

EMBARGO: 00.01 6 July 2006

4 July 2006

Experts urge English Heritage to save Conan Doyle's Surrey home

The Victorian Society has submitted an urgent application for upgrading Undershaw, the home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to Grade I-listed status following an application to divide the house into thirteen dwellings.

The society was contacted by John Gibson, a Conan Doyle bibliographer and local resident, who was concerned that the Grade II-listed house, commissioned by Conan Doyle in 1896, would fall prey to developers. Although planning permission for the original application was refused in May 2006, Listed Building Consent for subdivision may still be granted by Waverley Borough Council, leaving Undershaw vulnerable to future schemes. Enlisting the help of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, and Conan Doyle experts around the world, the Victorian Society is encouraging fans to lobby the Council to refuse Listed Building Consent.

'It's vital that the Council refuses Listed Building Consent,' said Dr Kathryn Ferry, Southern & Welsh Architectural Adviser of the Victorian Society. 'Any scheme for subdivision could be hugely damaging and would mean that this vital part of our literary heritage is lost to the public. But this is just the start. This application certainly won't be the last unless we can get Undershaw recognised as the internationally significant monument it is.'

The home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his wife Louisa for almost ten years, Undershaw formed the backdrop for many significant literary and historical events. It was at Undershaw that Conan Doyle wrote his most famous work *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) and two years later resurrected one of the most famous literary characters of all time in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*. More recently, Julian Barnes set part of his Booker Prize nominated novel, *Arthur & George*, there.

Bram Stoker, who interviewed Conan Doyle at Undershaw, noted that: 'It is so sheltered from cold winds that the architect felt justified in having lots of windows, so that the whole place is full of light. Nevertheless, it is cozy and snug to a remarkable degree, and has everywhere that sense of 'home' which is so delightful to occupant and stranger alike.'

These associations put Undershaw on a par with Charles Darwin's Downe House, a Grade I-listed house which, according to the list description, 'would be Grade II on architectural grounds but is Grade I for historical associations.' For this reason, the Victorian Society has urged English Heritage to upgrade it.

'Undershaw was the home of one of the best-known authors in the English language,' said Dr Kathryn Ferry, Southern & Welsh Architectural Adviser of the Victorian Society. 'It's time we recognised its importance.'

-ends-

PHOTOS AVAILABLE

For further information contact:

Ann Morgan
Community Engagement Officer
community@victoriansociety.org.uk
Direct line 020 8747 5897 /
07973 842 113

Dr Kathryn Ferry
Southern & Welsh Architectural Adviser
kathryn@victoriansociety.org.uk
Direct line 020 8747 5893

Nick Utechin
Editor
Sherlock Holmes Journal
01865 766 448

John Gibson
Conan Doyle Bibliographer
01372 453 147

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- 1. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was the best-selling author of the 1890s.** Today he has an international cult following with over 400 societies dedicated to his life and works.
- 2. Built in 1897 by architect Joseph Henry Ball, Undershaw was the home of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his family until 1906.** Conan Doyle commissioned the house in 1896 after his wife, Louisa (Touie), was diagnosed with tuberculosis and given a few months to live. Her condition improved during a stay abroad and in 1895 Conan Doyle paid £1,000 for a plot of land at Hindhead, known as a good place for convalescence because of its healthy micro-climate. Biographical accounts suggest that Conan Doyle drew initial plans for his home before commissioning his friend, Joseph Henry Ball, to complete the design.

3. Among many interesting features, Undershaw is notable for its stained glass windows showing crests from the Conan Doyle family and for being the first house in the area to have its own electrical plant.

4. The Victorian Society is the national charity campaigning for the Victorian and Edwardian historic environment. It fights to preserve important Victorian and Edwardian buildings and landscapes so that they can be enjoyed by this and future generations. It provides expert advice to churches and local planning authorities on how Victorian and Edwardian buildings and landscapes can be adapted to the way we live now, while keeping what is special about them. It also advises members of the public about how they can help shape the future of their local Victorian and Edwardian buildings and landscapes. It provides information to owners of Victorian and Edwardian houses about how they can better look after their precious buildings. It helps people understand, appreciate and enjoy the architectural heritage of the Victorian and Edwardian period through its publications and educational programmes.

5. The Victorian Society, 1 Priory Gardens, LONDON W4 1TT

Telephone 020 8994 1019

Facsimile 020 8747 5899

Web www.victoriansociety.org.uk