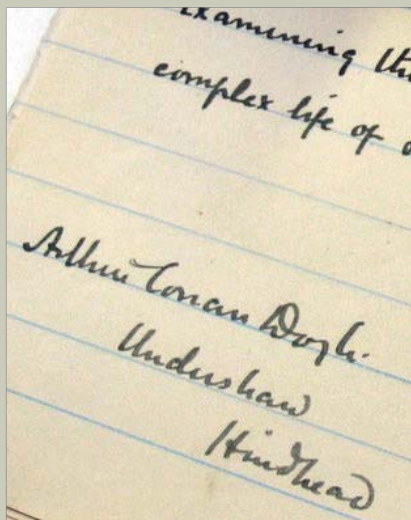




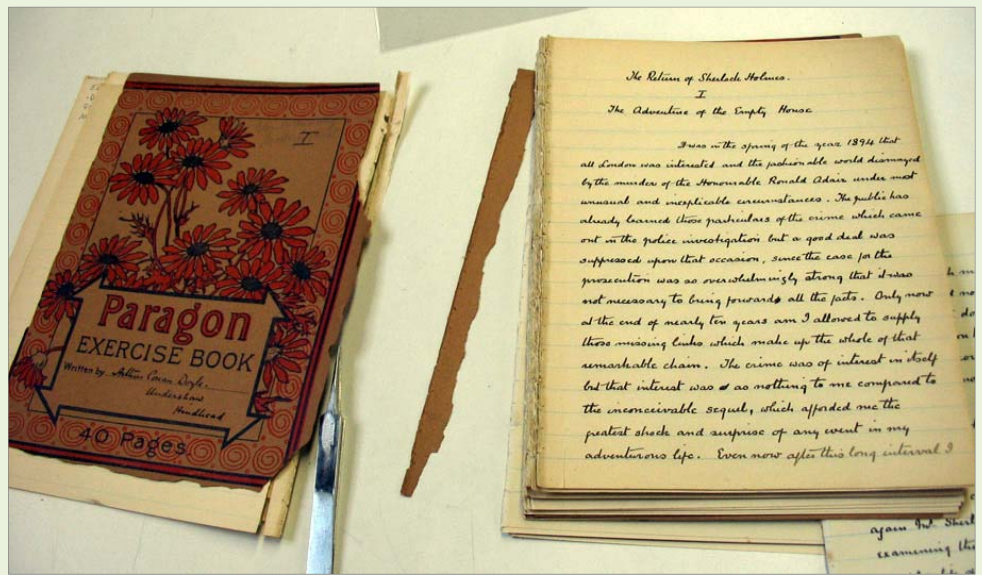
FOCUS

September 2010

"It was in the spring of the year 1894 that all London was interested and the fashionable world dismayed by the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair under most unusual and inexplicable circumstances...."



Top: First page of the first notebook / Bottom: Close-up of Arthur Conan Doyle's signature



Above: Cover and pages of the first composition book in the volume / Top left: The cover of the third notebook, during conservation treatment / All images: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The adventure of the empty house*: autograph manuscript. [1903]. EL4 .D754e 903MS. Rosenbach Museum & Library

...So begins Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original manuscript for *The Adventure of the Empty House*, an episode in his series *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. The 1903 manuscript, whose notebook covers were fragmented, acidic, and brittle and whose pages had minor soiling and edge discoloration, recently left the Rosenbach Museum & Library to receive treatment at the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA).

Doyle first featured Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in the 1888 novel *A Study in Scarlet*, written while Doyle, a doctor, waited for patients at his then struggling medical practice. The detective was a hit with readers, and Doyle continued to feature Holmes in stories written for *The Strand* magazine. Eventually, Doyle felt that Holmes was overshadowing his more serious writings, and in 1893, he had Holmes fall to his death in *The Final Problem*. Pressure from disgruntled fans brought the detective back in 1901, when *The Strand* published the first episode of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The magazine began serializing *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* in 1903, and several books followed in the next decade. *The Adventure of the Empty House* reveals that Holmes had only faked his death in *The Final Problem* to hide from his many dangerous enemies.

At the end of his life, Doyle knew that Sherlock Holmes would outshine his other works; his poetry, plays and historical novels were nearly forgotten even before his death in 1930. This was due in part to Doyle's dedication to spiritualism, which damaged his reputation in the later years of his life; readers of the beloved detective stories found it odd that the creator of Holmes, a character dedicated to reason and logic, could develop such a passionate interest in the paranormal. But even though Doyle thought his Sherlock Holmes stories inferior to his other works, "Sherlock Holmes" and "Dr. Watson" are now household names almost world-wide. Holmes secured Doyle's place in history as an innovative force in the once little-known genre of crime fiction.

To preserve Doyle's original *The Adventure of the Empty House*, Conservation Assistant Richard Homer removed the cover of the textblock, which consisted of three composition books bound together, then disbound and surface cleaned it. He lined the composition book covers with acrylic-toned mulberry paper and mended their pages. Finally, Richard sewed the volume and lined the spine in order to attach the volume to its vellum cover, which first needed flattening and minor repairs.