

Dr Arthur Conan Doyle MD Edin.

2 Upper Wimpole Street, London

taken from 'Memories and Adventures' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, written in 1924

Chapter X - The Great Break

Spring 1891. 'I had a wife and child [by then] and ... we took rooms in Montague Place, and I went forth to search for some place where I could put up my plate as an oculist. I was aware that many of the big men do not find time to work out refractions, which in some cases of astigmatism take a long time to adjust when done by retinoscopy. I was capable in this work and liked it, so I hoped that some of it might drift my way. But to get it, it was clearly necessary that I should live among the big men so that the patient could be easily referred to me. I searched the doctors' quarters and at last found suitable accommodation at *2 Upper Wimpole Street* ... close to the classical Harley Street. There for £120 a year I got the use of a front room with part use of a waiting-room. I was soon to find that they were both waiting-rooms, and now I know that it was better so.'

Earlier editions of 'Memories and Adventures' place Conan Doyle's consulting room at 2 Devonshire Place, which still bears the inscription 'Conan Doyle House', - the original manuscript having been written: No 2 at the top of Wimpole Street.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's own papers, however, clearly show that his consulting room was at 2 Upper Wimpole Street. He took the room from April 1891 until the summer of that year.

'Every morning I walked from the lodgings at Montague Place, reached my consulting-room at ten and sat there until three or four, with never a ring to disturb my serenity. Could better conditions for reflection and work be found? It was ideal, and so long as I was thoroughly unsuccessful in my professional venture there was every chance of improvement in my literary prospects. Therefore when I returned to the lodgings at tea-time I bore my little sheaves with me, the first-fruits of a considerable harvest.

'A number of monthly magazines were coming out at that time, notable among which was *The Strand*, then as now under the editorship of Greenhough Smith. Considering these various journals with their disconnected stories it had struck me that a single character running through a series, if it only engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine. On the other hand, it had longed seemed to me that the ordinary serial might be an impediment rather than a help to a magazine, since, sooner or later, one missed one number and afterwards it had lost all interest. Clearly the ideal compromise was a character which carried through, and yet instalments which were each complete in themselves, so that the purchaser was always sure that he could relish the whole contents of the magazine. I believe that I was the first to realize this and *The Strand Magazine* the first to put it into practice.

'Looking round for my central character I felt that Sherlock Holmes, whom I had already handled in two little books, would easily lend himself to a succession of short stories. These I began in the long hours of waiting in my consulting-room. Greenhough Smith liked them from the first, and encouraged me to go ahead with them. My literary affairs had been taken up by that king of agents, A. P. Watt, who relieved me of all the hateful bargaining, and handled things so well that any immediate anxiety for money soon disappeared. It was as well, for not one single patient had ever crossed the threshold of my room.'

During that summer, however, Conan Doyle suffered ... 'a virulent attack of influenza, at a time when influenza was in its deadly prime. For a week I was in great danger, and then found myself as weak as a child, and as emotional, but with a mind as clear as crystal. It was then, as I surveyed my own life, that I saw how foolish I was to waste my literary earnings in keeping up an oculist's room in Wimpole Street, and I determined with a wild rush of joy to cut the painter and to trust for ever to my power of writing. I should at last be my own master. It was one of the great moments of exultation of my life. The date was in August, 1891.'