

When DID Watson Meet Holmes?

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Introduction

At the beginning of November, a posting from Willis Frick drew the attention of the Hounds of the Internet¹ to an article then recently published in the L.A. Times². The article, *A not-so-elementary guide to Sherlock Holmes' London*, examined Holmes' enduring status and included a short quiz, offering 9 questions each with 4 alternative answers from which to choose. Of these, question 7 was particularly jarring;

"7. When, according to the stories, did Sherlock Holmes live at 221B Baker St.?"

The four suggested answers were: *"In the 20th century; During the French Revolution; Between 1881 - 1904; and When King Henry VIII was on the throne."*

This prompted two reactions on my part. First, the 'stories' are, on the face of it, remarkably vague as to the date on which the pair moved into Baker Street - they do not tell us when Holmes moved into Baker Street, we have to deduce. Second, I have never been able to accept the most commonly proposed date of 1881 as this flies in the face of what the little of Watson's account of this period that still survives actually tells us.

I was prompted by this question, and by its claimed answer, to make a series of 8 postings to The Hounds - what follows is the 'omnibus edition' of these works.

¹ The Hounds of the Internet, <https://www.sherlockian.net/sharing/hounds/>

² A not-so-elementary guide to Sherlock Holmes' London, <https://www.latimes.com/travel/la-tr-london-sherlock-holmes-20181030-story.html>

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1.0 Watson's Journey to 'Candahar'

In this first section of these notes, let us look at the first 128 words of STUD³ and develop a broad understanding of the queries and problems set by the surviving text.

I say 'surviving' because this very short passage describes Watson's entire life up to his arrival in Kandahar, a circumstance that does not 'gel' with the suggestion that fundamentally these were Watson's own words 'reprinted from' his '*Reminiscences*'. I shall return to this point later.

"In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the Army. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as assistant surgeon. The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties."

Quite apart from missing his personal history up to 1878, what other problems can we discern?

Watson clearly states that he was 'duly attached' to the 'Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers'. We can only suppose just when Watson penned his *Reminiscences*. We know for certain it must have been before, probably well before, the end of 1877 as there had been time ahead of the publication of that year's Beeton's Christmas Annual to modify his original work into the STUD manuscript we know today. My own thought is that the work probably dates from 1885 or 1886, by which time Watson's description of his unit would have been correct. However, at the time of the 2nd Afghan War this was properly the 5th Regiment of Foot. Even more precisely, it was the First Battalion of the 5th Regiment of Foot that served in Afghanistan.

The 5th were based at Peshawar and were attached to General Browne's Peshawar Field Force. They did not participate in the first assault on the Khyber Pass, including the attack on Ali Masjid, but were subsequently tasked with holding and policing the Pass after the main body of Browne's force had moved on into Afghanistan and to Kabul. From this brief analysis of history, we can determine that when Watson says "*On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country....*" that the 'corps' to which he was referring was NOT the 5th Regiment of Foot.

Here we have clear evidence that serious editing of his *Reminiscences* has taken place. Either on his voyage to India or on arrival at Bombay, Watson must have received revised orders, no doubt prompted by the need for a more balanced distribution of medical staff across the three Field Forces, which seconded him to one of the units making up General Stewart's Kandahar Field Force. It is inconceivable that Watson would have failed to mention this in his *Reminiscences*.

The unit to which he was seconded was apparently not the 66th Regiment of Foot (the Berkshires) as Watson later tells us that he was; "*...removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires....*"

³ Doyle, A.C, 1887

As the original text has disappeared, we can only suppose that ‘his corps’ was one of the British, as opposed to Indian, Army units that made up General Stewart’s force. Before editing, the final two sentences of those first 128 words might well have originally read;

“On landing at Bombay in early October 1879, I found myself the recipient of new orders. I already knew that the 5th had been attached to the original Peshawar Valley Field Force, tasked with policing the Khyber Pass in support of the main element of the Force operating around Kabul in Afghanistan. However, rather to my surprise it seemed that they were not in need of their full complement of Assistant Surgeons and I discovered that I had been duly seconded to the 59th Regiment of Foot under Brigadier General Hughes, Commanding Officer of the 2nd Infantry Brigade in General Stewart’s Division of the Candahar Field Force. Through these changed orders, I learned that my new corps had almost a full year previously advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy’s country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and after a long and tedious journey by sea to Karachi and thence by rail to Sibi, followed by the traverse of the Bolan Pass on horseback and at times on foot, we finally reached Quetta in Baluchistan. From there the final 140 miles of the journey seemed by comparison straightforward as we travelled north-west from Quetta and finally we succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties.”

229 words as opposed to the published 57. In fact, I suspect that 229 words is a gross underestimate as I cannot accept, given the standard of Watson’s subsequent writing, that he would have described these events so trivially.

It is apparent that key information IS missing from the account, so it would seem incontrovertibly to be the case that at least some words have been removed, no doubt by the Literary Agent when preparing the STUD text.

2.0 From Maiwand to Quetta.

Following our brief analysis of the first 128 words of STUD in section 1.0, we will now turn our attention to the next 129 words - all of paragraph 2 and the first sentence of paragraph 3.

“The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar.”

We have already touched on the identity of Watson’s ‘brigade’ in Section 1, noting that it was not the 5th Regiment of Foot, to which he had been assigned before leaving the UK. However, why was he transferred from the ‘brigade’ to ‘the Berkshires’ during his time at Candahar [sic]? A review of the detailed history of the 2nd Afghan War will show how, initially, three separate forces cleared the mountain pass routes towards Afghanistan from India: the Peshawar Field Force under General Browne cleared the Khyber Pass and advanced on Kabul; the Kurram Valley Field Force under

General Roberts cleared the passes immediately to the south of the Khyber, joining with General Browne's force in the push to Kabul; the Kandahar Field Force under General Stewart were tasked with clearing the Bolan Pass, far to the south-west of the other actions, advancing through Baluchistan towards Kandahar. Stewart reached Kandahar on January 8th, 1879. His force included the 59th Regiment of Foot (the East Lancashire) to which we suppose Watson was later seconded, although it can only be a supposition as his notes on this matter have been lost.

As a consequence of what appeared to be a successful political settlement, the British started a military withdrawal from Afghanistan at the start of the Summer of 1879, leaving their representative in his official residence in Kabul. Unfortunately, not all was as it seemed and at the beginning of September 1879 Afghan forces attacked and overran the Residency, killing Britain's representative. The withdrawing armies turned and re-invaded Afghanistan, defeating their forces at the Battle of Charasiab on October 6th. The British position was not finally secured until Roberts' victory at the Battle of Sherpur on Christmas Eve, 1879. Not wishing to be caught out again, the British undertook a rebalance of their forces in the country and, as Kandahar was deemed relatively settled, in April 1890 General Stewart began to move a large force to Kabul.

Garrison duties at Kandahar were taken up by a force under General Burrows which included the 66th Regiment of Foot (the Berkshires) - the 66th had been in India since 1870 and were ordered to Afghanistan early in 1880. As Watson tells us he remained in Kandahar and was attached to the 66th, we can only presume that his skills were needed there rather than on the road to Kabul with General Stewart.

And so to the Battle of Maiwand, 27th July 1880.

After suffering very heavy losses at the battle, survivors of General Burrows' force made their way back to Kandahar. Survivors from Maiwand arrived back in Kandahar throughout the 28th, the last survivors arrived early in the morning of the 29th. The remnants of the British forces withdrew to the citadel in Kandahar where they were besieged by Ayub Khan's armies. Of the 2,476 men engaged at Maiwand, 934 were killed and 175 were wounded and missing.

The siege of the Citadel at Kandahar is a huge embarrassment to analysts who support a Holmes/Watson meeting early in 1881 as the forces there were not relieved until General Roberts completed his forced march from Kabul and defeated the Afghan forces on September 1st, 1880. Here, if we follow the work of some others in this area, we begin to see the emergence of numerous somewhat devious explanations. For example, Baring-Gould⁴ wrote; *"...The month's siege at Kandahar was rigorous and morale was low - yet Watson never mentions it. It seems safe to conclude that he was never there."*

Baring-Gould glosses over the difficult problem that whilst Watson doesn't mention the siege of Kandahar, he doesn't mention anything else either. Of course, we can suspect that Watson DID describe these 'adventures' in detail but, regrettably, the Literary Agent crossed out much of this information. However, Baring-Gould goes on to note that Watson *"tells us, certainly, that he was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar"* yet he appears not to speculate as to the origin of this *"great train"* if it were not the survivors of Maiwand and the subsequent Kandahar siege, who were finally able to leave Kandahar for India on or about September 8th, 1880 (see below).

⁴ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 79.

To understand Watson's options, we need to understand the British reaction to Maiwand. General Roberts⁵ argued for, and was allowed to lead, a relief force (the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force) on the march of over 300 miles between the two cities. To ensure the maintenance of speed, Roberts chose to march without the usual supporting supply train, opting instead to 'live off the land'.

Roberts also knew that, were he successful at Kandahar, the final threat to stability would be eliminated and the British once again would withdraw from the country. In fact, Roberts later discovered that the British withdrawal actually commenced the day after he left Kabul! Roberts' only route out of Afghanistan, it thus transpired, was to be through Quetta and then the Bolan Pass. Before setting out, Roberts assured the members of his force that they would not be tasked with garrison duties in southern Afghanistan but would return to their parent units when it was safe to do so.

As Roberts left Kabul on August 9th, 1880, the Kandahar siege was entering its 11th day - a fast reaction indeed as his force comprised nearly 10,000 men with almost as many 'followers'. A second relief column, under General Phayre, was assembled to approach Kandahar from Quetta but difficulties assembling this force meant that it did not arrive at Kandahar until after Roberts had already secured victory there.

Roberts arrived in Kandahar on August 31st and defeated Ayub Khan's forces on September 1st.

Because Roberts had travelled without sufficient supplies, his immediate and pressing priority was to secure food supplies for his men and the survivors of the siege. Accordingly, he dispersed his forces across the region to ensure security and the necessary supplies. It wasn't until September 8th that it was deemed safe to begin the evacuation from Kandahar.

This was the earliest date that Watson would have been able to commence his journey towards the Bolan Pass.

Briefly to jump ahead in this analysis, later in his account, and we will review this in detail later, Watson wrote; "*I was despatched accordingly, in the troopship Orontes, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty.*"

As it is a matter of record that the Orontes sailed from Bombay on 31st October 1880 to arrive in Portsmouth on 26th November, analysts appear to have jumped at the close correlation between this fact and Watson's account as 'evidence' that this was the voyage he made. Thus, he is claimed to have been back on British soil before the end of November 1880.

However, he could not have left Kandahar until September 8th, heading in the first instance to the base hospital at Quetta. From Quetta he would have been faced with a 'march' of over 100 miles, including the passage of Bolan, to reach the railhead at Sibi. Had he been taken thence to Karachi (340 to 400 miles depending on route) and on to Bombay (another 550 miles) he conceivably might just have caught the Orontes.

However, first he had to recover sufficiently at Quetta to allow this journey to begin and then, according to his account, he did not travel to Karachi at all but instead made his way to Peshawar, over 700 miles in the opposite direction to Karachi and the sea.

To understand his time-line in India, we have to understand what took him to Peshawar and why, subsequently, by his own account he was committed to the base hospital there.

⁵ Roberts, F.S. 1898

3.0 From Quetta to Peshawar.

In sections 1 and 2 of these notes we looked at the first two paragraphs of STUD and, as a lead-in to later discussions, the first sentence of paragraph 3.

In this section I will focus on that first sentence from paragraph 3.

“Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar..”

The first half of this sentence indicates the depth of Watson’s suffering after Maiwand. He specifically refers to *“prolonged hardships”* and we must ask whether it is at all conceivable that Watson’s original *Reminiscences* did not recount this obviously traumatic period of his life? Here, I believe, we have another obvious example of the Literary Agent’s extreme editing.

Remember Baring-Gould’s interpretation - *“...The month’s siege at Kandahar was rigorous and morale was low - yet Watson never mentions it. It seems safe to conclude that he was never there.”* My analysis tells me that Watson certainly would have ‘mentioned it’ - the lack of a surviving account is entirely down to his Literary Agent. The situation in southern Afghanistan immediately after Maiwand was such that the only ‘safe’ place to which Murray could have taken Watson - *“the British lines”* - was Kandahar. There was no other British force in the area. Further, Watson goes on to say; *“I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers....”*

Where did this *“great train”* come from, if not from Kandahar after the relief of the siege at the beginning of September?”

However, now we have an even more glaring example of editorial butchery when Watson, we are told, adds *“.....to the base hospital at Peshawar”*. The journey from Kandahar to Peshawar, through Quetta and the Bolan Pass (remember this was the only secure route out of Afghanistan) would have covered nearly 900 miles. Even the shortest route, via Kabul, was 480 miles, but, as we know, this was not an option as the British had left northern Afghanistan. No, with a base hospital ‘nearby’ at Quetta, just over 140 miles away, there is no way the wounded would have been sent to Peshawar.

First let us consider the journey to Quetta and then we will review what must have been a subsequent journey to Peshawar.

Robert’s relief column undertook one of the most famous forced marches in history, covering 313 miles in 22 days, an average of 14 miles a day. It is true that Roberts was concerned to ensure that his troops were battle-worthy on arrival at Kandahar, but it is equally true that he was determined to reach Kandahar before the garrison fell to the Afghans. We have noted that he travelled without supporting supply trains, an option that would not have been possible when organising the transport of wounded to Quetta. It seems highly unlikely that this journey could have matched the relief force’s speed.

During his march to Kandahar, General Roberts contracted a fever and he also took time subsequently to recover at Quetta. In his account of his service in India ⁶ he wrote;

“Macgregor’s brigade started for Quetta on the 8th [of September], and was followed soon after by Baker’s and Macpherson’s brigades. I accompanied Macgregor in the hope that the change to Quetta (where I remained about a month) would pick me up, and enable me to meet Lord

⁶ Roberts, F.S., 1898

Ripon's wish that I should retain the command in southern Afghanistan until some satisfactory settlement could be arrived at." (page 493)

"As the change to Quetta did not benefit me, and as I found that, owing to indifferent health, I was unable to carry on my duty with satisfaction to myself, I applied to be relieved. My request was acceded to, and I started on the 12th October for India." (page 494)

Assuming that "*Macgregor's brigade*" (the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force 3rd Infantry Brigade) were able to make good speed to Quetta, Roberts probably would have arrived there on or about September 18th. His recorded date of departure, 12th October, suggests his stay at Quetta was rather less than '*a month*', more likely three to three and a half weeks, or that Macgregor had actually made better speed than Roberts' column had achieved.

However, our concern has to be how much time Watson spent at the Quetta hospital before he was considered fit to travel onwards from there. First, when did Watson arrive at Quetta? It is probable that "*a great train of wounded sufferers*" would have taken longer than a fit infantry brigade, so I would suggest September 23rd to the 25th (an average speed of about 10 miles a day). We cannot know how long Watson's recovery took, but his condition is likely to have been more serious than Roberts', so let us assume one month. Therefore, on or about October 23rd, Watson might well have set off towards Peshawar. Whether this estimate of one month is in error by one to two weeks will be seen to matter little in terms of effect on final conclusions.

The Orontes left Bombay for England on the 31st - 7 days later.

So why Peshawar? To return to Roberts' writings, on page 473 he wrote;

"I wished that the force [the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force] should be composed, as far as possible, of those who had served with me throughout the campaign; but as some of the regiments (more especially Native corps) had been away from their homes for two years, and had had more than their share of fighting, besides having suffered heavy losses in action and through sickness, I considered it right to consult their commanders before detailing the troops. With the exception of three, who thought that their regiments had been long enough away from India, all, to my great delight, eagerly responded to my call, and I took upon myself to promise the men that they should not be left to garrison Kandahar, but should be sent back to India as soon as the fighting ceased."

and on page 492/3;

"No supplies and very little forage were procurable between Quetta and Kandahar, and in the neighbourhood of the latter place there was now hardly anything in the shape of food for man or beast to be had for love or money, the resources of this part of the country having been quite exhausted. Relief could only be obtained by reducing the number of mouths to be fed, and with this object I scattered the troops in different directions, to posts as far distant from each other as possible, consistent with safety; and in accordance with my promise to the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force, that they should not be required to garrison Kandahar when the fighting was at an end, I arranged to despatch without delay to India the corps which had come with me from northern Afghanistan."

The force at Kandahar at this stage would have comprised General Phayre's relief column - Phayre finally arrived in Kandahar from Quetta on September 6th - as well as the survivors of General Burrows' forces and Roberts' Kabul-Kandahar Field Force.

Roberts' plan all along had been that his troops would return to their parent units after completion of the task in hand. But what of Watson? He had had three parent units - the 5th, 59th and 66th Regiments of Foot. Following their losses at Maiwand, the 66th were despatched to India and they returned to England early in 1881. The 59th had moved with General Stewart to Kabul and thence to Peshawar. We will later show that it was the 59th that travelled on the Orontes at the end of October 1880. The 5th, as we know, had been based at Peshawar throughout. What was there for a conscientious officer to do but follow the General Order and proceed to re-join his unit? We can safely surmise that Watson was ordered to re-join the 5th. Thus, on or about October 23rd, Watson would have taken leave of Quetta and set his sights on Peshawar - 750 miles away.

To return to Roberts' narrative, on page 494 he wrote;

“Riding through the Bolan Pass I overtook most of the regiments of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force marching towards Sibi, thence to disperse to their respective destinations. As I parted with each corps in turn its band played ‘Auld Lang Syne,’ and I have never since heard that memory-stirring air without its bringing before my mind’s eye the last view I had of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force. I fancy myself crossing and re-crossing the river which winds through the pass; I hear the martial beat of drums and plaintive music of the pipes; and I see Riflemen and Gurkhas, Highlanders and Sikhs, guns and horses, camels and mules, with the endless following of an Indian army, winding through the narrow gorges, or over the interminable boulders which made the passage of the Bolan so difficult and wearisome to man and beast.”

Roberts had been an invalid for almost a full month in Quetta, yet he still was overtaking the first part of the evacuation of Kandahar. On October 15th he formally handed over his command to General Phayre. The final British troops withdrew from Kandahar in April 1881. Whenever Watson left Quetta, he would undoubtedly have travelled with one of the British units - the Bolan Pass was no place to traverse alone - as far as the railhead at Sibi. From Sibi he had the option of reasonably speedy rail travel to Peshawar. The train times from Sibi to Jacobabad would have been of the order of 3 to 4 hours with a time of between 1 and 2 days from there to Peshawar. If Watson indeed left Quetta on or about October 23rd, he would have arrived at Sibi at the earliest 10 days later. From Sibi, train availability permitting, he could have been in Peshawar another 2 to 3 days after that, no earlier than November 4th or 5th, 1880.

On these timings, the Orontes sailed whilst Watson was still in the Bolan Pass, long before he had even reached Peshawar.

4.0 Peshawar

Let me review progress so far. It is the beginning of November 1880 and Watson has finally reached Peshawar, no doubt his intended destination when he sailed from Portsmouth one year earlier.

Since Maiwand (Tuesday July 27th), he spent just over six weeks at Kandahar before his evacuation to Quetta on or shortly after Wednesday September 8th. After reaching Quetta (Thursday September 23rd?) and recovering from his “*prolonged hardships*” he finally left Quetta on October 21st and, after traversing the Bolan Pass to reach Sibi and there taking to the train, he reached Peshawar during the first week of November.

No doubt there will be analysts who consider this assessment to be pessimistic and who will attempt to shorten the times here and there. However, some of these dates are locked in by history. Kandahar

was not relieved until August 31st, 1880 and the Afghan forces were not defeated until the following day. No “*great train of wounded sufferers*” left Kandahar before September 8th. My time line shows an eight-week period between Watson’s leaving Kandahar and his arrival at Peshawar. Be as optimistic as you might and you may reduce this period by two, or possibly even three, weeks but that still places Watson in Peshawar no earlier than October 13th.

Whenever we decide Watson did arrive in Peshawar, we then have to address the next phase of his surviving narrative;

“..... to the base hospital at Peshawar. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the veranda when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England.”

The obvious first question is ‘why was Watson admitted to the base hospital at Peshawar?’

As we study Watson’s personality throughout the Canon we see, I am sure, a person of diligence, resolve and a conscientious commitment to his responsibilities. Much more Edward Hardwicke than Nigel Bruce, perhaps? As a serving officer in the British Army there can be little doubt that, having finally made connection with his unit, he immersed himself straight away in his duties and assigned tasks. Even at this stage in the 2nd Afghan War, the medical situation at Peshawar would still have been demanding. It would seem that Watson’s resolve to do his duty led to his overestimation of his own fitness - the combination of effects on him from Maiwand, from the Kandahar siege and from his no doubt gruelling journey from Quetta to Peshawar, coupled with his work-load after joining his unit, clearly took its toll and the doctor found himself a patient in his own hospital.

“Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the veranda when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions.”

Quite how long it took Watson to ‘rally’ and to ‘improve’ we might never know - his records have been lost. However, one of his notes has survived and tells that after this period he was struck down by ‘*enteric fever*’. The generic term ‘enteric fever’ encompasses Typhoid Fever and Paratyphoid Fever, caused by the Salmonella bacterium. Given modern medical methods, notably timely and well-managed treatment using antibiotics, the condition could be cured, depending on circumstance, in 7 to 14 days. However, in the early 1880s there were no antibiotics. Watson’s own description of his recovery is telling; “*or months my life was despaired of,.....*”

Along with the Siege of Kandahar, this one phrase creates another acute embarrassment to those analysts who insist Watson sailed on the Orontes at the end of October 1880. We can already see that that was impossible anyway, but they soldier on. Let me look again at Baring-Gould’s analysis, for two reasons. First, he, like many others, seemed determined that Watson was on the Orontes. Second, the analytical approach he adopted when facing this issue is well-worth bearing in mind when studying his analyses of other parts of the Canon.

In “Good Old Watson”⁷, B-G discusses this phrase, somewhat dismissively. He quotes N. P. Metcalfe’s analysis from his note “The Date of the Study in Scarlet”⁸ as follows:

⁷ Baring-Gould, W.S. 1992, vol 1 page 79

⁸ Metcalfe, N.P., 1959

“With respect to Dr Hauser [Dr Louis A Hauser, quoted by Edgar W Smith in “The Long Road from Maiwand”⁹], I feel that the opinion of a medical man who has himself experienced this disease [Dr Maurice Campbell] is to be preferred. It is as follows: “The duration of enteric fever (nowadays called typhoid) is three weeks - though of course the attack may vary from subject to subject and depend on the severity or mildness of the onset. After his hectic experiences... Watson’s months of despair were probably only weeks, his remark that his life was despaired of for months should not be taken literally. That is not a reasonable statement about any ordinary complications of typhoid where the risk is generally over during a much shorter period. There is nothing so interminable as a long stay in a base hospital as anyone who has experienced it can vouch.”

No mention of the role of antibiotics, note.

This dismissal of Watson’s account is quite astonishing, especially as Watson WAS “*a medical man who has himself experienced this disease*” and who’s Literary Agent was also not without medical expertise! It is also deeply disturbing from a logical and philosophical view point. In effect we are being told to ignore one of Watson’s few surviving statements as being exaggeration brought on by boredom whilst at the same time we are told slavishly to accept his statement that he sailed on the *Orontes* (although, note, HE didn’t say when, at least not in the notes that survive). Logically we cannot pick and choose what to believe and what not to believe in his writings. Either we believe him, or we don’t. If we don’t believe him then why do we waste time and paper (and there is no doubt that Baring-Gould used up a lot of paper!) analysing the writings?

Secondly, the boredom point. Watson may or may not have been bored while he was recovering from his fever but that was NOT when he wrote his *Reminiscences*. I can only believe that the key dates in his time line were recorded in his diary along no doubt with additional notes. When he did write the *Reminiscences* (I have suggested 1885 or 1886 as likely dates) he would not have been subject to hospital-induced mental malaise, rather he would, I am sure, have been able to look back on his own history dispassionately.

However, even if Watson’s typhoid attack did only last weeks and not months, he still could not have reached Bombay in time to sail on the *Orontes* at the end of October - the *Orontes* time-line has already been blown so we might as well properly, and without prejudice, assess his actual progression. It is only regrettable that we have, thanks to the Literary Agent, so little to go on but what does survive nevertheless tells us much.

5.0 The *Orontes* Question.

As we continue to work through the opening paragraphs of today’s STUD text, we inexorably approach perhaps the fundamental chronological issue within our discussions.

*“I was despatched accordingly, in the troopship *Orontes*, and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.”*

It is a matter of fact that there was a troopship called the *Orontes*. She was one of a series of ships that have borne that name over the years. Named after the principle river of Syria, this particular ship was built by Laird Brothers at Monks Ferry in Birkenhead on the River Mersey in 1862. The ship was

⁹ Smith, E.W.

originally laid down as a Frigate but was completed as a troopship with a displacement tonnage of 4857. She was launched in November of her build year. The ship was lengthened (it is speculated also by Lairds) in 1876, increasing her displacement tonnage to 5600. She was finally disposed of by the Navy in 1893 to be broken up at a yard on the River Thames (Chatham?).¹⁰

During the mid to late 19th century, the Royal Navy operated several troopships, some built specifically for the role, but others converted from various types of operational ship. However, at the time of the Second Afghan War there were eight designated troopships in the British Naval inventory. The list of troopships operating at that time, together with their year of build or acquisition, was as follows:

H.M.S. Crocodile	(1867)
H.M.S. Euphrates	(1867)
H.M.S. Himalaya	(acquired from P&O in 1854)
H.M.S. Jumna	(1866)
H.M.S. Malabar	(1866)
H.M.S. Orontes	(1862)
H.M.S. Serapis	(1866)
H.M.S. Tamar	(1863)

As with most Royal Navy ships, full details of each ship's maintenance history (the "Ship's Book"), together with their logs, can be found at the UK National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) at Kew in West London. For example, National Archive document number ADM53/11707 is the Orontes log for the period from 12th January 1880 to 16th April 1881 and document ADM53/11708 is the log from 17th April 1881 to 5th June 1882.

Let us return again to Baring-Gould's analysis of this sequence of events. In the essay "Good Old Watson" in his *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, he reports¹¹ the work of N.P. Metcalfe¹², as follows;

From Bombay "he was despatched in the troopship Orontes - and here, thanks to the researches of Mr Metcalfe ("The Date of The Study in Scarlet"), we are able to determine the exact date. Mr. Metcalfe, scanning the Naval and Military Intelligence column of the London Times from July, 1880, to December, 1881, has revealed that "a ship called the Orontes was pressed into special service from July, 1880, and troops for Afghanistan and India were embarked on her on August 3rd. She sailed from Portsmouth to Queenstown [today's Cobh in County Cork on the south coast of Ireland], the Mediterranean and Bombay on August 4th. The journey was scheduled to take 28 days, but she actually arrived in Bombay on September 1st. On October 31st, she left Bombay for Portsmouth, calling at Malta on November 16th and arriving at Portsmouth on Friday afternoon, November 26th, bringing home the first troops from Afghanistan, including eighteen invalids."

"This corresponds almost precisely with Watson's statement that he "landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty."

As an examination of ADM53/11707 will show, H.M.S. Orontes did indeed sail from Bombay on October 31st, 1880, travelling via Aden, Suez, Port Said and Malta to arrive at Portsmouth on November 26th, 1880, almost exactly "a month later". Some analysts, obviously Baring-Gould and

¹⁰ This information has been drawn from the Ships Database built by the Department of Marine Technology, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The specific details quoted are as entered in December 2001.

¹¹ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 80

¹² Metcalfe, N.P., 1959

Metcalf included, have interpreted this coincidence between the actual duration of the voyage and the duration stated in Watson's account as "proof" that he was indeed one of the passengers on this particular sailing and they have constructed their chronologies accordingly. As an aside, Metcalfe apparently did not discover, or at least he did not report, that Orontes left Bombay on September 18th and sailed to Port Durban in Natal, returning to Bombay on October 16th, explaining the apparently very long period between his quoted Bombay arrival and departure dates. As to "*the first troops from Afghanistan, including eighteen invalids*", these sensibly can only have been drawn from forces returning to India through the Khyber Pass - the evacuation of forces from Northern Afghanistan commenced on August 10th, two and a half months before the Orontes sailed. To presume without question that at least some of these troops were from Kandahar is lax indeed.

Significantly, http://www.garenewing.co.uk/angloafghanwar/resources/regiments_englandindia.php shows that the 2nd Battalion of the 59th Regiment of Foot returned to England on the Orontes on the dates quoted by Metcalfe and Baring-Gould - if only Watson hadn't been transferred from them to the Berkshires he might have travelled on that voyage! The 59th were of course evacuated from Kabul when General Stewart's forces left for India. However, Watson's secondments suggest that demands for his medical expertise transcended specific unit orders. The 66th returned to England on the Malabar, departing Bombay on 20th January 1881 to arrive in England 19th February 1881. One can only suppose, given their losses, that the return of the 66th was probably prioritised, indicating a likely minimum period for a force to have reached Bombay from Kandahar - September 8th, 1880 to January 20th, 1881 or nearly four and a half months.

Even if we did not have this evidence, we know that Watson could not possibly have been in Bombay by October 31st, 1880, unless, of course, we choose to disregard everything he wrote before his Orontes statement. Let me be clear, I do mean everything! Such are the historical 'locks' on this timeline we would have to deny even that Watson was at Maiwand, that he was ever transferred to the Berkshires and perhaps that he was ever at Kandahar at all! This would amount to a declaration that the Canon is a pure work of fiction by an author whose background research was 'iffy' at best. However, if we disregard all that he says up to that point, we not only have to explain why, but in addition we have to explain why, despite this, we nevertheless accept his statement regarding the Orontes and why consequently we choose to build chronologies based on an 1881 meeting with Holmes.

A careful study of B-G's writings will show that he placed Watson at Peshawar before the end of August 1880¹³ - not for him the constraints of historical reality, or indeed of Watson's text, it would seem.

As I study what survives of Watson's writings, I see here a coincidence between his account and historical fact, but I see ONLY a coincidence. My immediate question when faced with this issue is to ask, "when was the Orontes next in Bombay?" In addition, knowing what I do of that ship's subsequent voyages, I ask "why did Watson not travel on the Orontes after all?"

I could describe all of the Orontes' travels after arriving at Portsmouth in November 1880, but in the interests of brevity I will, for now, simply note that she returned to Bombay on January 27th, 1882. Her subsequent voyage, she departed Bombay on February 5th, 1882, was tortuous indeed with calls in South Africa, and Zanzibar before transiting the Suez Canal to reach Malta and then Gibraltar (17th April 1882). However, from there she sailed to Madeira, Bermuda, Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados before finally sailing to Portsmouth, arriving there on May 25th - not at all the one month

¹³ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 79 paragraph 3.

described by Watson. I am confident that were Watson's original *Reminiscences* to turn up we would find yet another example duly recorded therein describing orders being overtaken by events.

Consider the geography. As the crow flies Bombay (Mumbai) lies over 1000 miles from Peshawar. However, in terms of railway travel the journey would have been more than somewhat longer than this. In Watson's day there were options, but his most likely route would in the first instance have taken him from Peshawar, through Lahore to Delhi. From there the preferred route to join the Great Indian Peninsular Railway's line from Bombay to Calcutta (remember *Around the World in 80 Days* - this was the railway used by Phileas Fogg to travel from Bombay eastwards) would have taken the traveller to Allahabad (Prayagraj since October 2018). Thence it would have been the GIPR all the way to Bombay. The journey distance from Peshawar to Delhi would have been 625 miles, from Delhi to Allahabad 430 miles and from Allahabad to Bombay 875 miles - that is 1930 miles in total. However, despite the distances involved, even in Watson's day this journey would have taken at most a few days, depending on train connections.

It is interesting to speculate just how current the intelligence regarding troopship movements might have been at a location so far removed from the Port of Bombay, but it is not inconceivable that an intention to berth Watson on the *Orontes* formulated in Peshawar could well have been overtaken by events by the time he reached the Port.

If we follow the 'believe Watson' logic, it is clear that he did not in fact sail on the *Orontes* back to England (the ship took a lot more than a month to complete the voyage), however it is entirely possible that his sailing on the *Orontes* had been the Army's intention before he left Peshawar.

If this were so, we can deduce that the Army planned that Watson should leave India towards the end of January or in early February 1882. This now gives us an overall time frame within which to encompass;

"Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the veranda when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England.

There is no need whatsoever to debate whether or not Watson was bored or how accurate his medical knowledge might have been - this time frame is entirely compatible with his actual account, or at least what is left of it.

However, if Watson did not sail on the *Orontes*, then which ship did bring him back to England? Determining just which troopship carried Watson from Bombay to England will take further research work, regrettably. Even with research, this is a question we might never be able positively to answer. We do, however, have a relatively tight 'window' within which to work. Assuming the Army had intended Watson to travel on the *Orontes* it seems unlikely that he could have departed Bombay much earlier than the beginning of February 1882. As to latest date, whilst this might be a loose constraint, after the Suez Canal opened in 1869, troop movements by ship to and from India tended to be seasonal (between September and March, to avoid the extremes of heat) and departures from Bombay after the end of March would have been unusual. Even if Watson were delayed until a sailing at the end of March, he would still have arrived at Portsmouth significantly ahead of the *Orontes*. I believe we can say with some certainty that Watson's arrival in England was either in March or April 1882.

I have previously speculated that Watson's *Reminiscences* might at this stage in his narrative have read as follows (the underlined text was, I suggest, crossed out by the Literary Agent as he prepared the final version STUD in 1887 - the question marks are a consequence of the discussion above);

“Here I rallied, and after a month or so I had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the veranda, enjoying the late winter sun, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that almost an entire year had passed since I entered that hospital before finally my strength had improved to the point where a medical board at last determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. I was despatched accordingly, to a berth in the troopship Orontes, but when I finally completed the long journey from Peshawar to Bombay, yet again I discovered that my orders had been changed. The Orontes had arrived late in Bombay and was no longer scheduled to sail directly back to England and I found that I had instead been allocated a berth on H.M.S. ?? which finally carried me away from India on ?? 1882 and landed me a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.”

I would be the first to argue, based on the evidence of his other writings and on contemporary memoirs produced by others, that Watson's original account was probably far longer than this and would have been rich in colour and detail. It is unsurprising, if highly unfortunate, that the Agent caused so much of this early text to be lost as he chose, correctly in my view, to focus STUD on Watson's relationship with Holmes.

6.0 From Portsmouth to London

Thus far in our analysis we have enjoyed the benefit of a well-established historical time-line against which to set the fragments of Watson's memoirs that survive today. However, once he returned to England, we have no such yardstick by which to judge subsequent developments. We are dependent solely on analysis of his actual words.

To set the scene, Watson arrived in England either in March or April 1882 with his health “*irretrievably ruined*” to be granted; “*permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.*”

We can deduce from this that the Army in effect gave him the remainder of 1882 as extended leave. We can also deduce, if we take his description literally in this context, that he arrived on English soil either late in March or early in April, that is nine months before the end of 1882. This should assist in determining on just which troopship he sailed and therefore, to the day, when he actually arrived.

He went on to write;

“I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air—or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably

more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.”

“On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when someone tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Bart’s.”

Not much to go on. However, we can as a working constraint deduce that he found himself in economic hardship before, perhaps even well before, his nine months were up. As a working hypothesis we might suggest the late Summer, i.e. after six of the allowed nine months, as a guide to the date of his visit to the Criterion Bar.

So, from his landing at Portsmouth what would seem the most likely course of events? In reference to his travelling to London, he uses the word “gravitated”. Whilst not a specific term, this choice of word hardly describes the actions of someone leaping onto the first express train to the capital. A real issue here is Watson’s health. How ill was he? For someone who’s health was “irretrievably ruined” he later managed nevertheless to perform several sprightly and strenuous activities. How many miles must he have on walked on Dartmoor, for example? Who can forget his walk from Reichenbach to Meiringen and his rush back to join Holmes after having been falsely summoned to a medical emergency at their hotel? These were, of course, six and nine years later and there can be no doubt, I suggest, that on his return to England from India such activity would have been out of the question.

Equally, is it not likely that his desire for the excitements of London would also have been somewhat subdued until he had at least made a partial recovery? It seems to me most probable that he would have perambulated from Portsmouth through Hampshire and Sussex, building his strength and stamina, before turning north for London. Quite how long this phase of his life lasted is problematic, but this slow procession to London seems to me eminently well-described by the word ‘gravitate’.

My reference to ‘Hampshire’ and ‘Sussex’ may well trigger the memory banks of Canon analysts. There are specific references to Watson’s knowledge of these two counties in the Canon and much has been written to explain just whence this knowledge came. We need look no further than Baring-Gould’s “Good Old Watson” to find a potted summary of these alternate views. However, their authors were quite probably hide-bound by their fixation that Watson was safely ensconced in Baker Street by early January 1881 and therefore alternative theories which recognise this ‘constraint’ have been propounded. To be entirely fair, it has been suggested by some that Watson gained this knowledge while ‘gravitating’ to London, although quite how he is supposed to have achieved this between the Orontes’ arrival at Portsmouth on November 26th and his meeting with Stamford just one month later, particularly alongside everything else he reports from this period, is not satisfactorily explained.

If we read on towards the end of STUD Chapter 2, to the point where Watson first lays eyes on Holmes, there is one sentence that has intrigued chronologists: *“There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work.”*

Only one student in a very large teaching laboratory!

To return to Baring-Gould and his “Good Old Watson”, he picked on the phrase “*the very day*” in Watson’s account of his arriving at his financial conclusion and added the following note:

It was always Christopher Morley's belief [he wrote] that "the very day" was January 1, 1881 - "a day when Watson would naturally be making resolutions for a more frugal life.....Also the fact of its being a Holiday would account for Holmes being *the only student working in the laboratory.*" (Good Old Watson - Side-note number 16¹⁴)

In light of the discussions earlier in this sequence of notes, I hope that it is clear that Watson's presence in the Criterion Bar on Jan 1, 1881 would have been utterly impossible. However, I do have sympathy with Morley's view that Watson and Holmes met during a Holiday. As Watson landed in the UK in either March or April 1882 and as pressure of circumstances affected him before the end of the subsequent Summer, we can dismiss that year's Christmas Holidays. Equally, Easter can be dismissed for the simple reason that it fell on April 9th in that year. Even if he were in the country before Easter, dates on or around April 9th would have been far too soon for him both to have 'gravitated' to London and spent to the point where his finances were so dire. No, the obvious Holiday was the long summer vacation enjoyed within the teaching establishments.

Balancing the proportion of Watson's "nine months" that probably had passed against the 'long vac' constraint leads me to believe that Watson met Stamford at the Criterion Bar during September 1882 and that, before the end of that month, he, and then the following day Holmes, moved into their rooms in Baker Street.

7.0 The Impact on Chronologies.

Having established an interpretation of Watson's history that matches, rather than contradicts, his own records, let me now look at the impact this has on overall perspectives of Canonical Chronology.

Watson was clearly not above using a good phrase more than once in his writing. One oft-quoted, phrase of Holmes' is highly germane to our discussions on chronology, or at least it should be. Watson reports Holmes' use of the phrase in *STUD*, *SCAN*¹⁵ and *SECO*¹⁶.

In Chapter 3 of *STUD* (first published in 1887), he wrote the following:

"You don't seem to give much thought to the matter in hand," I said at last, interrupting Holmes's musical disquisition.

"No data yet," he answered. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

Later, in *SCAN* (1891), we find:

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts."

Even later still, in *SECO* (1904)

¹⁴ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 80.

¹⁵ Doyle, A.C., July 1891

¹⁶ Ibid. December 1904.

“With Eduardo Lucas lies the solution of our problem, though I must admit that I have not an inkling as to what form it may take. It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts.”

If my earlier notes tell us anything, it is that this priceless piece of advice has repeatedly been ignored. Someone, somewhere, sometime ago apparently decided that Watson met Holmes at the beginning of 1881 and the events at Lauriston Gardens took place in March of that year. Since then, countless analyses, articles, essays and notes have been produced explaining why it is, when, inconveniently, Watson’s writings do not support, or indeed downright contradict, this assumption, that these writings must be wrong. We are told that he must have been suffering from boredom, that his handwriting was so bad he couldn’t read it, that his knowledge of medicine wasn’t up to muster, that he employed an unreliable personal shorthand, and so on, and on and on.

The phrase *“It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence”* should be framed and hung on every Sherlockian’s wall.

The problem here, of course, is that Watson’s writings ARE our ‘data’. We have no other source on which to base analyses of his, or Holmes’, life.

I did once paraphrase the master’s advice quoted above, but in the form of a corollary: *“It is a capital mistake to adjust the evidence to fit a previously established theory. It biases the judgement.”*

This, it seems to me, is precisely what many Sherlockians have been doing ever since the 1881 date emerged. Let me look at an example that demonstrates this. The first sentence of FIVE¹⁷ reads:

“When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes cases between the years ‘82 and ‘90, I am faced by so many which present strange and interesting features that it is no easy matter to know which to choose and which to leave.”

This is an innocent enough statement and, in the context of my notes in sections 1 to 6 of this sequence, offers no surprises. Watson met Holmes in the late Summer of 1882 and settled progressively into a working relationship with him. There would have been cases that Watson would have noted towards the back end of 1882. We do not know which cases because Watson did not see fit to document these for public consumption. The first of their cases he DID publish (eventually, but more of that later) was SPEC.

However, the opening lines of FIVE do not surprise me simply because Watson’s own account tells me that in 1881 he was in India and his own account, again, tells me that the Lauriston Gardens affair happened in 1884. However, most Chronologists, it would seem, either believe, or perhaps simply accept, that the pair met at the beginning of 1881 and ‘Lauriston Gardens’ must therefore properly be dated to March 1881. We have already noted how support of this ‘theory’ demands the amendment, or downright dismissal, of much of Watson’s account - our ‘data’, or ‘evidence’.

“It is a capital mistake to adjust the evidence to fit a previously established theory. It biases the judgement.”

Baring-Gould we know supported the 1881 thesis, despite the evidence, so how did he react to the opening sentence of FIVE? He treated us to a lengthy side note - note 1 in his annotation of FIVE - which reads as follows¹⁸:

¹⁷ Doyle, A.C., November 1891

¹⁸ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 389.

“...between the years ‘82 and ‘90.” Why is ‘81 omitted? “Clearly because A Study in Scarlet was the only case [in the year 1881] of which [Watson] had any record,” the late Gavin Brend wrote in My Dear Holmes¹⁹. “After this case it was no longer necessary for him to make a discreet withdrawal to his bedroom when a client arrived to see Holmes, as had been his custom during the first few weeks. . . . But he probably took no further part in the proceedings, and above all, he kept no notes. The idea of a permanent partnership had not yet occurred to either man.” Returning to this theme in his essay, “From Maiwand to Marylebone,” Mr. Brend wrote: [Holmes and Watson] “were complete strangers when they first appeared in Baker Street. Probably therefore some time would elapse before either of them thought of the possibility of a complete record of all the cases. I [visualize] 1881 as a year in which Watson spent most of his time in writing his account of the one case in which he had been allowed to participate, A Study in Scarlet. He would know little, if anything, of any other case which occurred during that year and above all he kept no records. It was only at the beginning of 1882 that systemized records of the cases came into existence.”

All very interesting and to a large degree disturbing. Brend is offering us HIS THEORY as to the make-up of the Holmes-Watson relationship and he is asking us to accept his description of what Watson did or did not do during the year 1881. He presumes, with no supporting evidence whatsoever, the date when Watson commenced the creation of his detailed records. How could Brend possibly have known when Watson’s “systemized records of the cases came into existence”? Watson certainly does not tell us, and his is our only record. Much effort apparently was applied by Brend to understanding, analysing and theorising around a problem which a simple reading of Watson’s own account should have indicated was not a problem at all.

I commend readers of this piece to note this and other examples of extensive analysis being used to ‘shore up’ an indefensible theory. Let me conclude this part of my summary with just one more example.

In his ‘Annotated’, Baring-Gould offers another essay under the title “As to your dates that is the biggest mystification of all”²⁰ (quoting Watson’s words to Holmes in CREE²¹). This essay opens as follows:

“Mr. Sherlock Holmes was in active practice for twenty-three years, and ... during seventeen of these I was allowed to co-operate with him and to keep notes of his doings.”

So Watson wrote in the opening lines of “The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger.”

Ten of these seventeen years occupy the period from March, 1881 (A Study in Scarlet), to May, 1891 (“The Final Problem”). The partnership was reconstituted shortly after April, 1894 (“The Adventure of the Empty House”), and it came to an end with Holmes’ retirement in the autumn of 1903 - a period of nine years and six months, or a total of nineteen and a half years.

There were, then, two and a half years during the period of “the partnership” in which Watson did not “co-operate with” Holmes or “keep notes of his doings.”

The ‘Missing Years’ problem has tasked many analysts and spawned reams of paper over the years. However, check the arithmetic (math) presented by B-G.

¹⁹ Brend, G., 1951

²⁰ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 235

²¹ Doyle, A.C., March 1923

Ten of these seventeen years occupy the period from March, 1881 (A Study in Scarlet), to May, 1891 ("The Final Problem").

Wrong! Watson did not actually work with Holmes until very late in 1882 (remember his account of all the comings and goings, mysterious visitors and so on as he tried to understand just what Holmes did for a living - all this after they moved into Baker Street - set against his statement that there were cases in 1882), probably a full twenty-two months after B-G's presumed start. Consequently, this first period did not last ten years but rather it was only eight years and two months - give or take the odd month. Accepting for now B-G's timing of the second phase of their partnership, the total period was seventeen years and eight months (not, as he states, *nineteen and a half years*). This corrected total is not a million miles away from Watson's quoted 'seventeen years', note! We must ask ourselves just how precise Watson's "seventeen years" statement actually is. It is not uncommon for the sake of brevity that such estimates are rounded to the nearest whole year, so possibly Watson was implying as much as seventeen and a half years, leaving us with only two missing months.

So, rather than there being *two and a half years during the period of "the partnership" in which Watson did not "co-operate with" Holmes or "keep notes of his doings*, we can see that there was only a period of eight months, quite possibly less, even a lot less, than this. We can also see that all the essays, all the suggestions, looking into how Watson spent these 'missing years' are in fact spurious if we accept Watson's own accounts!

For what it's worth, I believe the real missing period of just months, be it two or eight, is accounted for by Watson writing his *Reminiscences*, probably during 1885 when, again by his account, his involvement in case work was minimal.

If I have learned one lesson from this analysis it is this - if we really choose to believe Watson, many (but not all) of previously noted chronological anomalies will simply go away. Watson's notes appear to be significantly more reliable than many people are prepared to credit. As they are our only source of 'data', it would be wise to ponder long and hard before deeming these notes in any way to be 'inaccurate'.

8.0 The Road to Lauriston Gardens

It is a long way from Maiwand to Baker Street. As the crow flies the distance is approximately 3500 miles, however Watson's journey, with his detours to Peshawar and then the journey home from there, covered over 9600 miles.

Commensurate perhaps with the distances involved, these notes have been a long 'ramble' through a number of the factors and issues that characterised that journey. Most chronologists, it would seem, have in the past placed Watson back in the UK only 122 days after the Battle of Maiwand. In the earlier parts of this sequence of notes, we have seen, I hope, how unlikely, indeed how impossible, such a rapid progress would have been.

My analyses were prompted by questioning just when Holmes really did move into the Baker Street rooms and I would like to end this sequence of notes by looking at the latter part of the time-line, covering the period after the pair moved into their rooms, specifically the series of events leading to the case element of STUD.

I will start with SPEC. The first paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph of The Adventure of the Speckled Band read as follows:

“On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.”

“It was early in April in the year ‘83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed.”

This case, first published in February 1892, is generally accepted by Chronologists as being the second of the cases with which both of our pair were involved subsequently to have been published by Watson. However, as we shall see, it seems more probable that it was their first. A number of points of interest can be gleaned from this short extract.

Firstly, and most clearly, Watson gives us the date of the case - “early in April”, 1883.

Secondly, Watson notes that he had been working with Holmes for “the last eight years”. Clearly this statement does not refer to the time of the case, but rather to the time that Watson was writing up his notes. Given the time line that we have been developing in this series of notes, it appears that Holmes and Watson first worked together towards the end of 1882, suggesting that he was preparing this text either late in 1890 or early in 1891, depending on just how precise his “eight years” really was. This places us roughly one year ahead of The Adventure’s publication date.

Thirdly, he tells us that he might have published this adventure earlier had he not been bound not to do so by *“a promise of secrecy.....made at the time, from which...[he had]...only been freed during the...[previous]...month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given.”* This combination of comments allows us to postulate, should we wish to do so, the date of Helen Stonor’s death.

Now consider RESI ²². When first published (in 1893), the second and third paragraphs of the Resident Patient read:

“I cannot be sure of the exact date, for some of my memoranda upon the matter have been mislaid, but it must have been towards the end of the first year during which Holmes and I shared chambers in Baker Street. It was boisterous October weather, and we had both remained indoors all day, I because I feared with my shaken health to face the keen autumn wind, while he was deep in some of those abstruse chemical investigations which absorbed him utterly as long as he was engaged upon them. Towards evening, however, the breaking of a test

²² Doyle, A.C., August 1893

tube brought his research to a premature ending, and he sprang up from his chair with an exclamation of impatience and a clouded brow."

"A day's work ruined, Watson," said he, striding across to the window. "Ha! The stars are out and the wind has fallen. What do you say to a ramble through London?"

However, when the first edition of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* was assembled for publication by Newnes in 1894, these two paragraphs were replaced by a long piece of text copied verbatim from *The Cardboard Box*, whose publication had at that time been suppressed.

There was a third version of this section of the opening text, which first appeared in *The Complete Short Stories*, published by John Murray in 1928. This version simply read:

"It had been a close, rainy day in October. "Unhealthy weather, Watson," said my friend. "But the evening has brought a breeze with it. What do you say to a ramble through London?"

This is the textual standard used by Baring-Gould in his *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. In his notes on RESI²³, B-G quotes the original "lost memoranda" text in his note 4, appending the following comment:

"This, as we shall see, is a manifestly inaccurate version, which is why the two paragraphs became one when Watson's account of the case of "The Resident Patient" appeared in Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories (London: John Murray, 1928)."

"Quite obviously, as the late H.W Bell indicated in Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson: The Chronology of Their Adventures²⁴, the missing memoranda must eventually have been discovered; Watson undoubtedly consulted them before the publication of the first complete collection of his shorter chronicles, checked the fact that the month was indeed October, and removed from the text the paragraph about "the end of the first year during which Holmes and I shared chambers in Baker Street."

Note the use of the words 'obviously' and 'undoubtedly' and the fact that it was only the confirmation of the stated month, apparently, which caused Watson to remove his original text!

In the versions of the Canon with which we are probably most familiar, Watson's key paragraph, which gave strong guidance as to the date of the case, is no longer to be seen. Worse than that, we can see the same old B-G reaction in his response to this now-missing text - *"This, as we shall see, is a manifestly inaccurate version, which is why the two paragraphs became one....."*

Watson's original text was *"manifestly inaccurate"*! I hope that by now readers are alive to, and possibly immediately suspicious of, comments such as these. Of course, we know that, realistically, the *end of the first year during which Holmes and I shared chambers* places the narrative towards the early Autumn of 1883, perfectly consistent with its being *boisterous October weather*. Of course, because B-G and others believed that Holmes and Watson took up residence in Baker Street shortly after the New Year of 1881, on this level at least they would see it as *manifestly inaccurate*, wouldn't they? What else could they do but challenge the accuracy of Watson's memoir? We have seen this before, of course - challenging Watson's accuracy it is the only way the 1881 date can be sustained.

²³ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1996, vol.1 page 267.

²⁴ Bell, H.W., 1932

Believe Watson! The case date for RESI was October 1883, their second recorded case dated by Watson to that year.

Detailed analysis of RESI will, no doubt, indicate problems with reconciling prison sentences and early release dates with this suggested case date. However, remember three things: one, Watson tells us clearly that some of his memoranda on the matter were missing - he was able to write a pretty thorough account despite this even though he must have been dependent to some degree at least on memory; two, when he recounts his prison sentence data he is telling us, perhaps from memory, what someone (Holmes) had originally told him - this may also have been from memory as we do not know whether Holmes had examined his records or not; and three, in 1875, when the Worthington Bank robbery occurred, Holmes would have been 21 years old and Watson 23, given their generally accepted birth dates - it is a moot point whether details of a crime as early as this would have appeared in Holmes' index anyway as it occurred 5 years before either GLOR²⁵ or MUSG²⁶, that is if reasonable, rather than majority, assessments of their dates are accepted. Our latitude for dating these two adventures is greatly increased when we accept that Watson could not have met Holmes until the late Summer of 1882. It becomes much easier simply to accept dating clues as presented in the narratives.

Those who argue the recovery of the *missing memoranda* seem only on that basis to have challenged the consequences of the 'October' statement - that was really all that had changed when the later versions first appeared - no one seems to doubt Watson's recall in respect of 'October' or of any other part of the narrative. I would think it far more likely that Watson managed to get the date right than some of the other minutiae if indeed some of his records were missing. Most analysts appear to suggest a case date of 1887 for RESI. Are we to believe that Watson mistook five years for one? I think not!

However, I would suggest that the question we really must ask is, "Why were parts of his memoranda missing?" This, I think, brings us to *the elephant in the room* - STUD.

As we build Watson's time-line we must accept that, at some point before the end of 1877, he sat down, somewhere, and wrote his *Reminiscences*. I believe we can posit that this happened sometime well before the end of 1877 as by then there had been time for a failed attempt at publication, the establishment of a relationship with a Literary Agent and for that Agent, as we have seen, significantly to edit Watson's original work. Note the rubric to STUD which declares it be a "*Reprint from*", and not a "*Reprint of*", the *Reminiscences*. In order to prepare his *Reminiscences*, Watson presumably gathered his memoranda as the aides memoire necessary to write his life-story up to that point. He would have to have had personal records from his childhood, such as school reports, from his undergraduate days (college records, his actual degree), post-graduate records and, of course, his military records. As his relationship with Holmes had become central to his life it seems more than likely he would also have had his records of the cases worked prior to that point. Whichever chronology we might adopt, if Watson did write his memoirs in either 1885 or 1886 there apparently were very few cases to choose from. We know that Watson indicates that there were many more cases than we see in the 60 stories recorded in the Canon and some of the untold stories may well have lain in this pre-*Reminiscences* period. However, they were untold, so we cannot know for certain.

Having completed what must have been a Herculean task, the work, despite his efforts, has vanished without trace. We must presume it was never published. Legal Deposit has been a requirement of English Law since 1661 - had the *Reminiscences* been published, records, if not actual copies, would

²⁵ Doyle, A.C., April 1893

²⁶ Ibid., May, 1893

surely have survived at the British Library or one of the other Legal Deposit Libraries that were active in that role in the 1880s.

I have no doubt that the work would have been huge. Throughout my analyses, I have drawn parallels with the Memoirs penned by General Roberts²⁷, which run to over 300,000 words. Just short of 10,000 of these words are given over to the period from Maiwand to Robert's leaving Kandahar for Quetta. Watson's surviving account of this same period runs to 129 words. I have read the Canon many times and when I look at Watson's style, his thoroughness, I cannot for one minute accept that he would have summarised his entire life up to his first meeting with Holmes in less than 600 words.

Note how his style changes dramatically after his meeting with Stamford. Now we have complete conversations being reported. There is a lot more colour and detail. We have nearly 1100 words, almost twice as many as were used to describe his complete life up to that point, covering just the couple of hours between Watson's meeting with Stamford and the latter introducing him to Holmes.

As soon as Holmes appears, everything changes.

If we accept that there were *Reminiscences* and that an Agent had been engaged to make them 'saleable', we can see exactly the Agent's tactic - forget the war, concentrate on Holmes. But how best to concentrate on Holmes? The Agent, quite logically, it seems to me, pointed to the obvious solution - describe his methods, present worked examples, focus on the case studies. But which case or cases?

I believe there were very few to choose from at that time and the choice was narrowed as Watson's promise precluded the use of SPEC as his worked example. No, he would have had to describe the Brook Street and Lauriston Gardens cases as these were apparently the only usable examples of Holmes' work that he had. The Resident Patient offered some possibilities but the Agent, it seems to me, clearly saw 'market value' in the account of the Lauriston Gardens affair and steered Watson's pen in that direction. Any references to Brook Street were removed and their work subsequently focused on Lauriston Gardens.

Over this period, his memoranda concerning SPEC may well have been under lock and key for secrecy's sake - we just don't know - and any notes he had covering the Brook Street Mystery (RESI) were most likely simply set aside to allow concentration on Lauriston Gardens. Editing, in some cases drastic editing, was initiated. I strongly suspect that this tells us when, and why, *some of his memoranda were mislaid*. In addition, it tells me why Watson could have been so sure of the date even if the memoranda were missing - he remembered the case had featured in his *Reminiscences* and how, subsequently, the memoranda came to be mislaid. He appears not to have mislaid any other notes - why just this one case?

However, having identified the Agent's preferred focus on the case, when did the series of events centred on Lauriston Gardens occur? We can state with confidence that it must have been before Watson wrote his *Reminiscences* as, had that not been the case, the narrative might never have caught the Agent's eye. In fact, much as the 1881 school of chronology might wish it otherwise, in *STUD* Watson DOES tell us the date - albeit indirectly. He notes a report in the *Standard* newspaper as including the phrase;

"The two bade adieu to their landlady upon Tuesday, the 4th inst., and departed to Euston Station with the avowed intention of catching the Liverpool express". (*STUD* Part 1 Chapter 6)

²⁷ Roberts, F.S., 1898

The introduction to the ‘case’ element of *STUD* starts with the phrase:

“It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast.” (*STUD* Part 1 Chapter 2)

Nowhere, directly, does Watson indicate in which year this 4th of March lay, nor, to the best of my knowledge, does he tell us what his *good reason* was. If today’s text is a reprint from the *Reminiscences*, it would seem that the Agent simply removed the entire Brook Street section that previously led into this statement (see below). However, as Watson did not meet Holmes until late Summer 1882, we can conclude that this “4th of March” could have been no earlier than 1883.

To return to the report in the *Standard*, one of the problems facing the 1881 School is that “the 4th inst”, that is, in their view, the 4th of March 1881, was a Friday and not, as recounted by Watson, a Tuesday. Yes, you have guessed it! Yet more reams of studies, essays, theories and excuses have been generated to explain Watson’s ‘mistake’ - it must have been a mistake, their authors’ claim, because the ‘data’ does not fit the 1881 theory.

What did Baring-Gould have to say on the matter? - “*Tuesday the 4th inst. The Standard was clearly wrong* [at least he didn’t directly blame Watson!] *in calling the 4th, a Friday in 1881, a Tuesday, as virtually all commentators agree. The only Marches in this entire period in which the 4th fell on a Tuesday were 1879 (much too early) and 1884 (even more too late)”*.²⁸

“It is a capital mistake to adjust the evidence to fit a previously established theory. It biases the judgement.” (Section 6 of this document)

If we choose to believe Watson, the obvious question should simply be “when DID the 4th of March fall on a Tuesday?”. In 1881, as B-G correctly points out, the 4th of March was Friday. In 1882 it fell on a Saturday, in 1883 on a Sunday and in 1884 on a Tuesday. The previous year it fell on a Tuesday, again as B-G correctly observes, was 1879, over a year before Maiwand, and, after 1884, the next occurrence was in 1890, well after the publication of *STUD*.

I have no problem whatsoever simply accepting Watson’s account and interpreting this literally - the case element of *STUD* dates to 1884, that is to say it post-dates *RESI* and therefore most probably would have followed on from the narrative that later became *RESI* in Watson’s original *Reminiscences*. I am confident that significant pieces of Watson’s pre-Criterion account were removed by the Agent and I have no reason to suppose that his post-Criterion account survived unscathed. Indeed, given what clearly happened to the first part of the *Reminiscences* I believe it to be almost certain that similar editing took place when the latter part of Watson’s text was addressed. There was no ‘magic’ difference between the two phases of Watson’s narrative.

As proof of this, students of *STUD* will be aware of a large chunk of text (nearly 15000 words - over one third of the entire text) dealing with the history of the Mormon religion and the Drebber/Stangerson background that does not seem to ‘sit well’ with the rest of the narrative (*STUD* Part 2 Chapters 1 to 5). Here we need not speculate as the Agent openly admits that this text had nothing to do with Watson (note the header to Chapter 6 in Part 2), confirming that post-Criterion editing did indeed take place. It seems to me a great pity that the Agent decided to add this passage - as analysts we would be on much firmer footing had he replaced at least some of the missing pieces of Watson’s narrative instead.

²⁸ Baring-Gould, W.S., 1992, vol 1 page 185 note 141.

By way of conclusion, I am not hidebound by the assumption that the events described in *STUD* were literally serial, i.e. followed on without break. Indeed, the removal of the Brook Street passages denies us access to the original text that immediately preceded Watson's "*was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember....*". I certainly do not accept that Lauriston Gardens was necessarily their first case together. It was simply the first to be described in a formal publication. Their remaining cases were by no means published in the same order that they occurred, so why should it be a surprise that this happened with the Lauriston Gardens Affair?

9.0 In Conclusion

This analysis looking at one specific question - when did Holmes move into Baker Street? - Certainly does not answer all the questions posed by the Canon. However, it does provide a framework which is consistent with history and with Watson's own writings. It sets the early relationship between Holmes and Watson on a firm, rather than entirely speculative, footing. This framework leads to the immediate elimination of several Canonical problems which have tasked analysts over many years. Whilst it may not answer all questions, I am happy that it provides a positive base against which the better to judge such outstanding issues as might remain and on which to build a robust chronology.

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