

Mycroft Holmes: “Unclubbable” but “occasionally he is the British government”

by Bill Barnes

Note: In this article “Holmes” refers to Sherlock Holmes, whereas Mycroft Holmes is referred to as “Mycroft”.

What do we know about Mycroft Holmes, the brother of Sherlock?

In his accounts of Holmes’ cases, Dr Watson tells us the following about Mycroft:

- He is seven years older than Sherlock. (‘The Greek Interpreter’, hereinafter GREE)
- He lives in lodging rooms in Pall Mall. (GREE)
- He works in Whitehall. (GREE)
- He walks to work in the morning and back again every evening. His office in Whitehall is *around the corner* from his lodgings in Pall Mall. (GREE)
- He is always at The Diogenes Club from a quarter to five until twenty to eight every evening. (GREE)
- The Diogenes Club is just opposite his rooms in Pall Mall. (GREE)
- He is only ever seen at his lodgings in Pall Mall, his office in Whitehall, or The Diogenes Club. (GREE)
- The Diogenes Club contains *the most unsociable and unclubbable men in town*; and Mycroft was one of the founders. (GREE)
- Holmes says that Mycroft is better than he is in observation and deduction. (GREE)
- Holmes also says Mycroft has no ambition and no energy; and that *If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived.* (GREE)
- On one occasion, Holmes is surprised that Mycroft is coming to visit him at 221B Baker St and says: *It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane. Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall -- that is his cycle.* (‘The Bruce-Partington Plans’, hereinafter BRUC)
- He takes snuff from a tortoise-shell snuff box and uses a large red silk handkerchief to brush away the spilt grains of tobacco. (GREE)
- Mr Melas, the Greek interpreter of the story of the same name, lodges on the floor above Mycroft (GREE). This is nothing to do with the character of Mycroft, of course, but may indicate a normal, multi-floor lodging house.
- Holmes says that Mycroft *has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living.* (BRUC)
- Mycroft remarks once that he extremely dislikes altering his habits. (BRUC)
- In one of the cases where Mycroft is involved, Holmes suggests that Mycroft could solve it himself. Mycroft replies: *Possibly, Sherlock. But it is a question of getting details. Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there.....and lie on my face with a lens to my eye--it is not my metier. No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up.* (BRUC)



Mycroft
Holmes

What does Mycroft look like?

- When Dr Watson meets Mycroft for the first time he describes him as a large and stout person, with light watery grey eyes and *a broad flat hand, like the flipper of a seal*. (GREE)
- Later, in another story, Watson says: *The tall and portly form of Mycroft Holmes was ushered into the room. Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in its lips, and so subtle in its play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross body and remembered only the dominant mind*. (BRUC)

What does Mycroft do for a living?

- At first, Holmes tells Watson that he *has an extraordinary faculty for figures and audits the books in some of the government departments*. (GREE)
- Later, Holmes is more forthcoming: *The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearing-house, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other*. (BRUC)
- Holmes also surprises Watson by telling him: *You are right in thinking that (Mycroft) is under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he is the British government*. (BRUC)
- He earns a salary of £450 a year. (BRUC)
- Holmes alludes to Mycroft holding a highly sensitive position in the government by telling Watson that he *... remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country*. (BRUC)

What is Mycroft's involvement in Holmes' cases

- Holmes says some of his most interesting cases have come to him through Mycroft. (GREE)
- Dr Watson has published two cases where Holmes was engaged by Mycroft to resolve – first appearing under the titles of ‘The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter’ and ‘The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans’.
- In a direct contradiction of both Holmes’ and Mycroft’s remarks about his dislike for physical action, Mycroft drove the carriage that took Watson from the Lowther Arcade to Victoria Station in ‘The Adventure of the Final Problem’.
- When Holmes went missing after the incident at Reichenbach Falls, and Watson thought him dead, Holmes kept in touch with Mycroft and obtained funds from him to live on. (‘The Adventure of the Empty House’, hereinafter EMPT)
- Also, during the three years after that fight with Professor Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls, where Holmes was thought to have died, Mycroft had presumably kept paying the rent on 221B Baker St, as Holmes tells Watson that *Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been*; and Watson later says *Our old chambers had been left unchanged through the supervision of Mycroft Holmes and the immediate care of Mrs. Hudson*. (EMPT)

These are all the known facts, from the indisputable published words of Dr Watson.

Sherlockian scholars over the years have been rightly curious about these comments from Holmes regarding his brother and have endeavoured to look for real-life people whom Arthur Conan Doyle might have used as a model and the basis for the character of Mycroft Holmes.

Dr Watson is known for his occasional reticence, or his disguising the true identity of some characters that appear in his accounts of Holmes' adventures. He has explained this a few times – for instance in 'The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger' he says:

When one considers that Mr. Sherlock Holmes was in active practice for twenty-three years, and that during seventeen of these I was allowed to cooperate with him and to keep notes of his doings, it will be clear that I have a mass of material at my command. The problem has always been not to find but to choose. There is the long row of year-books which fill a shelf, and there are the dispatch-cases filled with documents, a perfect quarry for the student not only of crime but of the social and official scandals of the late Victorian era. ... The discretion and high sense of professional honour which have always distinguished my friend are still at work in the choice of these memoirs, and no confidence will be abused.

Mycroft
visits Holmes
and Watson



Again, from 'The Adventure of the Second Stain', he writes:

If in telling the story I seem to be somewhat vague in certain details, the public will readily understand that there is an excellent reason for my reticence.

So Dr Watson is quite direct about his habit of preserving confidentiality where he thinks it is required and we can infer his occasional use of pseudonyms replacing the real names of clients, witnesses, and culprits alike, and altered place-names replacing the real locations.

So, who are the “models” that have been proposed as the possible basis for the character of Mycroft Holmes?

This article is not a comprehensive summary of all the theories that have been put forward over the years, rather it is a selection of interesting ideas that display appropriate rigour in presenting arguments for their thesis.

Let us first set some timelines – as we have seen, Mycroft is mentioned in four of Dr Watson's stories but it is only in two of those that we get any detail about him:

- 'The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter', set in, let's say, 1888 (the most popular date by the various Sherlockian chronologists) and published in 1893; and
- 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans', set in 1895 (no discussion there, Dr Watson says so) and published in 1908.

If we work on the assumption that Dr Watson and his literary agent, Arthur Conan Doyle, produced the stories shortly before their publication date then there is a period of some fifteen years between 'The Greek Interpreter', where Holmes first relays some information about his brother to Watson, and 'The Bruce-Partington Plans', where Holmes proffers more detailed information about Mycroft. This fifteen year gap has a bearing upon one of the proposed models for Mycroft, as we shall see later.

C. Auguste Dupin

The first model to look at is that of C. Auguste Dupin¹ – the three stories of the adventures of this French amateur detective by Edgar Allan Poe were published in the 1840s. Commentators have remarked upon the parallels between Sherlock Holmes and Dupin, and in *A Study in Scarlet*, Dr Watson's first account of his partnership with Holmes, he records a conversation they had in which Watson tells Holmes he reminds him of Poe's Dupin, at which remark Holmes firmly replies that he doesn't think very much of Dupin at all, considering him an "inferior fellow" and "showy and superficial".



Let us look instead at the similarities that have been put forward between Dupin and Mycroft:

- Dupin comes from an illustrious family. Mycroft and Sherlock's ancestors were country squires (maybe not illustrious, but certainly having a very high standing in their community). And let us not forget that Mycroft and Sherlock's grandmother was French.²
- The narrator of the Dupin stories tells us Dupin spends his daylight hours *reading, writing, or conversing*. Mycroft, we are told, receives *The conclusions of every (government) department ... and he is the central exchange, the clearing house, which makes out the balance*. Holmes gives an example of how Mycroft is used by his employers – a government minister needs information on a variety of separate topics, he could get individual advice about each from the respective department but instead goes to Mycroft, who can *focus them all and say offhand how each factor would affect the other*. It sounds like Mycroft spends his work day also reading, writing and conversing.
- Dupin's unknown narrator explains his powers of deduction by saying *The faculty of re-solution is possibly much invigorated by mathematical study...* Holmes at first tells Watson that Mycroft *audits the books in some of the government departments*. In light of Holmes' later comments about Mycroft's government role that may be partly true or may be a cover story. If Mycroft does carry out some review of government finances then naturally he would have to have a firm grasp of mathematics, a skill borne out by Holmes' remark that Mycroft had *an extraordinary faculty for figures*.
- They are both armchair detectives – Holmes says of Mycroft *If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived*. In the Dupin story 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' Dupin receives a visit from the Prefect of the Paris Police who is at a loss with a murder case and asks for help. Dupin's method is to sit in his armchair and study the police report and every newspaper account of note published in the three weeks since the body was discovered. After a week he offers his opinion to the police, which results in the case being solved.
- Dupin and Mycroft both enjoyed solitude. Dupin and his narrator friend lock themselves away in their apartment each day, never going out until nightfall. The narrator says *Our seclusion was perfect...(our) locality had been carefully kept a secret from my former associates; and it had been many years since Dupin had ceased to...be known in Paris. We existed within ourselves alone*. In

¹ Propp, William W., 'A Study in Similarity: Mycroft Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin', *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol 28, No 1, March 1978.

² See Holmes' comment in 'The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter'.

the morning, Mycroft went straight from his rooms to his office; in the evening he left his office and went direct to The Diogenes Club, and from the Club he returned straight home. The famous Diogenes Club was set up for the convenience of men who had *no wish for the company of their fellows. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one.* Solitude reigns supreme.

Samuel Pepys

The next contender for a model for Mycroft is Samuel Pepys.³ Pepys was active in the British civil service in the last half of the 1600s and was the author of a famous diary. Pepys was so highly regarded for his devotion to duty to the government that later scholars of his life concluded that, on occasion, he was the British Navy. That phrase will, of course, resonate with us, as something very similar was said about Mycroft.



Samuel Pepys

Born to modest parents, Pepys attended Cambridge University and then, at the age of 23, started working for his second cousin, a fellow named Edward Montagu, who rose rapidly in the government of Oliver Cromwell following the end of the English Civil War. Montagu was promoted to General at Sea, in charge of the Navy, and Pepys became his secretary. When King Charles II returned to the throne in 1660, Montagu and Pepys were retained in their naval positions, with Pepys becoming clerk to the Navy Board, where he became heavily involved in shipbuilding contracts, recruitment procedures (the Navy was the largest employer in the realm), and all matter of the provision of supplies for the Navy. Pepys was the first civil servant to keep detailed records of the Navy and he found many ways to economise in the huge expenses involved.

Pepys remained at his post in London during the Great Plague of 1665 while many others left for the countryside. Again, he stayed during the Great Fire the following year and was instrumental in advising the King in ways to stop the runaway blaze. Through two naval wars with Holland around this time Pepys defended the Navy Board at parliamentary hearings into the immense drain on the government's coffers in funding these conflicts.

In 1673 Pepys was appointed Secretary to the Admiralty and a year later was elected to Parliament where he introduced many reforms to ensure that the Navy became more professional and not just relying for its officers on family connections. Pepys remained in his Admiralty post, continuing his programme of naval reform, for another twenty years, when he fell foul of the conflicting Catholic and Protestant sides in the Royal Family and the government and was arrested twice for treason but released and allowed to live out a peaceful retirement.

Let us now return to Mycroft and Conan Doyle's remarks about him, via the pen of Dr Watson. In 1893, when 'The Greek Interpreter' was published, Watson is told by Holmes that Mycroft *audits the books in some of the Government departments.* This is a very brief and general statement, lacking in any detail. We are given a picture of a middle-aged civil servant with a relatively humdrum job, someone with a great brain but *no ambition and no energy*, according to his brother.

Fifteen years later, when 'The Bruce-Partington Plans' was published, Mycroft had virtually exploded in importance, becoming someone who was indispensable to the government and whose advice was sought in deciding national policy. Holmes explains this anomaly in the information he gives Watson

³ Moss, Robert A., 'The Mind Is the Man: Samuel Pepys as a Source for Mycroft Holmes', *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol 57, No 2, Summer 2007.

by saying: *I did not know you so well in those days. One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state.* (As an aside here, when ‘The Greek Interpreter’ took place [say 1888] Holmes and Watson had been sharing rooms and adventures together for six or seven years⁴ – just how long does Holmes need before he knows someone “well”?)

The theory that the civil service career of Samuel Pepys was the source of Mycroft’s incarnation as the British government in the Bruce-Partington story is based on some other writings of Conan Doyle’s. In 1894, the year after ‘The Greek Interpreter’ appeared in *The Strand*, a series entitled ‘Before My Bookcase’ of six short articles by Conan Doyle came out in a periodical called *Great Thoughts from Master Minds*. There is no mention of Pepys in these six articles.



Monument to Pepys in London

Thirteen years later, in 1907, one year before the publication of ‘The Bruce-Partington Plans’, Conan Doyle published *Through the Magic Door*, an essay on the charisma and charm of books. In it Conan Doyle invites readers to enjoy the greatest minds of all times through what they have left behind. Those previous six short articles are included in this book, which also contains an appraisal of Samuel Pepys, part of which reads:

(He was) a devoted civil servant, an eloquent orator, an excellent writer, a capable musician, and a ripe scholar who accumulated 3000 volumes – a large private library in those days – and had the public spirit to leave them all to his University.

The inference here is that Conan Doyle studied or refreshed his understanding of the life and career of Pepys between 1894 – after publication of ‘The Greek Interpreter’ – and 1907 – before publication of ‘The Bruce-Partington Plans’.

The Bruce-Partington story concerns missing plans for a new submarine for the Navy; a loyal civil servant meets his death attempting to prevent the theft of the plans; there is international intrigue; and the government is involved at the highest level. Conan Doyle had been writing about Pepys’ life not long before ‘Bruce-Partington’ was published – it is not much of a stretch to imagine he could have thought of Pepys as he wrote about Mycroft.

But here the similarity ends - Pepys was filled with energy, he was a social person, an avid admirer of women, and concerned with amassing personal wealth. Mycroft was, in all these respects, the exact opposite, or at least as reported by the known-to-be-discreet Dr Watson.

There is also no indication that Samuel Pepys’ physical characteristics were anything like Mycroft’s; however there was someone whom Arthur Conan Doyle met (before publication of ‘The Greek Interpreter’) who may have contributed to one or more of the images we have of Mycroft.

Oscar Wilde

In the late summer of 1889, Joseph M. Stoddart, from Philadelphia USA, the managing editor of *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, was in London to consider a British edition of his magazine, with a British editor and British contributors. He hosted a dinner at the elegant Langham Hotel and among those invited were two up-



Plaque in London noting the meeting between Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde

⁴ *A Study in Scarlet*, when they first met, is dated by chronologists as occurring in 1881 or 1882.

and-coming writers, both in their 30s, Arthur Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde. In his autobiography, Conan Doyle says *it was a golden evening for me* and wrote glowingly of Wilde's company. This dinner was four years before Conan Doyle would assist Dr Watson in the production of 'The Greek Interpreter'.

Wilde has been described by somebody who knew him well in the mid 1880s as follows:

*His appearance was not in his favour; there was something oily and fat about him that repelled... He had a trick...of pulling his jowl with his right hand as he spoke, and his jowl was already fat and pouchy... He was over six feet in height and both broad and thick set, he looked like a Roman Emperor of the decadence.*⁵



Contemporary drawing of Oscar Wilde

At their first meeting in 'The Greek Interpreter' Dr Watson described Mycroft thus:

His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery gray, seemed to always retain that far-away, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.



Oscar Wilde

Continuing on with that description of Oscar Wilde:

*I noticed almost immediately that his grey eyes were finely expressive; in turn vivacious, laughing, sympathetic; always beautiful.*⁶

In 'The Bruce-Partington Plans' Watson says of Mycroft:

Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in

its lips, and so subtle in its play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross body and remembered only the dominant mind.

And, again, Wilde's contemporary noted:

*At this time he was a superb talker, more brilliant than any I have ever heard in England, but nothing like what he became later. His talk soon made me forget his repellant (sic) physical peculiarities; indeed I soon lost sight of them so completely that I have wondered since how I could have been so disagreeably affected by them at first sight.*⁷

So, both Mycroft and Wilde had a similar effect on people of making them no longer see the massive body and concentrate only on the marvellous mind.

Finally, at their first meeting in 'The Greek Interpreter', Dr Watson writes that Mycroft said *I am glad to meet you, sir* and put out *a broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal*. Conan Doyle doesn't mention anything about the size of Wilde's hands from their meeting at that dinner, but he certainly knew about

⁵ Harris, Frank, *Oscar Wilde, His Life and Confessions*, ch 6, web edition, The University of Adelaide.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

seal flippers as he had served aboard an Arctic whaler in 1880, nine years previously. It could be said that contemporary caricatures of Oscar Wilde do show his hands as “flipper like”⁸

Right: Caricature of Wilde suggesting flipper-like hands



Reginald Brett

Another contemporary of Conan Doyle’s who has been put forward as a possible model for Mycroft Holmes was a fellow named Reginald Brett, who had the title of 2nd Viscount Esher.⁹ He was seven years older than Conan Doyle (Mycroft was seven years older than Sherlock. Coincidence?). Esher studied law at Cambridge and was called to the bar but never practised. He became private secretary to a powerful Liberal Party politician, Lord Hartington, and eventually entered Parliament himself as a local member but lost the taste for electoral politics after a short while and eventually lost his seat. He found his niche as a “behind the scenes” enabler or fixer in the government.

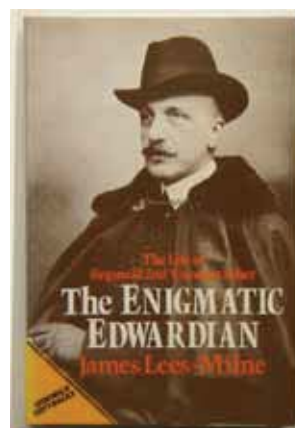
Appointed as Secretary to the Office of Works he became, with the help of influential friends, a confidant and adviser to the Royal Family. Queen Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, had died in 1861 and the Queen had virtually withdrawn from public life. The Queen’s remoteness and the perception that she did not care for her subjects, together with the agitation being caused by the actions of anarchists; the troubling question of Irish Home Rule; and the loss of confidence in Scotland Yard, particularly with the unsolved Jack the Ripper murders of 1888, created a toxic discontent in the British people and the monarchy was held in low esteem in the 1880s and 90s. Esher did much to dispel this by orchestrating the grandiose ceremonies to commemorate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 1887 and Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Previously such ceremonies had been rather staid and colourless affairs but through Esher’s efforts they became beautifully choreographed events with pomp and ceremony and did much to restore the public appeal of the monarchy.



That was Esher’s forté – when there was a problem for the government or the monarchy he worked away in the background with little or no fanfare until a solution was arrived at. He

is quoted as telling one of his sons that he always preferred not to have a formal position where he would have to take orders.¹⁰ Later, during the reign of Edward VII he was an important advisor to the King and to the Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour. He has been described at this time as the “hidden power behind the British government”¹¹

In reading the Schwartz article regarding Esher I was struck by an obvious question – if Esher was a backroom wheeler and dealer who kept out of the public eye, how would Arthur Conan Doyle have known enough about him to use him as a basis for Mycroft Holmes? The answer was to be found in Conan Doyle’s political affiliations – for most of his life these were with the Liberal Unionist Party and he unsuccessfully stood for



⁸ Scheideman, J. W., “Like the Flipper of a Seal,” *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol 25, No 1, March 1975

⁹ Schwartz, Joel S., ‘Who Was Mycroft Holmes?’, *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol 52, No 2, Summer 2007.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_Brett,_2nd_Viscount_Esher (accessed 14 March 2016).

¹¹ Quoted in Schwartz, Op Cit.

them as a candidate in two elections – 1900 and 1906. The Liberal Unionist Party was formed in 1886 as a breakaway from the Liberal Party, who had turned in favour of Irish Home Rule. When he was living in Southsea, at the time of writing *A Study in Scarlet*, Conan Doyle went to local meetings of the newly-formed Liberal Unionist Party and represented the Portsmouth branch at a Party conference in London in 1887. The Liberal Unionist Party was led by Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Hartington, the mentor of Viscount Esher. It is quite conceivable that through this political connection and his involvement in the Party organisation that Conan Doyle came to see and be impressed by the behind-the-scenes work of Esher.

The most indispensable man in the country

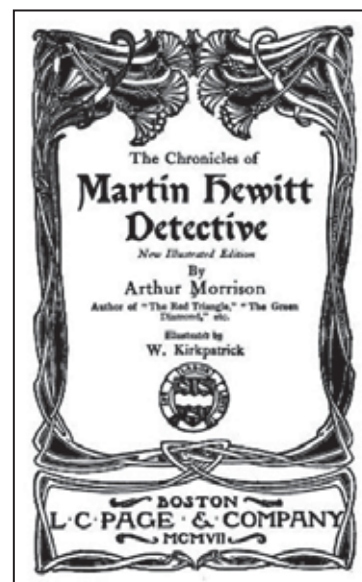
This article has so far looked at some models for the character and/or physical description of Mycroft Holmes, but what about his life and occupation prior to his becoming, in the words of his brother, *the most indispensable man in the country*? After all, no matter how smart one is, no one just walks into a job such as Mycroft had. Holmes told Watson in ‘The Bruce-Partington Plans’ that Mycroft’s position in the government *is unique. He has made it for himself. There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again.*

I seriously doubt that, even if Mycroft had started off as a government auditor, he would have progressed to the exalted position of being *the central exchange* for the formulation of national policy of the British government. An auditor is a figures person, they look at the income and expense and make sure it has all been accounted for properly and that, in a financial sense, everything is above board. Somebody who is checking the pounds, shillings and pence would not even get near sensitive policy documents concerning either of the *Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question.*

No, Mycroft must have attracted the attention of someone in government, or more likely someone in a government agency, who recognised that his unique talents could be utilised by the government in a highly specialist and secretive position, and that the cover for this would be employment as an auditor at the published salary for such a functional position. How, then, could Mycroft have come to the notice of the right people?

We know from comments by Holmes to Watson that Mycroft had better powers of observation and a greater facility for deduction than his younger brother. The theory was put forward in the 1950s that Mycroft in his younger years had also been self-employed as a private detective¹² and it was due to the successful outcome of one of more of his cases which solved some tricky problem for the government that his peculiar faculties were noticed and he was discreetly approached to take up alternative employment.

But if there was someone operating as a private detective who was smarter than Sherlock Holmes, how come we haven’t heard of him? Well, we have, but under a different name. The early exploits of Mycroft Holmes were recorded in 25 short stories by his friend, a journalist named Brett, and published with the assistance of Brett’s literary agent, Arthur Morrison, as a series about a former law clerk turned private investigator named Martin Hewitt.



¹² Cox, J. Randolph, ‘Mycroft Holmes: Private Detective’, *The Baker Street Journal*, Vol 6, No 4, October 1956.



In fact, the first seven of those short stories made their appearance in *The Strand* magazine between March and September 1894 and were illustrated by one of *The Strand*'s usual contract illustrators, a fellow named Sidney Paget. The stories were later collected and published in four volumes between 1894 and 1903.

What evidence is there that Martin Hewitt and Mycroft Holmes were one and the same?

Firstly, there's the mental capacity of the two men. In describing Mycroft, Holmes tells Watson *He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living*. In the Hewitt story 'The Case of Mr. Foggatt', Hewitt himself says: *This is one of the twenty thousand tiny things that few people take the trouble to notice, but which is useful for a man in my position to know.* So they were both able to retain immense amounts of data in their

brain, although obviously as he got older Mycroft was able to train himself to remember more than twenty thousand pieces of information.

Then there's the physical comparison – we are all familiar with Mycroft's appearance, he is a large man. In the published accounts of his cases, Hewitt is described variously as "tubby", "plump" or "stout".

What about the dates of the respective sets of stories – the Hewitt cases and Dr Watson's mention of Mycroft in his account of Holmes' work? Exact dates in the Hewitt stories are rarely quoted, though one story indicates that events relating to an earlier case of Hewitt's occurred in 1879. As we know, the first time Dr Watson meets Mycroft is in the case of 'The Greek Interpreter', which is usually dated by Sherlockian chronologists as occurring in 1888, so that provides a sufficiently ample time period for Hewitt/Holmes to have impressed his Whitehall contacts with his abilities and to shut up shop as a private investigator and take up employment in Her Majesty's government.

What sort of case could Hewitt/Holmes have taken on that involved the government as an interested party? Some of the Hewitt stories recorded by Brett are obvious contenders – there's 'The Case of the Dixon Torpedo', a story about a new torpedo being considered by the Navy where one set of design drawings had been stolen; 'The Case of the Lost Foreigner' is one where Hewitt foiled an Anarchist plot to deploy bombs in London hidden in loaves of bread; and 'The Case of the Admiralty Code', where a secret cipher disappeared from a safe in the Admiralty office. This last named case was one of a number linked to the mystery of The Red Triangle, where there was a threat of war between Britain and an unnamed great European country. There is plenty of scope there for Hewitt/Holmes to meet and work with people or agencies from Whitehall, the Foreign Office and the Admiralty.



Martin Hewitt on a case

Finally, we have undisputed evidence from somebody who met and studied both Mycroft Holmes and Martin Hewitt – Sidney Paget, who illustrated stories for *The Strand* magazine featuring both these men. Here is a comparison of two drawings by Paget (see top of next page) – Mycroft Holmes on the left and Martin Hewitt on the right – who can doubt they are not the same person some years apart?

It goes without saying that Mycroft, performing as he was a very sensitive job for the government, had to be very careful about the publication of the details of the investigations he had undertaken in his previous life, as it were. No doubt he came to an arrangement, perhaps with financial recompense, for his journalist friend Brett and his literary agent Morrison to hold off publication until the time was right and no damage to the government would occur. It seems that by 1894 sufficient time had passed to allow publication and Brett and Morrison were given the all clear.

Incidentally, it was probably a very opportune time for Brett and Morrison to start publishing these stories because Sherlock Holmes had gone over the Reichenbach Falls in 'The Final Problem' a few years previously and the public, not to mention magazine editors, were crying out for new detective stories to replace the monumental hole left by the demise of Holmes.

So, the stories of Mycroft Holmes' private investigator cases appeared in the public eye, but with one important change. Clearly Mycroft couldn't allow his real name to be used so Brett or Morrison came up with the pseudonym "Martin Hewitt" ... but kept the same initials of "M H".



Mycroft Holmes (left) and Martin Hewitt

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