volume of the Edinburgh Edition of the Works of Arthur Conan Doyle.

The author wrote to his mother in September or October 1906: "I have a play on the stocks 'The Fires of Fate' founded on the Korosko, which really is about the best thing I have done. I don't know if there is money in it but it is very strong."<sup>10</sup> The play was written with Conan Doyle's friend, the actor Lewis Waller, in mind, and Waller seems to have had some input into its composition.

In 1908, the author was busy improving the script and had secured Aubrey Smith to produce the play. It opened at Liverpool's Shakespeare Theatre on June 11, 1909, and moved to London's Lyric the next week, then to the Haymarket Theatre and finally, after a brief provincial tour, back to the Lyric. Its run in London ended on October 8, sooner than Conan Doyle hoped: it had had to contend with a sweltering summer, and after taking it on tour, the star Waller seemed to have lost interest in it. But the London staging was followed by a run of three weeks in New York, whence it moved on to Chicago. In due course, it had an afterlife in the cinema. In America, the film was retitled *The Desert Sheik*, an improvement that had little to do with Conan Doyle's story, but is explained by the wild success of Rudolf Valentino in *The Sheik* (1921).



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## THE GREEN SETTEE

# Editorial: A Summer for Discoveries

TOM UE

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Summer is ripe for making discoveries. I find myself returning to *The Valley of Fear* (1915). The novel opens, of course, with Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson poring over a cipher message from one “Fred Porlock.” Partly out of conscience and partly thanks to “the judicious stimulation of an occasional ten-pound note,” this associate of Moriarty’s “has once or twice given [Holmes] advance information which has been of value—that highest value which anticipates and prevents rather than avenges crime.”

Instead of enclosing the key in a second letter, however, Porlock reveals his belief that Moriarty suspects him, and he entreats Holmes to destroy the coded message: “Please burn the cipher message, which can now be of no use to you.” It is unverifiable if Porlock is indeed in danger or if (as Holmes believes) he is reading accusation everywhere, but it now behoves Holmes and Watson to work out the cipher and to help (if they can) Moriarty’s victim.

Porlock’s decoded message warns of danger for a Douglas at Birlstone. Sure enough, Holmes and Watson are revisited by Inspector Alec MacDonald, who brings tidings of John Douglas’ murder the night before. Watson describes the effect of MacDonald’s words on them:

It was one of those dramatic moments for which my friend existed. It would be an overstatement to say that he was shocked or even excited by the amazing announcement....There was no trace then of the horror which I had myself felt at this curt declaration; but his face showed rather the quiet and interested composure of the chemist who sees the crystals falling into position from his oversaturated solution.

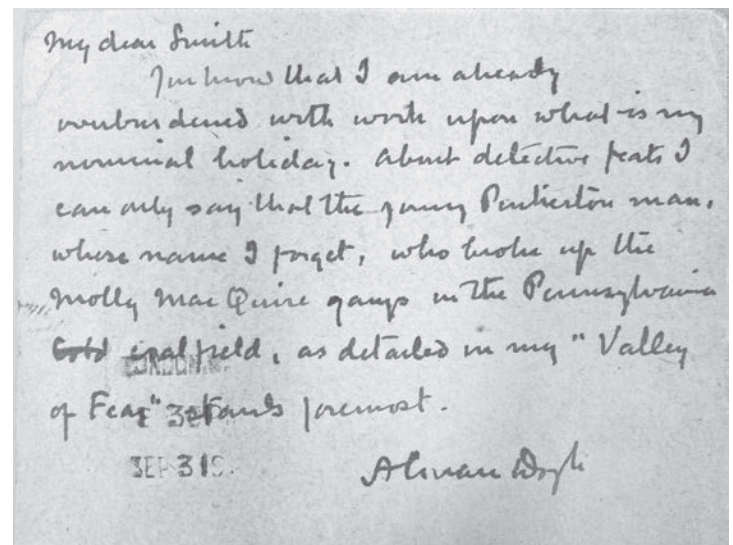
Holmes and Watson appear too late. As the detective puts in, when he tries to arrange the morning’s events in chronological order, “I receive an

anonymous communication from a quarter which I know to be important, warning me that danger threatens a certain person. Within an hour I learn that this danger has actually materialized and that the person is dead.” Indeed, Porlock’s language—that the message “can now be of no use to you”—may refer to his doubt that Holmes can crack the code, but it can just as easily suggest that the crime will have been committed by the time he gets the letter.

As the novel unfolds, though, it seems as if Holmes and Watson are right on time: the deceased was not, in fact, Douglas, and so they have the chance to prevent rather than to avenge a crime after all. Yet one does well to wonder: had Moriarty always known that Douglas survived? Conan Doyle leaves this ambiguous. Holmes tells Watson in the epilogue, “when [Moriarty] read in the reports of the failure of this agent, he would step in himself with a master touch,” that is, by killing Douglas himself. When *did* the reports reach Moriarty?

This question of time has significant implications for our interpretation of Moriarty: if the criminal can predict and/or receive news of Douglas’ survival immediately after the first, unsuccessful assassination attempt, then he proves himself to be Holmes’ equal without even appearing in person in the story. But what strikes me, in this revisit to *The Valley of Fear*, is the cryptic message that Holmes receives two months after the case had apparently closed: “Dear me, Mr. Holmes. Dear me!” Who is it from? Why does it move Holmes to “unwonted seriousness”; to remark, “Deviltry, Watson!”; and to “s[i]t long with a clouded brow.” Watson thinks that it’s related to this case, but how?

Amongst the many treasures in the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection is a 1919 postcard from Conan Doyle to Herbert Greenhough Smith about James McParland, the Pinkerton agent who inspired *The Valley of Fear*. Conan Doyle’s writing is peppered with Easter eggs, and it is ripe for detective work. This issue brings together some fresh discoveries. Douglas Kerr examines how Egypt shaped Conan Doyle’s imaginative fiction. Cliff Goldfarb updates us on the festivities of the Friends of the ACD Collection at the Toronto Public Library’s 50th anniversary. Marilyn Penner offers a new fodder. JoAnn Alberstat and Jessie Amaolo attend to some of the Collection’s unique materials. Alberstat revisits the case of the Cottingley Fairies, while Amaolo introduces us to some rare materials and books. There are worlds to be discovered.



Another film was made in 1932, and, oddly enough, a French version, *La Caravane Perdue* (“une action palpitante”), came out in 1946.

*The Fires of Fate* belongs to a period of intense theatrical activity for Conan Doyle. He had had a success with *A Story of Waterloo*, a play which was first performed in 1894 with Henry Irving in the starring role, and which became a part of his personal repertoire. But in the period from 1903 to 1910, Conan Doyle took to the stage with *Brigadier Gerard*, *The Fires of Fate*, *The House of Temperley*, *The Speckled Band*, and *A Pot of Caviare*, all based on material that had first seen the light as prose fiction, as was the case, of course, with the many Sherlock Holmes dramas, of which the most famous was William Gillette’s *Sherlock Holmes*, first performed in 1899.

*The Fires of Fate*, however, is not a simple dramatic treatment of the earlier tale. Conan Doyle makes significant changes, in particular adding depth to the central male character, a role developed for the star actor Lewis Waller. He also provides the Egyptian story with a substantial prehistory, set in London, a new plot strand, and a new personal, existential dimension to the



*The Fires of Fate*

drama of adventure and love.

With the downfall of Oscar Wilde, who was sentenced to two years’ hard labour in 1895 for gross indecency, it seemed that the public had had enough of the aesthetic, the fanciful, the cynical, and the provocative. This shift of taste, whether real or just imagined by playwrights and theatrical producers, probably worked to the advantage of a writer like Conan Doyle. His approach to the stage was realist, masculine, and sensational. He had a taste for striking dramatic effects such as the real serpent that starred in *The Speckled Band*, the bouts of pugilism that alarmed the audience of *The House of Temperley*, and the authentically filthy uniforms assigned to Napoleonic troops in *Brigadier Gerard*. The story of *The Fires of Fate* may be melodramatic, but the staging was made as naturalistic as possible. The prompt book for the play in the New York Public Library has detailed stage directions: in an action scene, “the bullets should be seen occasionally to brush up spurts of dust, done by small tubes containing dust blown up through the rocks, very effective in London production.”<sup>11</sup>

Appointing himself stage manager for his play, Conan Doyle insisted on realistic effects in the scene where the Arabs ill treat the English tourists, men and women, whom they have captured: “I made the Arabs get imitation whips and cudgels and really savage the poor travellers. The effect was novel and appalling.” He adds the rather improbable detail that a young army officer (holder of the Victoria Cross and Distinguished Service Order, authentically heroic credentials) in the stalls “could hardly be restrained from clambering on to the stage” to help the victims: “Such moments to a dramatist give a thrill of personal satisfaction such as the most successful novelist never can feel.”<sup>12</sup> The novel worked its magic remotely and in private, but romance, sensation, and melodrama were the effects Conan Doyle was after in the theatre to move and thrill the audience directly.

And yet in some ways *The Fires of Fate* is more novelistic than *The Tragedy of the Korosko*. The earlier prose tale contains debates, among British, French, and American characters, about the purpose and justification of empire.<sup>13</sup> But it does not reveal much about the kind of inner and moral life which the novel had



Conan Doyle in Egypt





*The Fires of Fate*

made its own, at least the sort of reflective novel that Henry James championed, in opposition to the more outward-looking, action-oriented, and masculine kind of tale favoured by Robert Louis Stevenson or indeed H. G. Wells. *The Fires of Fate* is a tale of the imperial frontier, but while it shares the *Korosko*'s story of courage and military prowess, what it adds is a more inward, existential tale, which is the other side, or interior, of the frontier myth. The frontier—in this case a desert both ancient and Gothic—becomes the scene for a man's confrontation with his own demons.

*The Fires of Fate*, then, is not a simple dramatic treatment of the earlier tale. We can observe this best in the transformation of the leading man.

Colonel Cochrane in the tale is an upright but rather dull old soldier: "It was respect rather than affection which he inspired among his fellow-travellers."<sup>14</sup> In the course of the ordeal, his hair turns white—a familiar adventure-story trope, at least since Poe's "A Descent into the Maelstrom" (1841)—but it is revealed later that the reason is his temporary separation from his bottle of hair dye. All in all, this was not a role the dashing Lewis Waller would relish. So Cochrane, in the tale, is metamorphosed into his dramatic avatar, Colonel Cyril Egerton, a "young, brown, alert, keen man with brisk manners," a war hero rendered tragic by an interesting terminal disease.<sup>15</sup>

Egerton is introduced in the new first act, which takes place in London in the consulting room of Dr Roden, a physician whose brother is a clergyman. The brothers are about to depart on holiday to the Nile. The play begins with a debate between them—a doctor and a clergyman, ministers to material and spiritual needs, and two aspects of the author himself—about the hand of providence. These debates between materialism and spirituality take place right across Conan Doyle's work, in fiction and non-fiction. Then the Colonel arrives to consult the physician,

and he is dismayed to learn that he is suffering from a deadly and incurable neurological condition.

The diagnosis and prognosis—he has perhaps a year to live—bring about a crisis in the soldier, his doubt about the value of action and indeed of life itself. His first thought is to kill himself and put an end to things. But he is talked out of this resolve by the Rodens, the religious and scientific authorities, who persuade him that it is the braver course to soldier on and see what more life can offer him. After all, there may still be work for him to do. The brothers succeed in changing the Colonel's mind, and he then accepts their suggestion that he should join the party going to the Nile. As often happens in tales of imperial adventure, a problem arising in the imperial centre will be confronted and solved in the far-flung periphery.<sup>16</sup>

The Colonel's frontier ordeal will convince him that it was unmanly to contemplate suicide, that fate had a purpose for him after all, and that the Rev. Samuel Roden was right to tell him that "perhaps the supreme experience and the highest and most useful moment of your life, still lie before you."<sup>17</sup> The resolution of this metaphysical and existential plot will coincide with the rescue of the tourists by the Egyptian Camel Corps, the defeat of the Dervishes, the miraculous cure of Colonel Egerton's illness, and his union in love with the heroine, the American girl Sadie Adams. (In *The Tragedy of the Korosko*, the hero of the love story was Stevens, a character who does not appear in the drama. In the play, Egerton takes his place as romantic lead.)

*The Tragedy of the Korosko* was an ensemble piece, but *The Fires of Fate* is a star vehicle. We can learn three things from this change in emphasis. First, in theatrical terms, it is an instance of the way, then and now, a famous performer can alter the gravitational field of an original text, so that the action and the other characters arrange themselves around him (or her). Secondly, it impacts on the imperial theme, dramatizing in the





Lewis Waller as Colonel Egerton

fate of one prominent character the way that the British, while pursuing their own personal ends, could be revealed to be the agents of a wider Providence working through them for the welfare of others. Like Colonel Egerton, they should have full confidence in their powers to do good. In *The Fires of Fate*, Colonel Egerton goes to Egypt because he has been persuaded by the Rodens that he should accept his illness and his personal fate stoically. The result is that he saves the lives of the cosmopolitan passengers of the “Korosko” on the imperial frontier, and incidentally forms a loving alliance with a member of the up-and-coming white imperial nation, the United States. (*The Tragedy of the Korosko* was published a year before Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippines” (1899), and Kipling and Conan Doyle both believed that Americans and British should become partners in the business of empire, the white man’s “burden of service.”)

Thirdly, the change in emphasis reflects the author’s increasingly open interest in the spiritual life and the force that directs it. Colonel Cochrane, in the tale, had seen Providence as the great guiding force behind the British Empire.<sup>18</sup>

But Providence in *The Fires of Fate* is seen to work on the more intimate stage of individual self-consciousness. The pilgrim’s progress of Colonel Egerton, from suicidal doubt to the revelation of his part in a great scheme of things, is like a religious conversion. In this, it is expanding on a hint at the end of *The Tragedy of the Korosko* when the survivors join chorically in an impromptu religious service, garnished with a passage from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850), and each resolves to live better. In Conan Doyle’s desert drama, the theme is concentrated on the leading character, and it foregrounds the existential and spiritual life—even if this was due in part to the demands of a star performer for the lion’s share of the limelight.

#### NOTES

1. Doyle, Arthur Conan. *Memories and Adventures*. Oxford UP, 1989, p. 233.
2. *The Tragedy of the Korosko* was serialized in the *Strand Magazine*, vols. 13 & 14 in 1897 and published in London by Smith, Elder in 1898. In America, it appeared under the title *A Desert Drama* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1898).
3. Abdallahi ibn Muhammad was the Khalifa (“successor”) who followed the charismatic Muhammad Ahmad (“the Mahdi”) as ruler of the Sudan after the latter’s death in 1885, soon after his capture of Khartoum.
4. It is a mystery to me why Conan Doyle titled this story a tragedy. It has none of the characteristics usually associated with the genre.
5. *Memories and Adventures*, p. 135.
6. Lycett, Andrew. *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007, pp. 219-24.
7. Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Tragedy of the Korosko*. Hesperus Press, 2003, p. 106.
8. General Gordon’s dispatches from Khartoum, printed in the press, had captured the public imagination. After his death he became a national martyr. His picture hangs on the sitting-room wall at 221b Baker Street. See Doyle, Arthur Conan. “The Cardboard Box.” *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Christopher Roden, Oxford UP, 1993, p. 32.
9. *Memories and Adventures*, 1989, p. 136. This characterization reflects the fact that the Khalifa’s army was poorly disciplined and hopelessly outgunned when faced with British and Egyptian troops.
10. ACD to Mary Doyle, undated [September or October 1906], Doyle, Arthur Conan. *Arthur Conan Doyle: a Life in Letters*. Edited by Jon L. Lellenberg et al., Harper, 2007, p. 536.
11. See <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/691e0c00-bd6a-0130-e7d9-0050568c6644>, pp. 366-580.
12. *Memories and Adventures*, p. 233.
13. See Glazzard, Andrew. “Conan Doyle’s *The Tragedy of the Korosko*: The Clash of Civilizations and the Necessity of Empire.” *English Literature in Transition*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2015, pp. 164-80.
14. *The Tragedy of the Korosko*, p. 5.
15. Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Fires of Fate*. British Library: Lord Chamberlain’s Office Theatre Files, vol. ccxxi, 1906-1912, p. 10.
16. The opposite often happens too—not least in the Sherlock Holmes tales—where a problem hatched overseas is released, and dealt with, in the home country. Both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* follow this pattern.
17. Conan Doyle. *The Fires of Fate*, p. 21.
18. *The Tragedy of the Korosko*, p. 18. There is a very strong racial theme in the novella. Unexpectedly, its narrative allows that radical Islamic Arabs may themselves become agents of a historical telos, “the besom with which Providence may sweep the rotten, decadent, impossible, half-hearted south of Europe, as it did a thousand years ago, until it makes room for a sounder stock” (59).





## CANON FODDER

# Roses and Aphids (The Devil's Foot)

MARILYN PENNER

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He cupped the rose in his palm. "It's just about to open," he murmured. He caught my outstretched hand. "Careful. Don't prick yourself!"

"Too late." I sucked the blood from my finger. "I wish that roses didn't grow thorns."

"I wish that roses didn't attract aphids." The Reverend Mr. Roundhay brushed a dozen or so off a leaf, then off his cassock. "It doesn't matter what I do to get rid of them. They always return."

I watched the tiny insects scurry over the leaf. "They are such a bright green and yellow against the dark green leaf."

He frowned. "Yes. They contrast well. God knows why He made aphids, but must they must eat my rose leaves?"

He lowered the rose head and stroked an outer petal. "As soft and as heavy as a baby's head. It needs its thorns to tell us 'I'm fragile. Handle me with care.'"

I remember reading that Sherlock Holmes compared the rose to the goodness of the Creator. He said that other things were created to fill our needs for food and shelter, but a rose was an extra benevolence. It fulfils our desire for beauty. Heaven knows that we appreciate beauty.

"Yet even the aphids have a beauty that flies lack." He put on his heavy canvas gardening gloves, took his small shears, and clipped off a half-dozen rose stems.

"Do you still wish to visit the graveyard?" he said, as he carefully placed each stem in his basket. I nodded. "Well, come along."

I walked beside him along the path leading from the vicarage to the small cemetery. He gave a violent shudder. "You're asking me to show you what I long to forget."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be." He sighed. "I'm glad she's not forgotten. We all have our failings; but she was a good woman. She made a brave man happy."

I thought it over. Miss Brenda Tregennis was Dr. Leon Sterndale's love, not his wife. Perhaps I had a prurient mind. Perhaps his happiness did not include having sex with her. But he must've been away from her in Africa for years. They would have longed for each other and longing must have led to intimacy.

"Does Dr. Sterndale still visit?"

He shook his head. "He can't return to England ... and there is nothing for him now but sad memories."

"And the roses."

"Yes. Brenda Tregennis loved the roses."

We arrived at the grave and paid our silent respects: he to the woman he had known and I to his knowing her. The old cleric handed me the basket and, again putting on his canvas gloves, he gathered up the roses in his arms. Then he knelt, laid them over upon her grave and spread them into a fan shape.

"He writes to me. I do what I can. It eases his heartache, he said, to know she's cared for."

I touched his shoulder. When he straightened to his feet, I strewed the ferns over the thorns.

"What about her brothers?" I asked.

"George and Owen? Still in the asylum. They never recovered enough of their reason to leave. They still have enough memory to be frightened. Enough to know what their brother did to them."

The vicar clenched his fists. He jerked his head to a patch of weeds. "He's in that corner. You go there if you want. I still cannot forgive him. God forgive me. I have prayed to forgive him; but my will isn't in it."

"God knows you're honest then."

"Just 'honest.' I must forgive Mortimer Tregennis. It is my duty. But I can't. That's the furthest patch of blest ground in the churchyard. No one cuts the weeds. No one cares to." He stared at it. "It's how I feel about the aphids destroying my beautiful roses. He destroyed his own sister and brothers. I'm amazed how much I still hate him."



Holmes Holding a Rose.  
Illustration by Sidney Paget.



# The Allure of the Fairies

continued from page 1...

Conan Doyle's fervent efforts to promote the young Yorkshire women's images as real confound us today, as they did many at the time. However, the renowned author's interest in pixie-like people was an extension of his belief in spiritualism and a quest for a deeper meaning of life.

Tiny people might have been in Conan Doyle's DNA, given his Irish heritage and love of legends and folklore. He became interested in fairies through his uncle Richard (Dicky) Doyle, the *Punch* illustrator, and kept a file on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Fairies crop up in Dicky's art, along with that of his brother Charles, Arthur's troubled father. Conan Doyle was always doing research for his writing and folk tales and local lore were among the material he collected and used. Perhaps the best-known example is the Dartmoor myth that inspired *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).

Conan Doyle's file on fairies included accounts of sightings and encounters that he drew on for his writing on the topic, starting in 1920. Among the material he would reference were fairy stories by folklorist Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould,

William S. Baring-Gould's grandfather. But the richest—and most controversial—source Conan Doyle were the photographs taken by 16-year-old Elsie Wright and her younger cousin, Frances Griffiths, 10. They staged the first two images as a joke in 1917 near a wooded stream behind Elsie's family home in the village of Cottingley.

The photos surfaced in spiritualist circles in 1919 after Polly Wright, Elsie's mother, brought copies to a Theosophical Society meeting in Bradford. Fashionable at the time, theosophy was a synthesis of Eastern ideas about reincarnation and spirit travel.<sup>2</sup> Conan Doyle heard about the photographs in May 1920, three years after they were taken. He had just finished writing his first *Strand* article about fairies and, being a good spiritualist, saw the timing as a sign that he should investigate further and change the focus of his piece, which appeared in December.<sup>3</sup>

Fairy photos held strong appeal for the popular writer, a skilled amateur photographer who had written travel articles for the *British Journal of Photography* during the 1880s. As a spiritualist, Conan Doyle was also interested in spirit photography and lectured on that topic. This helps explain why he would see the camera as an instrument to capture fairyland, another realm that existed beyond the physical one. As he wrote

in 1922's *The Coming of the Fairies*: "It is exactly that power of tuning up and adapting itself to other vibrations which constitutes a clairvoyant, and there is nothing scientifically impossible, so far as I can see, in some people seeing that which is invisible to others."<sup>4</sup>

Besides his own curiosity about the Cottingley images as an occult occurrence, Conan Doyle privately saw an opportunity to use the photos to promote spiritualism. As he wrote to Gardner while on a spiritualism tour in Australia in late 1920: "When once fairies are admitted, other psychic phenomena will find a more ready acceptance."<sup>5</sup> Conan Doyle would respond to the heavy criticism he received from within the spiritualist movement by making a point of publicly distancing his religion from fairy photos. "Of course the matter has nothing to do with spiritualism, which is concerned only with the destiny of the human soul," he wrote in a May 1925 letter to *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps this was his way of admitting some of the so-called fairy evidence was flimsy at best. One of his often-used arguments was that photography experts had examined the negatives and found no sign of tampering. Besides, the images were produced by "two children of the artisan class," Conan Doyle told physicist Sir Oliver Lodge, a Cottingley skeptic. Conan Doyle added: "Such photographic tricks would be entirely beyond them."<sup>7</sup> The joke was, of course, on him for accepting that fashionably dressed paper cut-outs were real.

While this class bias and other types of willful blindness are apparent in Conan Doyle's writing on little creatures, he does acknowledge those who didn't believe in the Yorkshire photographs. But those critics get less ink, compared to the camera buffs, psychics, and folklorists who are supportive or neutral.

Conan Doyle framed the inquiries into the Cottingley fairies as a rational, science-based investigation. As a result, his tiny folk chronicles read like the Canon. *Strand* readers wanted detective stories anyway so they might tolerate mention of etheric bodies and psychoplasm as possible explanations for why and how some, such as innocent young women, can see and photograph fairies.<sup>8</sup> Less understanding was the press, including outlets in North America, after a visiting Houdini took copies of the fairy photos back with him.<sup>9</sup>

The entertainment value of the Cottingley episode is apparent in the deductive methods used by Gardner, who did most of the fairy investigating, and which included:

- Traveling to the location (Yorkshire) and interviewing witnesses (the



Elsie Wright and the Gnome. Photo taken by Frances Griffiths.

Conan Doyle framed the inquiries into the Cottingley fairies as a rational, science-





young women and their parents);

- Examining the location in question (wooded stream) and other evidence (camera and plates);
- Consulting independent subject matter experts; and
- Conducting experiments and testing theories (i.e., providing new equipment and marked plates, which Elsie and Frances used to produce three more fairy photographs in 1920, and bringing in a psychic).

Conan Doyle tried to bolster his weak arguments and flawed proof that the photographs were genuine by sharing more of his ever-growing research on fairies. He received letters from believers around the world (including one from Montreal, quoted in *The Coming of the Fairies*). He also clipped negative commentary in newspapers and periodicals, some of which he responded to and quoted later in his writing.

Conan Doyle turned to the Cottingley Fairies for writing material more than once between overseas tours. His public stance on the images never wavered, notwithstanding the damage done to his reputation as a doctor and as Sherlock Holmes' literary agent. What time shows us, a century later, is that his interest in the Yorkshire images was inspired by a longstanding love of little folk and his spiritual journey. As a writer and as a man, Conan Doyle was full of wonder about life's mysteries, especially the strange and unknown. As he wrote in a 1920 letter to Elsie: "I have seen the wonderful pictures of the fairies which you and your cousin Frances have taken, and I have not been so interested for a long time."<sup>10</sup>



Fairy Offering Flowers to Elsie.

#### NOTES

1. Higham, Charles. *The Adventures of Conan Doyle*. WW Norton, 1976, p. 263.
2. Lycett, Andrew. *Conan Doyle*. Orion, 2007, p. 127.
3. Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Coming of the Fairies*. George H Doran, 1922, p. 99.
4. *The Coming of the Fairies*, p. 14.
5. *The Coming of the Fairies*, p. 98.
6. Gibson, John Michael, and Richard Lancelyn Green, eds., *Arthur Conan Doyle, Letters to the Press*. University of Iowa Press, 1986, p. 310.
7. *The Coming of the Fairies*, p. 26.
8. Doyle, Arthur Conan, "Fairies Photographed," *Strand Magazine*, vol. 60 (July-December 1920), pp 462-468.
9. *The Adventures of Conan Doyle*, p. 265.
10. Arthur Conan Doyle to Elsie Wright, June 30, 1920, in Magnus Magnusson, *Fakers, Forgers & Phoney's*. Mainstream Publishing, 2006, p. 99.

#### Examples of ACD Collection holdings (reference materials) related to the Cottingley Fairies:

##### Non-fiction:

- Joe Cooper, *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies* (1990)  
Frances Griffiths, *Reflections on the Cottingley Fairies: Frances Griffiths in Her Own Words* (2009)  
Stewart Sanderson, *The Cottingley Fairy Photographs: A Re-Appraisal of the Evidence* (1973)

##### Fiction:

- Hazel Gaynor, *The Cottingley Secret* (2017)  
Ana Sender, *The Cottingley Fairies* (2019 – Children's picture book)

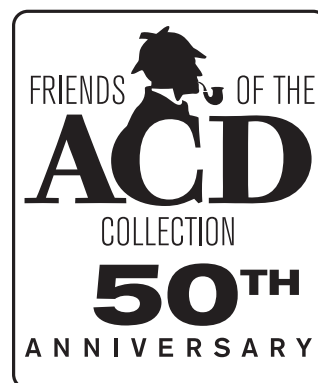
##### Hoaxes:

- Kevin Young, *Bunk: The Rise of Hoaxes, Humbug, Plagiarists, Phonies, Post-Facts, and Fake News* (2017)  
Jeff Szpirglas, *They Did What? Your Guide to the Weird & Wacky Things People Do* (2005)

## A N N O U N C E M E N T

The Arthur Conan Doyle Collection is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2021. Due to the pandemic, we are not holding the event this year. We are planning an in-person joint Celebration next year, together with the 50th anniversary of the founding of The Bootmakers

of Toronto, on Friday, September 23 to Sunday, September 25, 2022. Please check our website for further announcements.



## THE FRIENDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Please visit our Facebook page:  
[www.facebook.com/groups/ACDfriends/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/ACDfriends/)

and our YouTube Channel,  
Toronto Friends ACD Collection:  
[tinyurl.com/y2pp9vhh](https://tinyurl.com/y2pp9vhh)





## THE LUMBER ROOM

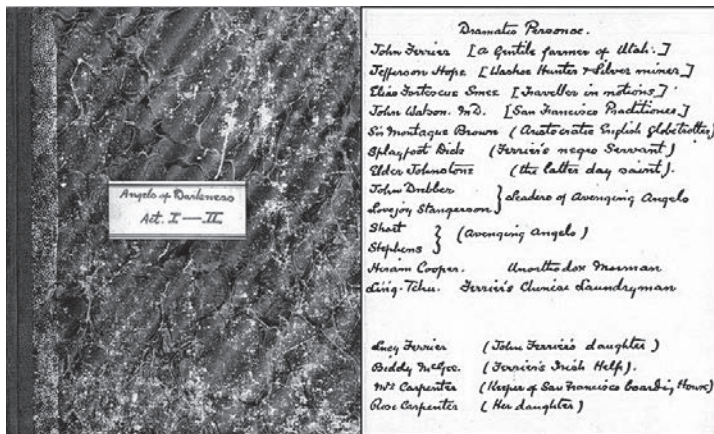
# One-of-a-Kind Manuscripts from a One-of-a-Kind Collection

JESSIE AMAOLO

Jessie Amaolo has been the Services Specialist and Curator of the Toronto Public Library's ACD Collection since 2018. During her tenure, she has been involved in acquiring and maintaining library materials, participated in conferences, arranged programs, co-curated gallery shows, and contributed to publications.

As with many specialized collections, much of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection's strength and research value lies in our one-of-a-kind materials. The Collection holds many priceless manuscripts representing various facets of Conan Doyle's life and works. Materials range from letters and notebooks on his life and business (e.g. story ideas and travel notes, etc.) to early incarnations of his short stories and plays. Some of these materials went on to be published, many in *The Strand Magazine*, while others remain unpublished to this day and are only accessible through the Toronto Public Library. Having these items in the Collection means that they are preserved for posterity, publicly accessible, and available for all to enjoy.

Many significant manuscript holdings were purchased by the Friends of the ACD Collection, or acquired with their significant support. Others have come through donations. Below are a variety of highlights.



Angels of Darkness (circa 1888)

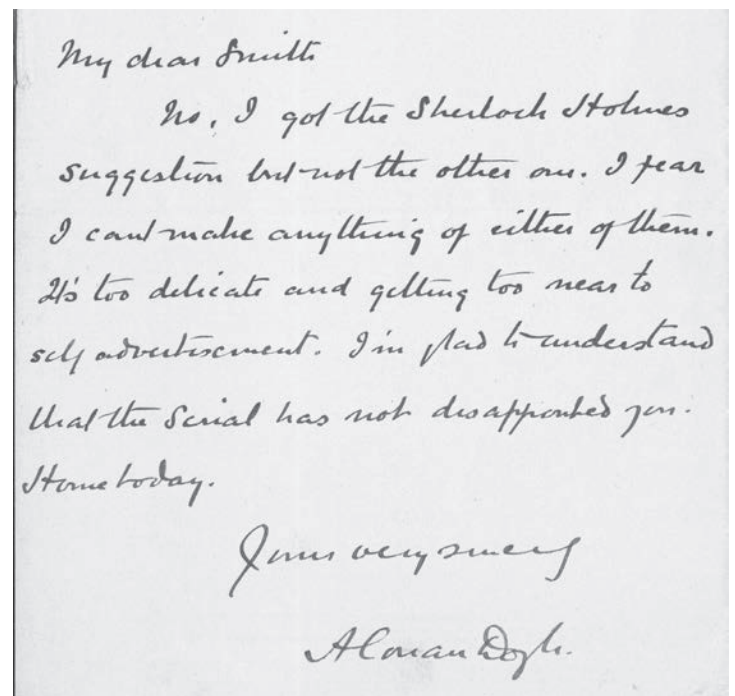
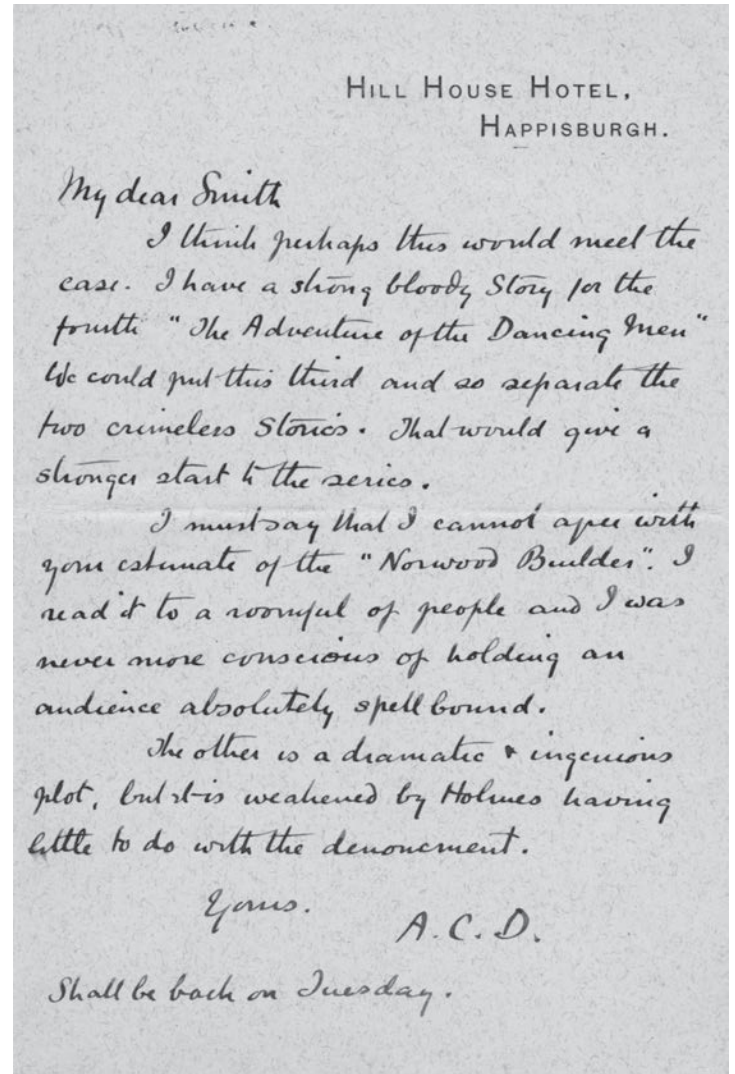
Dramatic Personae.

John Ferris [a gentle farmer of Utah.]  
 Jefferson Hope [Utah's Hunter & Silver miner.]  
 Elias Denton's Son. [Traveller in notions.]  
 John Watson, M.D. [San Francisco Practitioner.]  
 Sir Montague Brown [Archie's English Goldsmith.]  
 Spangfoot Bialo [Ferris's negro Servant.]  
 Elder Johnson [the latter day saint].

John Drabber } Leaders of Avenging Angels  
 Lovejoy Stangerom }  
 Short } (Avenging Angels)  
 Stephens }

Harold Cooper. Unaltered from Newman  
 Ling-Tchu. Ferris's Chinese Laundryman

Lucy Ferris (John Ferris's daughter)  
 Biddy McFee. (John's Irish Help).  
 Mr Carpenter (Keeper of San Francisco Boarding House)  
 Rose Carpenter (Her daughter)



Correspondence with Herbert Greenhough Smith (1893 to 1929)



3600  
10000

The Marriage of the Brigadier

I am speaking, my friends, of days which are long gone by when I had scarcely begun to build up that fame which has made my name so familiar. Among the thirty officers of the Hussars of Comblans, there was nothing to indicate that I was superior in any way to the others. I can well imagine how surprised they would all have been had they realised that young Lieutenant Etienne Gerard was destined for so glorious a career, and would live to command a brigade and to receive from the Emperor's own hand that cross which I can show you any time that you will do me the honour to visit me in my little cottage - you know it, do you not, the little white washed cottage with the vine in front, in the field beside the Garonne.

People have said of me that I have never known what fear was. No doubt you have heard them say it. For many years out of a foolish pride I have let the saying pass. And yet now, in my old age, I can afford to be honest. The brave man ~~can~~ <sup>dares</sup> afford to be frank. It is only the coward who is afraid to make admissions. So I tell you now that I also am human, that I also have felt my skin grow cold, and my hair rise, that I have even known what it was to run until my limbs could scarce support me. It shocks you to hear it? Well, some day it may comfort you when your own courage has reached its limit to know that even Etienne Gerard has known what it was to be afraid. I will tell you now how this experience befell me, and also how it brought me a wife.

For the moment France was at peace, and we, the Hussars of Comblans, were <sup>quartered</sup> all that summer a few miles from the town of Les Andelys in Normandy. It is not a very gay place by itself, but we <sup>of the light Cavalry</sup> make all places gay which we visit, and so we passed our time very pleasantly. Many

"The Marriage of Brigadier Gerard" (1910)

**Angels of Darkness** (circa 1888) is a play written by Conan Doyle. Our unique manuscript was written around the same time as *A Study in Scarlet* and it features many of the same characters—with the exception of Sherlock Holmes. The manuscript was donated by Anna Conan Doyle, facilitated by the Friends of the ACD Collection. It wasn't published until 2000 when the Library and the Baker Street Irregulars co-published a facsimile.

**Correspondence with Herbert Greenhough Smith** (1893 to 1929) In 1974 the Library acquired one of the largest sets of business letters between Conan Doyle and Greenhough Smith (editor of *The Strand Magazine*). In total, there are 80 letters—74 letters and six postcards—with all but five letters in Conan Doyle's hand. The letters offer insight into his business dealings, his relationship with Greenhough Smith, and many of his works of fiction and non-fiction.

**The Crown Diamond** (1921) is a one-act play by Conan Doyle, featuring Sherlock Holmes. It's almost identical to the Holmes story

"The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" (published a few months later). The manuscript was donated by Anna Conan Doyle.

**"The Marriage of Brigadier Gerard"** (1910) is Conan Doyle's last short story to feature Etienne Gerard, an officer in the French Army during the Napoleonic Wars. It was published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1910. The signed manuscript was the first short-story manuscript added to our collection, and it was purchased in 2013.

**Notebook on Nelson and Napoleonic Times** (1885) is one of the notebooks Conan Doyle used to record his thoughts about future writings. It covers three of his works: *Rodney Stone* (1896), *Uncle Bernac* (1897) and *Through the Magic Door* (1907). It features timelines, character sketches and quotes. ("Nelson" refers to Horatio Nelson, a British Royal Navy Officer who fought during the Napoleonic Wars.) This item was purchased in 2007.

**"The Parish Magazine"** (1930) is a short story by Conan Doyle in the year of his death. It tells the story of a printer tricked into printing and taking credit for tabloid gossip about parishioners. The autographed manuscript was purchased in 2015. It was published in *The Strand Magazine* in August 1930.

**"Some Personalia about Mr. Sherlock Holmes"** (1917) is an article by Conan Doyle about the public's reaction to Sherlock Holmes, as well as his real-life attempts at detective work. Our manuscript was donated by Anna Conan Doyle. This article was published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1917.

The Parish Magazine

1

It was six o'clock on a winter evening. Mr. Pomeroy the printer was on the point of leaving his office, which was his back room, for his home which was his front room, when young Murphy called. Murphy was an unpuncturable youth with a pot face and sleepy eyes who had the rare quality of always doing without question what ever he was told. It is usually a great mistake - but there are exceptions.

"There are two folks to see you, sir" said Murphy, laying two cards upon the table.

Mr. Pomeroy glanced at them.

"Mr. Robert Anderson. Miss Julia Duncan. I don't know the names. Well, show them in!"

A long sad-faced youth entered, accompanied by a mournful young lady clad in black. Their appearance was respectable but depressing.

"I daresay you know this" said the youth, holding up a small grey-covered volume, the outer cover of which was ornamented with the picture of a church. "It's the Saint Otobria's Church Magazine. What I mean it's the Parish Magazine. This lady and I are what you might call the Editors. It has been printed by -"

"Elliot and Dack, in the City" said the lady, as her companion seemed to stumble. "But they have suddenly closed down their works. We have the month's issue all ready, but we want to add to it."

"A Supplement, if you get my meaning" said the youth. "That's the word - supplement. The thing has become too done -"

"What he is trying to say" cried the girl "is that

"The Parish Magazine" (1930)





## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

# Magic Door Chairman's Piece Summer 2021

CLIFFORD S. GOLDFARB

*Clifford S. Goldfarb, MBt, BSI ("Fordham, the Horsham lawyer"), Chairman of the ACD Friends, is the author of The Great Shadow: Arthur Conan Doyle, Brigadier Gerard and Napoleon, and co-author, with Hartley Nathan of Investigating Sherlock Holmes.*

Mixed (Meeting) Emotions.

Now that we seem to be returning to a degree of normalcy, having at least in this country passed through something as close to wartime as I hope we and our children will ever be exposed to, it is time to consider how the Friends, as well as Sherlockian and kindred organizations throughout the world, will be conducting their meetings. For most of the past 18 months, we have all adapted with varying degrees of skill and ingenuity to conducting meetings over the Internet, using the ZOOM program most of us had never heard of before and its doppelgängers Skype, Google Meet and Teams and WebEx. Because of this ease of access, the number of people attending meetings has generally increased. People have been turning up for meetings from literally several continents and many nations. Old friends who had moved away are back. Speakers in remote places entertained with new perspectives. How can we go back to local meetings populated by smaller groups of the usual suspects with perhaps a neighbour or two from the next county or state? Maybe we can't. Maybe we shouldn't.

Enter the era of the hybrid meeting: part in person, part online. Those who can will turn up in person. After all, humans are social animals.

The most hermit-like of my friends tell me how much they miss being in crowds, going to concerts and sporting events. Even that consummate loner, Sherlock Holmes, found "the most perfect happiness" sitting in the stalls at St. James Hall, listening to Sarasate play the violin ("The Red-Headed League"). Christopher Morley, the founder of the Baker Street Irregulars, was fond of creating clubs where kindred spirits (he called them "kinsprits") could meet. No technology yet invented can beat the pleasure of hugging a friend after a long interval, of quiet chats in a corner of a crowded room, or of meeting new people. Into this return to the old-fashioned meeting we need to add visitors from afar. Meeting venues will be expected to provide a large screen and robust Internet connection that will allow local meetings to bring in guest speakers and attendees.

This year's Cameron Hollyer Memorial Lecture is on September 22, and will be another online lecture with American playwright Jeffrey Hatcher speaking about Arthur Conan Doyle as playwright.

In the last issue of *Magic Door* we said there would be a weekend celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Collection this September, as well as an exhibit in the TD Gallery. Those had to be postponed due to uncertainty about the reopening of the Library to the public. Next year, on the weekend of September 23-25, 2022, we will be having a belated celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection jointly with The Bootmakers of Toronto, who will be celebrating their own 50th anniversary. The founding of the Collection in 1971 led directly to the founding of the Bootmakers one year later, so the joint celebration is fitting. We are hoping to welcome visitors from many parts of the World, but we also plan to welcome, via videoconferencing, remote visitors and speakers who may not be able to come in person but who will most definitely be here in spirit.

Perhaps in the not-too-distant future, our speakers will, à la *Star Trek*, beam themselves into the room either in person or as holographs.

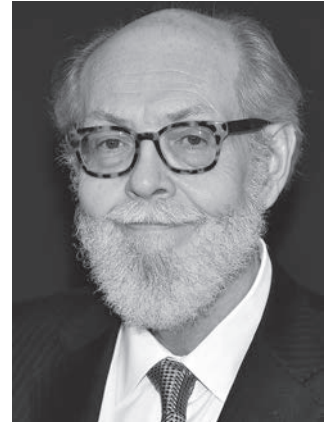
### ERRATUM

The picture of the ACD Room on page 5 of the previous issue is not the current Room, but rather the former Room that was demolished in 2014 and replaced by the current Room.

## 2021 CAMERON HOLLYER MEMORIAL LECTURE

**JEFFREY HATCHER**  
Playwright and Screenwriter

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE OCCASIONAL PLAYWRIGHT: CONAN DOYLE ONSTAGE



Jeffrey Hatcher is an American playwright and screenwriter. His screenplays include *Casanova*, *The Duchess*, *Mr. Holmes* and *The Good Liar*. His many award-winning plays have been performed on Broadway, off-Broadway, across the US and in other countries. His stage adaptation of Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was nominated by the Mystery Writers of America for the Edgar Award. He was invested in the Baker Street Irregulars in 2018 as "The Five Orange Pips."

To attend this webinar go to  
<http://www.acdfriends.org/events.html>

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