

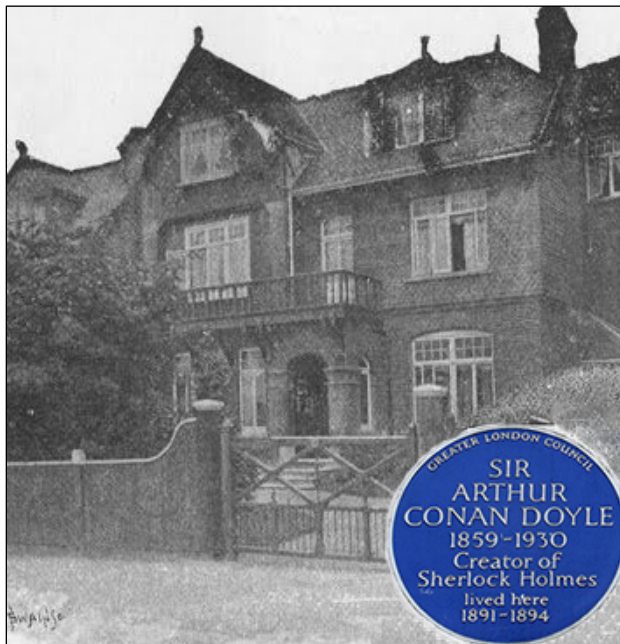
A Found Letter – A Missing Manuscript

By Marino C. Alvarez, Ed.D.

Marino C. Alvarez, Ed.D., BSI (Hilton Soames) is Professor Emeritus, Tennessee State University, a member of Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem, and author of *A Professor Reflects on Sherlock Holmes*.



It must have been disappointing for A. Conan Doyle to suffer the same fate as Mary Shelley when their manuscripts were lost in the post, and both had a try at rewriting what they had once written. (2) Especially for Doyle since *The Narrative of John Smith*, his first novel, and his second novel, *The Mystery of Cloomber*, did not achieve acclaim. At the British Library, a letter came to my attention revealing a missing manuscript that was on the mind of Conan Doyle in 1894. His letter to Miss McNally sets up its own mystery that parallels those of Doyle's in the Canon. In "The Adventure of the Priory School" Holmes states, "Before we start to investigate, let us try to realize what we do know, so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental." This letter posed such a dilemma. It stirred my imagination to first determine what is known about the



12 Tennyson Road, South Norwood (1)

letter itself, and then to speculate as to its importance, purpose, and intent.

A Found Letter

The mystery begins when Doyle returns to 12 Tennyson Road, South Norwood from Davos, Switzerland, and writes in his diary on April 16, 1894, Monday, "Back in Norwood." (3) On this day the letter is written to Miss McNally.

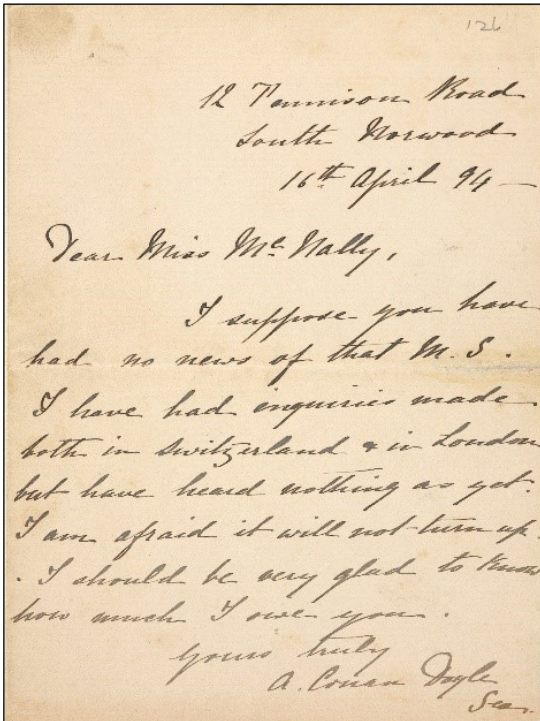
The letter reads as follows:

12 Tennyson Road
South Norwood
16th April 94

Dear Miss McNally,

I suppose you have had no news of that M.S. I have had enquiries made both in Switzerland & in London but have heard nothing as yet. I am afraid it will not turn up. I should be very glad to know how much I owe you.

Yours truly
A. Conan Doyle
Sec



So, what prompted the letter? There are several possibilities. One is that upon returning to South Norwood, Doyle was anxious to locate one of a collection of *The Stark Munro Letters* that was missing? Or perhaps it was an inquiry asking about another long-lost manu-script that had occupied his thoughts while in Switzerland?

Questions arise about: 1) the identity of Miss McNally, 2) the identity of the person who is Doyle's secretary on April 16, 1894, at South Norwood, 3) what may

have prompted Doyle to write to Miss McNally, and most importantly, 4) what is the missing manuscript that Doyle is trying to locate? Like Sherlock Holmes, who tirelessly gathers evidence and weights conflicting information, my attempt to answer the above questions began with my recent discovery of this 1894 letter in the British Library. It is within this perspective of tracing the letter to a missing manuscript that brought forth speculations about the letter's content and its possible importance to *The Stark Munro Letters* or *The Narrative of John Smith*.

Resolving the mystery around this letter demands stating the facts and assessing possibilities. First, it is a fact that it was written from Doyle's residence in South Norwood at a time when he had just returned from being in Davos, Switzerland with his wife Louise. Second, it suggests that the recipient was a typist. Third, it seems to represent the anxiety level of Conan Doyle when seeking to clarify the manuscript's whereabouts.

Anyone Know Miss McNally?

After establishing some basic details related to the letter, I set about to discover the identity of Miss McNally. A reading of several Conan Doyle biographies and a search of the *BSJ* articles show no mention of a Miss McNally. I began to assemble information by writing to persons who were familiar with Doyle's writings, and contacting fellow Sherlockians asking them to provide their perspectives and analyses of the problem at hand. Randall Stock replied to my query indicating that among his searches within the *SHJ*, *BSM*, the index to *Canadian Holmes*, and the Universal Sherlock Holmes, the name "Miss McNally" did not appear. Neither does the name appear in other Conan Doyle biographies or compendiums I consulted. (4)

I then contacted Dr. Justin Clegg, Curator of Illuminated and Liturgical Manuscripts at the British Library, about the particulars of the letter. He replied and suggested a possible connection between a Miss McNally and the family of Rand McNally who published some Sherlock Holmes material in the past. He also referred me to Donald Redmond's *Sherlock Holmes Among the Pirates* for a possible reference. This potential connection between Miss McNally as a possible family member affiliated with Rand McNally was a long shot possibility, but one worth investigating. I telephoned Rand McNally in Chicago and was told that the company had been sold and records were no longer available dating back to that time. Next, I consulted Donald Redmond's book for information about a Miss McNally, but to no avail. Writing to Christopher Redmond, he responded, "Looking in the Gibson and Green bibliography, and in my father's "Pirates" volume, I conclude that most likely everything they [Rand McNally] published was derived from editions put out by earlier

American publishers – in effect, piracies – and they probably did not have any direct contact with the author.” Likewise, Gabriele Mazzoni responded that “Rand McNally edited six different pirated copies of SIGN in Chicago from 1894 to 1901.” It was unlikely that this Doyle’s Miss McNally was part of the Rand McNally Company.

Who is Miss McNally?

Several respondents seemed to confirm that Miss McNally was a typist. Dan Stashower, in his reply, agrees that it was a typist even though he states that Doyle “had his own typewriter and that his sisters often did the typing for him.” He mentions that “Connie had abandoned him for a husband the previous year... so it’s certainly plausible amid all the travel and upheaval of that period that he would have paid for typing services.” Jon Lellenberg wrote that, “My first thought is that Miss McNally might have been a typist whose return of the manuscript she’d typed for him had gone astray.... It wouldn’t have been written from North America, he did not go there on his speaking tour until that following September. The previous month he had been in Switzerland for his wife’s health, saying that he expected to come during April, so I think he wrote this from the South Norwood address.” Catherine Cooke replied, “Miss McNally might be the person who typed the MS for submission to A.P. Watt or the Strand Magazine.... If so, she might have sent the transcripts separately from the MS, and only the latter was lost.... Maybe it was never recovered.”

So many loose threads to untangle and so few to grasp onto. The key to the letter’s query is Miss McNally. Since there is no address to where this letter was sent it becomes a puzzle that has more missing pieces to be assembled before it is solved. I again contacted Dr. Justin Clegg and asked how this letter came into the possession of the British Library. He named the person and the location, but no street address, who had donated this letter among others to the library. Fortunately, I was able to search and find a name and an address and took a chance that this was the person. I immediately sent a letter to Mrs. Morna Partridge asking if she was the person who donated the letter to the British Library, and if so, could she provide me with any information that would bring light upon the writing. She was very gracious in her reply but was unable to provide any information regarding this letter or the identity of Miss McNally. She wrote, “Unfortunately I have no information regarding the letter you mention or Miss McNally’s identity. I don’t remember how the letter came into my family’s possession. I expect it was with many other papers we were dealing with at the time & trying to find appropriate depositories.”

Of primary interest next was: who actually wrote the letter to Miss McNally? It seemed important that if I could determine the letter writer it

may provide some insight into the substance of the letter's content as related to a missing manuscript. Pierre Nordan, citing Adrian Doyle, states that Alfred Wood became Doyle's secretary in 1897. "When my father moved to Norwood, Wood was a frequent visitor and, about 1897, became his secretary. p. 275." Could this letter have been written by Wood when visiting prior to becoming Doyle's secretary? I sent a copy of the McNally letter to Michael Gunton, Senior Archivist at the Portsmouth City Library, and he responded that although he had shared the letter with his colleagues, the handwriting could not be identified. Further, after comparing the letter to those written by Alfred Wood, he concluded that it was not his handwriting. So another tangled thread: a letter, written *by* an unknown person *to* an unknown person. In my search of letters signed by A. Conan Doyle, Arthur Conan Doyle, D, ACD, and A C Doyle, none have I found, other than the McNally letter, that has "Sec" written beneath his signature. Thus, the someone else who wrote on behalf of Doyle is a mystery.

What is the Missing Manuscript?

Finding an answer to this question would establish whether or not the missing manuscript is significant I read the suggestions of Sherlockians I contacted. Some thought the letter may have been written asking about a story or the *Stark Munro* letters written while in Switzerland. A hypothesis that emerged was that Doyle might have sent a manuscript to a Miss McNally in London and/or to another location to be typed and that he had not received a reply. Thus, the absent reply causing him to write a letter asking the whereabouts of the manuscript and how much is owed when returning to South Norwood. There was skepticism, but a slim possibility was offered by a few, indicating that the letter referred to *The Narrative of John Smith*.

I then began to formulate several hypotheses to explain the possibility of why Conan Doyle was revisiting a lost manuscript. What if Doyle was reminded of the *Narrative* manuscript during/after his interview for *The Idler Magazine*, volume 2, January 1893, pp. 633-640? And again, when he was writing *The Stark Munro Letters* in Switzerland in August 1893. I wondered if either or both of these incidents prompted him, after 10 years, to write a letter to Miss McNally hoping that she could offer an explanation for this missing manuscript? Was this supposition plausible or just an arrow in search of a target?

We can assume that if the missing manuscript is one of *The Stark Munro Letters* it eventually found its way into the collection based on his diary and letter to his mother. On January 23, 1894, Conan Doyle writes his mother from Davos, Switzerland, "I am nearing the end of my book [*Stark Munro Letters*] --- could end it this week easily." (5) On 21 March 1894,

Doyle enters in his diary, Serial Rights “Stark Munro”. £ 200. (6) This entry written in the hand of Doyle appears before writing the McNally letter in April. Although not conclusive, his letter to his mother, and having the serial rights and money paid written in his diary, suggests that Doyle had completed *The Stark Munro Letters* and the book was ready for publication. *The Stark Munro Letters* is first published in *The Idler* between October 1894 and November 1895. I did determine that Chapter III appeared in *The South Australian Chronicle*, on 29 December 1894, by special arrangement with Doyle. (7) In his diary under Memoranda, End of 1894, Doyle writes, “Work done in 1894,” and lists among others, “Finished Stark Munro Letters.” (8) *The Stark Munro Letters* is first published in book form in 1895 by Longmans, Green & Co. in London, England.

What About *The Narrative of John Smith*?

Having read Doyle’s *Memories and Adventures* I was aware that he did not mention *The Narrative of John Smith*; instead naming *The Firm of Girdlestone* as his “first attempt at a connected narrative.” Pierre Nordon and John Dickson Carr both had access to Conan Doyle’s papers but also do not mention *The Narrative of John Smith* in their respective biographies. (9) While in the British Library I had read Conan Doyle’s entries from “Pages from Arthur Conan Doyle’s diaries (1894-1897), and there was no mention of *The Narrative of John Smith* or a Miss McNally. Andrew Lycett, questions whether Doyle ever sent the manuscript to the publisher, stating that “*The Narrative of John Smith* had been too didactic, and he had quietly secreted it, even pretending to have lost it.” (10) Hesketh Pearson who, too, had access to Doyle’s papers, did refer to the existence of the *Narrative* in his book, and felt that Doyle needed to have his name appear on this volume. He doubted that Doyle would have been dismayed if the lost manuscript reappeared in print and stated, “We [Pearson] cannot share his later thankfulness that the countless blue forms sent him by the Post Office were filled up in vain.” (11)

An inquiry into *The Narrative of John Smith* offered some tantalizing speculations, and acknowledging some lingering doubts, did not rule out the *Narrative* as an object of this letter. Although several scholars who responded to my query expressed misgivings about the letter referencing the *Narrative*, there were a few who offered a glimmer of this possibility. Brian Pugh has written a chronology of Doyle’s writings. (12) Responding to my supposition about the *Narrative* as the missing manuscript, Brian wrote, “A really plausible suggestion I believe.... I am not saying that this is what the letter is referring to, but it is the only connection that I can see. I could of course be completely wrong, it is a suggestion and worth

considering.... Until anything new turns up I would stand by what I said even though 10 years is a long time.” Gabriele Mazzoni was unacquainted with a Miss McNally, but did respond that “it is very suggestive for *The Narrative of John Smith* manuscript indeed.” I began to pull at a single fragile thread just to feel if it could sustain further scrutiny without causing embarrassment. I again reviewed Conan Doyle’s time frame and the letter sent to Miss McNally.

Conan Doyle’s *Juvenilia* appears in January 1893 in *The Idler* magazine. On page 637 of this publication Doyle references one of his first books, “Alack and alas for the dreadful thing that happened! The publishers never received it, the post office sent countless blue forms to say that they knew nothing about it, and from that day to this no word has ever been heard of it.... This one was called ‘The Narrative of John Smith,’ and it was of a personal-social-political complexion.” Clearly this *Narrative* was to be an important mark for Conan Doyle as an initial entry into the literary field. The writing of this first novel would have been memorable to establish his name among the literati. Thus, Doyle referencing this work in 1893 seems to indicate that the book was on his mind prior to writing the letter to Miss McNally in 1894.

The Writing of the Two Books

When we compare Conan Doyle’s *The Stark Munro Letters* to that of *The Narrative of John Smith*, we find similarities in that each evolved over a period of time. *The Stark Munro Letters* was finished in 1894. Martin Booth writes, “The book had been a long time in the making, starting off possibly as early as 1885 with some preliminary jottings to which he returned in 1891 and tinkered with until the book was finally completed.” (13) From this account, nine years elapsed, with interruptions, from starting the book to its completion. Richard Lancelyn Green and John Gibson state that in the Summer of 1893, while in Switzerland, Conan Doyle started writing *The Stark Munro Letters*. (14) However, if we are to take Booth’s timeline for this book, this must have been a continuation of Doyle’s previous writings first begun in 1885. In a similar manner, *The Narrative of John Smith* is written in 1883 in the early years of Doyle as a doctor. However, the *Narrative* is not without influence on Doyle’s subsequent works. Similar events preceding this incomplete rewriting of the *Narrative* are present, sometimes verbatim, in Doyle’s *The Stark Munro Letters*, *Through the Magic Door*, and several short stories. (15)

Discussion

Whether this is a letter of inquiry into the whereabouts of *The Narrative of John Smith*, an inquiry referring to a part of the collection of stories for *The Stark Munro Letters*, or some other manuscript, is open to discussion. While we can posit plausible explanations as to the circumstances surrounding the time and date of this letter, they may be equivocal.

As I imagine myself in Doyle's study, next to his mahogany desk, I reflect on my past writings. Having revisited papers, I have written in past years and not submitted for publication, it is not inconceivable that Conan Doyle may have been spurred to reconsider a long-lost manuscript with the goal of giving it one more try for its recovery. We do know that this manuscript lingered in his memory – given his second attempt to recreate the *Narrative* that was not completed some 10 years earlier, just as had the nine years lapsed before completing *The Stark Munro Letters*. If only I could have found a return letter from Miss McNally to A. Conan Doyle amongst the letters pertaining to Doyle at the British Library, these questions may have been answered definitively. Miss McNally's first name and location would have been known, and the circumstances of the missing manuscript and money owed may have been revealed. Perhaps the letter writer's identity could provide some further insight into the person to whom the letter was written.

While this letter and the person to whom it was written may not be important or of interest to others, to me it opens speculation into an array of possibilities. The discovery of this letter as a historical record does reveal a little-known fact. I did determine that this letter and existence of Miss McNally are not common knowledge. Perhaps some person with a familiarity of this letter will emerge and provide insight into its meaning and the mystery will be solved. Until then, I share Richard Sveum's reply, "but the mystery of Miss McNally continues."

Acknowledgements

I thank the following scholars for their assistance and comments received by each individual via personal communications. None should be associated with any suppositions I reached.

Phil Bergem, Peter Blau, Mattias Boström, Justin Clegg, Catherine Cooke, Thomas Dandrew, Michael Gunton, Roger Johnson, Michael Kean, Jon Lellenberg, Gabriele Mazzoni, Michael A. Meer, Morna Partridge, Peggy Perdue, Roy Pilot, Brian Pugh, Christopher Redmond, Steven Rothman, Daniel Stashower, Randall Stock, Richard Sveum.

NOTES

(1) This photograph appeared in Harry How's interview of Conan Doyle in *The Strand*, August 1892. It was taken by Joseph John Elliot and Clarence Edmund Fry. Their firm of Elliott & Fry was first located at 55 & 56 Baker Street, London.

(2) In January 1831, Mary Shelley began writing *Lodore*, part of which she had to re-write in 1834 after a section was lost either in the post or by her publishers. The novel was published in 1835.

<http://victorianweb.org/previctorian/mshelley/bio.html>

(3) Pages from Arthur Conan Doyle's diaries (1894-1897). British Library.

(4) Martin Booth, *The Doctor The Detective & Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997. Mattias Boström, *From Holmes to Sherlock*, New York: The Mysterious Press, 2017. John Dickson Carr, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949. Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories & Adventures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. Alistair Duncan, *The Norwood Author: Arthur Conan Doyle and the Norwood Years (1891-1894)*, London: MX Publishing, 2010. Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes*, New York: Penguin, 1984. Charles Higham, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976. Mary Hoehling, *The Real Sherlock Holmes: Arthur Conan Doyle*, New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1965. Jacqueline A. Jaffe, *Arthur Conan Doyle*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987. Russell Miller, *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle*, London: Harvill Secker, 2008. Pierre Nordon, *Conan Doyle: A Biography*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967. Ronald Pearsall, *Conan Doyle: A Biographical Solution*. Glasgow, Scotland: Richard Drew Publishing, 1989. Hesketh Pearson, *Conan Doyle*. White Lion Publishers Limited, London, 1961. Michael Sims, *Arthur and Sherlock*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999.

(5) Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, and Charles Foley, *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, New York: Penguin Press, 2007, p. 326; See also Nordon, p. 38. Citing The Conan Doyle Biographical Archives.

(6) Pages from Arthur Conan Doyle's diaries (1894-1897). Part of a collection at the British Library, London.

(7) *The South Australian Chronicle*, Chapter III, *The Stark Munro Letters*, 29 December 1894 issue with the heading Edited and Arranged by A. Conan Doyle and Published by special arrangement with the author. All rights reserved. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/93853117>

(8) Pages. MEMORANDA.

(9) Carr, 1949; Nordon, 1967.

(10) Andrew Lycett, *The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes: The Life and Times of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, New York: Free Press, 2007. p. 116; see also, pp. 102-103.

(11) Pearson, p. 106. Also, a view shared by Lellenberg, Stashhower, and Foss, 2007, pp. 8 and 9.

(12) Brian Pugh, *A Chronology of the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, London: MX Publishing, 2014. Revised and Expanded Edition.

(13) Booth, 1998, p 193.

(14) Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson, *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

(15) Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, and Rachel Foss, (eds.), *Arthur Conan Doyle, The Narrative of John Smith*, London: British Library, 2011. Introduction, p. 9.

The Second Stain

By Clarissa Aykroyd

Holmes is the magician. The carpet flies
in a spiral, devoured by the darkness.
He's on his hands and knees, clawing at clues.

Watson holds his ground. He's the assistant
to the Master, yes, but watchful Watson
understands how reality spins and

he knows this game. Holmes is in a frenzy,
like some crazed god and even when his hands
close on empty space in that secret place,

he can smell victory, he can taste it,
this man with all the senses of a wolf.
Now you don't see it. Now you do. London

will show the hidden world to Holmes again,
make no mistake. *That pale blue envelope
sealed in red? Not gone. Just invisible.*

*I'll pull it from thin air for your pleasure.
You'll remember me by this.* And Watson,
the watcher, will write his own illusions.