

A Toast to Mrs. Hudson

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Mrs. Hudson. The very name invokes a picture in the mind of every Sherlockian. A mature woman; refined, yet not aristocratic; nurturing, yet not a nuisance; traditional in her outlook, yet daring enough to have the most unorthodox of tenants; tolerant and patient, yet not without her limits.

Mrs. Hudson symbolizes the very image of British womanhood in the time in which she lived. Queen Victoria was the ruler of an empire, forced to deal with events and strong personalities as she encountered them. Mrs. Hudson was the ruler of her own little empire, the house at 221B Baker Street, and she admirably dealt with events and truly unpredictable personalities as she, sometimes suddenly, encountered them.

And yet, Mrs. Hudson is an enigma. There is no physical description of her, and we don't even know how old she was. We are told only that she possessed a "stately tread," that she had "cronies" who might be expected to visit, that she was an "excellent" cook. From these faintest of clues, we have built an image of her, and that image is invariably a positive one, of a kindly and compassionate woman who nevertheless had a constitution iron enough to manipulate the bust of Sherlock Holmes as he laid his trap for Colonel Sebastian Moran, knowing full well that her own life was in mortal danger.

Her personal story is a mystery as well. Who was Mr. Hudson? Was he dead? Had he abandoned her? Had she shown him the door? How did Mrs. Hudson come to possess the house on Baker Street? How did she spend those "princely" sums that Holmes paid her? Who was Mrs. Turner, and why was she in Mrs. Hudson's house? What became of her when Holmes retired to his beekeeping?

Perhaps all of this is just as well. We don't need answers to any of these questions. We need no verbal picture painted of her, constraining or changing or

perhaps polluting our own idealized vision. We don't need to know where she came from or where else life might have taken her, if anywhere.

Mrs. Hudson belongs at 221B Baker Street, and there alone. If Dr. Watson was "the one fixed point in a changing age," then Mrs. Hudson is the one fixed point in a place that never changes: that house in Baker Street, where it is "always 1895."

So, lift your glasses and celebrate the past life and immortal future of a great and wonderful woman:

To Mrs. Hudson!