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**NON-  
FICTION**

**BIOGRAPHY**



Hesketh Pearson  
**Arthur  
Conan Doyle**  
**A Life**

Read by  
**Tim Pigott-Smith**

NA224212D

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1	A British Celt	6:56
2	'At the age of nine...'	7:18
3	Some odd jobs	8:37
4	'Meanwhile, those sixpences had to be earned...'	6:37
5	'During the last year of his study at Edinburgh...'	7:35
6	Doctor Budd	7:46
7	'Budd's carriage pulled up on the Hoe...'	10:47
8	Doctor Doyle	11:10
9	While waiting	4:42
10	'Doyle never made a penny more than £25...'	7:48
11	To Berlin and Austria	3:06
12	Sherlock Holmes	7:19
13	'The notion of writing a series of short stories...'	9:46
14	Friends and Fame	9:52
15	The Brigadier	4:38
16	The Man of Action	4:30
17	On to Cairo	4:22
18	In South Africa – the Boer War	4:24
19	Titanic	8:26
20	The Man in the Street	6:46
21	The Last Phase	7:44
22	'Doyle's home life was exceptionally happy...'	7:41

**Total time: 2:38:05**

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# Hesketh Pearson

## Arthur Conan Doyle

### A Life

Arthur Conan Doyle was once described as 'the most prominent living Englishman', so it is not surprising to discover that biographies of Conan Doyle proliferated in the decades after his death in 1930. This 'teller of tales', who lived an upright life based on his own personal code of chivalry and who supported causes both worthy and lost alike, seemed something of an enigma to his friends and to the public.

He had created Sherlock Holmes, one of the handful of truly immortal characters of fiction known the world over, and biographers have searched the details of Doyle's life ever since to prove that the writer himself was indeed Holmes, and possessed his qualities. The evidence though seems to indicate he was more of a Dr Watson! The paradox of a writer who could display the mental incisiveness of his detective on the page, yet also believe in spiritualism, which one can never imagine Holmes taking seriously, fascinates his biographers to this day.

One of the latest biographies, *Teller of Tales* by Daniel Stashower (1999), attempts to put Doyle's belief in spiritualism, to which he devoted the last part of his life, in its social context.

The mass deaths of World War I had encouraged the desire for belief in, and contact with, the spirit world. One of the earliest Doyle memoirs was written by a spiritualist colleague, the Rev. John Lamond in 1931. In 1945 Doyle's son Adrian wrote from the family perspective in *The True Conan Doyle*, and in 1949 John Dickson Carr, himself a writer of crime stories, wrote what some aficionados think is the definitive biography. He was lucky to have access to Conan Doyle's family papers before they became enmeshed in a lawsuit which continues to this day, and has limited the availability of this source material to subsequent biographers. There is apparently a vast amount of material, as Doyle had a 'horror of destroying documents'.

Hesketh Pearson's biography appeared in

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1943, the same decade as Adrian Conan Doyle's and John Dickson Carr's. It is written in his usual popular and jaunty style making it a 'good read'. Pearson draws heavily on Conan Doyle's own autobiographical writings *Memories and Adventures* published in 1924, and is therefore full of anecdotes from Doyle himself, giving a strong sense of his personality, which was a mixture of humour and earnestness.

Pearson also intersperses the recollections of Doyle's family and friends, and seemingly knew Doyle personally. Perhaps because of this close association with the Doyle circle, he skirts round some of the issues raised by later biographers. Doyle's long platonic friendship with Jean Leckie for instance, who became the second Mrs Conan Doyle, is referred to enigmatically: 'This marriage in September 1907 to Miss Jean Leckie, whose family he had known for some time, made a new man of him'; and his great obsession with spiritualism is treated tactfully as something of an embarrassment.

Doyle's greatest faux pas, his belief that a faked photograph of fairies by two little girls in Cottingley was genuine, receives a one sentence mention – 'Doyle believed in fairies, but did not think their presence was proved until someone had made a photograph of them'. Such sensitive issues

in Doyle's life had to wait for later biographers to explore, when the necessity to tread carefully whilst friends and family were alive, had passed.

Pearson's Doyle comes across as a very likeable fellow, who thought of himself as a complex character. Perhaps he was right, for he certainly retains a fascination for twenty-first-century biographers. The Internet is filled with biographies and theses on his works, ranging from the straightforward in a series called *Great Scots* (which also includes an introduction to the geography and culture of Scotland) to the intellectual in *A Post-Colonial Canonical and Cultural revision of Conan Doyle's Holmes Narratives*. How Holmes would have relished that title!

And so the quest for the real Conan Doyle continues until, as the great man said himself: 'you have eliminated the impossible; whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.'

## Notes by David Timson

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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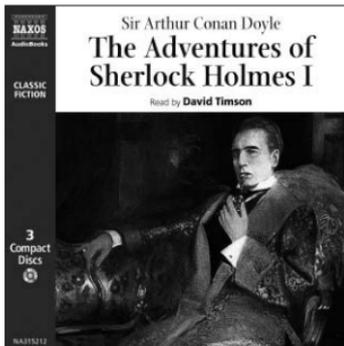
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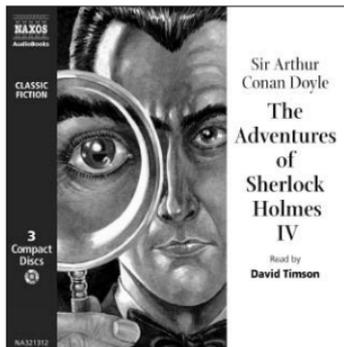
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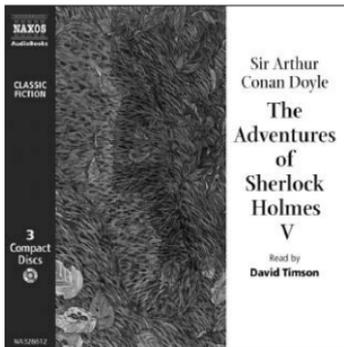
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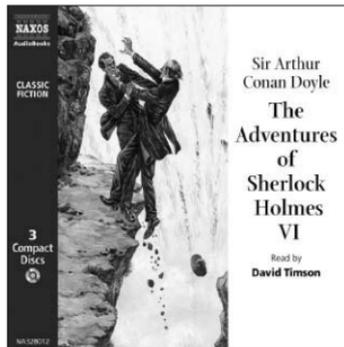
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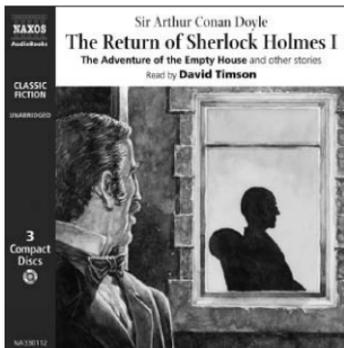
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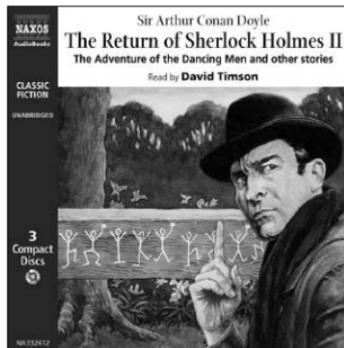
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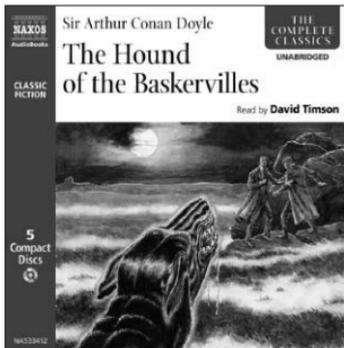


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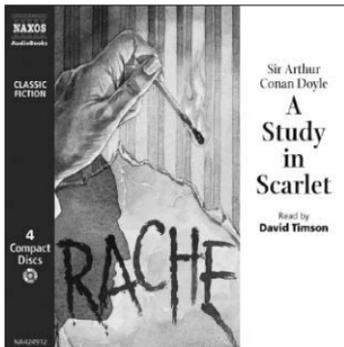
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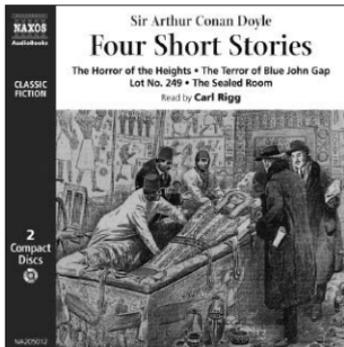
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Hesketh Pearson

# Arthur Conan Doyle A Life

Read by **Tim Pigott-Smith**

Conan Doyle (1859-1930) will always be remembered for the character of Sherlock Holmes. But he was a prolific writer – of short stories, of science fiction and historical fiction – including *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* and *The Lost World*. In his comprehensive biography, Pearson considers how Doyle's life is reflected in his books – including his background as a doctor and his enduring (and public) belief in spiritualism.



**Tim Pigott-Smith's** busy acting career has covered stage, TV and film, and extensive work on radio and audiobook. His films have varied from *Remains of the Day* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to *Escape to Victory* and *The Four Feathers*. He has spent many seasons with the RSC and the National Theatre, the plays including *Shakespeare*, *Amadeus*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Major Barbara*. *Fame is the Spur*, *Jewel in the Crown* and *Kavanagh QC* are among his TV credits. For Naxos AudioBooks he has also read *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction* and has narrated *They Saw It Happen*.

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