

A Sherlockian Toast (posted 2016-9-22)

“Toast to Mrs Hudson”

Given at the dinner of the Sons of the Copper Beeches, April 15, 2016

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The quote from Watson in “The Dying Detective”, “Mrs Hudson, the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, was a long-suffering woman,” contains the only two facts of which we can be certain: Mrs Hudson was a landlady and she was a woman. Everything else is conjecture. On stage in only 11 of 60 stories, she speaks in but three. She goes unnamed in the first published story and is misnamed in the third. Her only physical description is that her footfalls are more stately than the patter of the maid’s. The only clue to her antecedents is that her idea of breakfast is comparable to a hypothetical typical Scotswoman. The title of “Mrs” would have been given to Hudson for her position in society as a businesswoman, regardless of her marital status. From these threads of dubious quality, Sherlockians over the decades have woven yards of whole cloth. I do not worship at the altar of this romantic creation. Millions of anonymous women have had to navigate the brutal shoals of patriarchy and Holmes’ landlady must have been one of them. We know Mrs Hudson’s name but little else. With esteem, respect and gratitude for the life we can only imagine she lived—the unknown Mrs Hudson.