

## Muriel St Clare Byrne collection

The Elizabethan scholar, dramatist and critic MURIEL St CLARE BYRNE O.B.E. was born in 1895, and educated at Belvedere School, Liverpool, and at Somerville College (1914-17), where she read English. She was an assistant tutor and a coach at Somerville, and a lecturer at Bedford College, London. She also taught at R.A.D.A. and was a member of the governing body of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Her first published work was a history of Somerville (1921); she also wrote on Elizabethan life and theatre and in 1942 her memoir *Common or Garden Child* was published. Miss Byrne collaborated with her friend and Somerville contemporary Dorothy Leigh Sayers in writing the play *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937). Her life's work, however, was the six-volume *The Lisle Letters*, which appeared in 1981 after nearly 50 years' research.

At Somerville Miss Byrne was described as 'an awfully nice child who writes quite good stuff' by an officer of the Mutual Admiration Society, to which she applied for membership. She was later to become an Honorary Fellow of the College. She died in 1983, at the age of 88.

This collection was donated to Somerville by Muriel St Clare Byrne; she also bequeathed books and silver plate to Somerville in her Will. The ms. of *The Lisle Letters* & associated papers were deposited at the College by Chicago University Press (housed in seven separate archive boxes) in 1982. The following selective catalogue lists the core of the collection, arranged into nine categories:

- 1 Correspondence
- 2 Personal Papers
- 3 Somerville
- 4 Dorothy L Sayers
- 5 Marjorie Barber
- 6 The Lisle Letters
- 7 MSB's other work
- 8 Miscellany
- 9 Photographs

A summary of the remaining collection is also available.

*For additional photographs of Muriel St Clare Byrne, see P10/17/1-5 (0376-7).*

## **MSB 1 Correspondence** (those associated with Somerville appear in bold)

1/1 Family letters to Muriel from Aunt Ida, 1926 & 7; cousin Marjorie (nd); A St Clare Byrne (1937); niece Jennifer (nd).

1/2 School. Correspondence between MSB & the Headmistress of Belvedere School, 1955.

1/3 Somerville. Correspondence with the College or College Principals, 1921-1979, including als. from **Helen Darbishire, Margery Fry & Janet Vaughan**.

1/4 Bedford College. Correspondence about the staging of a play by MSB, *No Spring till Now*, performed on the centenary of Bedford College in 1949, with some associated material; also a letter inviting MSB to become a governor of the College in 1968.

1/5 Work-related Correspondence. A selection of letters arranged chronologically (1929-1973) from editors, publishers &c. about the commission of work from MSB.

1/6 Mary Aeldrin Cullis (b.1883, a colleague at Bedford College, London, and apparently Miss Byrne's lover): 15 letters signed 'S' [Cullis] from Madeira & with 4 photographs of 'S' enclosed (a few letters dated 1937-8); 13 from elsewhere (signed 'S', 'MAC', 'A' & Aeldrin, 1933-55), a postcard & 2 fragments. ***\*These are highly personal, and include a note requesting that they be destroyed unread\****.

1/7 Private Matters. Letters from solicitors, doctors &c., 1937-1979, about the purchase of property, Wills and bequests, tax affairs, MSB's gynaecological problems &c..

1/8 V.I.P.s Letters 1927-67 (arranged alphabetically by correspondent) from director & librettist Eric Crozier ('Eri'), author EM Delafield, social reformer Eglantyne Jebb, Australian scholar Ernest Oliphant, bibliographer Alfred Pollard, academic and author Barbara Reynolds (biographer of DL Sayers), historian AL Rowse, historian GM Trevelyan and his wife Janet, poet, playwright & asst. editor of *The Nineteenth Century and After* Helen [Waddell] (a close friend). See 4/1 for a postcard from **DL Sayers**.

1/9 Friends. Letters 1932-74 (arranged alphabetically by correspondent) from 'KB', Maud Burton, 'Da', Elaine, Emily, Louise Hampton, Mabelle, Nettie, **Dorothy [Dorothea] Rowe** (matric. 1912), Posy S., Sidney S--- [indecipherable], Dorothy Margaret Stuart, Katherine Ryland Todhunter, Violet, AW, Clifford Williams. See 5/1 for letters from **Marjorie Barber**.

## **MSB 2 Personal (Boxes a, b & c)**

2/1 Partial family trees, correspondence & newspaper cuttings relating to MSB's family history, the disbursement of Estates &c. 1778-1976. The 1778 letter is to Peggy Morison of Greenock and is full of charming pictograms. Another letter dated 1797 is to an address in Ireland.

2/2 Scrap-book, morocco-bound (with loose boards) belonging to Kate Chatteris (MSB's Grandmother) 1857-62; with watercolours, greetings cards, ms. verses, photographs, reproduced illustrations &c. (in separate box).

2/3 Letters from MSB's father to her mother, 1892-1916; documents relating to her parents' Estate; her father's birth certificate (1869), their wedding certificate (1894) & her mother's death certificate (1923).

2/4 MSB personal documents, biographical material, certificates &c. including birth certificate, 'Baby's Record Book', Exam & Degree certificates from Somerville, 'Professeur Honoris Causa, Université Libre d'Art Théâtral' (1950), Council of the Shakespeare Theatre Trust (1968); Wills & associated notes (1940-80), passport, material relating to personal finances; two Belvedere School/Liverpool High School booklets; copy of the order of service for MSB's Thanksgiving Service, 1984.

2/5 Two ms. editions of school magazines by MSB.

2/6 Testimonials, including several by **Helen Darbishire, Emily Penrose, A M Bruce.**

2/7 MSB's OBE (1955): messages of congratulation from (inter alia) **Helen Darbishire** (honoured in the same list) and 'Jebbie' (Eglantyne Jebb).

2/8 Diaries: pocket diaries 1928-83. Some mildewed; with occasional working notes.

### **MSB 3 Somerville** (see also 1/3, 4/5 & Photos)

3/1 Three Somerville postcards written by MSB from College (Hall dining room, and two of the Library), 1914; Jubilee menu and order of service, 1929, the former signed by **Dorothy H Rowe, Vera Farnell, Florence Campbell, Marjorie Barber, Gaynor Lewis, [?], Beatrice Rose, Doris Turner, Una Ellis-Fermor** & MSB; Somerville postcard album ( see P24/10, 0332-8, c.1914); 2 newspaper cuttings re Somerville, 1954 & 1979 (the latter scanned in 'Archival Documents'); misc. documents about the ASM, Memorial Funds &c.: High Table seating plan for the Centenary Eve dinner, 12 October 1979; a poem about Oxford (undated).

3/2 8 lecture-notebooks, dating from MSB's first term at Somerville (Michaelmas 1914).

### **MSB 4 Dorothy Leigh Sayers** (see also Photos)

4/1 Ms. postcard to MSB, signed DLS, Witham 14.5.45, reporting on some research on cherubim.

4/2 Correspondence about MSB lecturing on DLS and on the publication of 'The Sayers Review', 1976; letter from Bonnie Heintz proposing a Biography, 1976; ms. notes by MSB on 'Wimsification in the Elizabethan Manner' and the copy of a letter from CW Scott-Giles to DLS (1936) on Shakespearean references to Denver and Wimsey.

4/3 Material relating to DLS's poem *For Timothy, in the Coinherence*. Timothy White was MSB's cat (including photos of Timothy). Her dog, incidentally, was called Bunter.

4/4 DLS Society material: bulletins, proceedings &c, 1976-80; correspondence between MSB & the Chairman Ralph Clarke (including his letter informing her that he had decided to set up the Society, 4 Feb 1976) & others re the Society.

4/5 Correspondence &c. (mostly 1970s) between MSB & others on biographical, bibliographical & personal details of DLS's (and Peter Wimsey's) life & work, on writings about her, and about the play *Busman's Honeymoon*. Including a letter from Joan Evans (probably Dame Joan Evans, the art historian) to MSB, railing against a poor biography of DLS & with some actionable comments about Somerville (see JE/MSB scan 4(5)).

**MSB 5 Marjorie Barber** ('Bar', matric. 1914; MSB's friend and the companion with whom she lived for much of her life, and **Helen Darbishire's** cousin)

5/1 Letter to Barber from Theodora, 1959; 14 from Bar to MSB (1944 & nd); a celebration menu (for her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday) with drawings and signatures; a letter from Oxford Local Examinations to MSB who has enquired after work for Barber, 1931.

5/2 6 engagement diaries (1952, 62, 67, 68, 70); 3 pocket notebooks (2 empty) & a pocket photo album with notes by Barber.

5/3 Telegram announcing her brother's death in 1918; location of his grave; material on other family members (see also 5/7).

5/4 Barber's cv; letter from **Helen Darbishire** to Barber (1945) with HD's pamphlet on de Selincourt; a book of ms. poems by Barber.

5/5 Material relating to Barber's Will, Estate & Deeds of Covenant.

5/6 Tss. of short stories (writing as Anne Elliott): *Aquarium, After the Theatre, Seven Swords, Answers to Correspondents, A Livelier Iris, No Room in the Inn, Little Daughter, Trial but not by Jury, The New Hat, Late Rose, Unwelcome Guest, Children's Teeth, Lady in Waiting, Cough Mixture, All Things to All Men, & To Love and to Cherish*, with her agent's correspondence (1940s) re publication. Also *Aunts of England* by B. Sinclair (another pseudonym?).

5/7 Separate envelope marked (in Pauline Adams's hand) 'Byrne/Marjorie Barber': papers re Marjorie Barber's dementia & MSB's management of her finances (MSB was her carer), mostly 1974-6, including 2 alss. from Eglantine Jebb & a notice of leave to her late brother, dated 2 May 1918 (see 5/3); South Hampstead High School: calligraphic ms. invitation and programme for a concert/party, 1954 & a verse by Miss Barber in reply; typed lists of contributors to a (retirement?) gift to Miss Barber, & a list of former pupils and staff.

**MSB 6 Lisle Letters** (the College also possesses the Ms. of *The Lisle Letters*, published by Chicago University Press in 1981 after 50 years' research). See also Add. Mss. 1 & 2.

6/1 Applications for research grants to subsidise work on *The Lisle Letters*, 1950s-1970s, made by MSB and on her behalf by others, including replies from J Paul Getty, a telegram from T.S. Eliot and material about Leverhulme and British Academy funding including correspondence with Sir Mortimer Wheeler at the British Academy. Also MSB's cv, synopses of the project, reports of progress, requests for information or permissions &c..

6/2 Letters of congratulation on the *Letters'* publication, and a reflection by MSB expressing the hope that the publication will ensure her place in posterity.

6/3 Correspondence about the evacuation of the original Lisle Papers from the Public Record Office in 1942.

6/4 Letters from Chicago University Press (mostly from editor Catherine Seybold) 18 June 1976 - 1 Mar 1983 (& fragments); letters & notes from MSB to Chicago UP, mostly 1970s; correspondence between MSB & Faber, 1964-73; misc. correspondence re the *Lisle Letters*; a trenchantly-annotated fragment of galley proofs.

**MSB 7 MSB's Other Work:** selected papers (Boxes a, b)

[Elizabethan Life in Town and Country. It is difficult to divine which of MSB's copious un-labelled notes refer to this, her best-known book after *The Lisle Letters*, first published in 1925. There does not appear to be a specific section in her collection.]

7/1 Common or Garden Child (1942). Contract signed by Geoffrey Faber; Ms.; cuttings and reviews; congratulatory letters and correspondence with her agents. Box a.

7/2 Work on Elizabethan Theatre, including King Henry VIII (ed., 1937). Miscellany of notes, typescripts, correspondence (with Phyllis Hartnoll of OUP inter alia) &c.. Box b.

7/3 Anthony Munday (Essay published 1921). Misc. notes & scripts relating to the published paper and to a proposed book. Box a.

7/4 Plays & poems. Scripts and some notes. Including No Spring Till Now, performed at Bedford College in 1949 (see 1/4). Also ts of Well, Gentlemen? (also called Next Time and The Price We Pay) By Gwladys Wheeler & MSB. Including actors' copies, programmes of the play staged at the Cambridge Theatre 9 Oct 1932, publicity material, production accounts, telegrams & correspondence from, inter alia, Gwen John, notes &c.. Boxes c, d & e.

7/5 British Council Exhibition on Shakespeare (curated by MSB), 1964. Misc. papers & correspondence. Box d.

- 7/6 Books & offprints by MSB. (some with loose notes & cuttings inserted).  
*Elizabethan Life in Town & Country* (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1925) 10 copies of various editions (incl 2 in Polish).  
*King Henry VIII* (Ed., 1937).  
*England in Shakespeare's Day*: Essay in the Hebrew edn. of *The Shakespearean World* [?1964: see 1/21]  
*The Elizabethan Home* (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1925) 2 editions.  
*New Way to Pay Old Debts* (Massinger, ed. MSB, 1<sup>st</sup>. pub 1949) 2 copies of the 1956 edn.  
*Aldebaran* (1917) **Marjorie Barber's** copy.
- 'Emancipated Woman' & Vocation', *Christendom*, v. 11 no 44, Dec 1941.  
 'The Shepherd Tony', *Modern Language Review*, v. XV, Oct 1920.  
 'My Lord's Books' (with Gladys Scott Thomson), *Review of English Studies*, v. VII no 28, Oct 1931. 2 copies.  
 'An Early Translation of Seneca', *The [Bibliographical] Society's Transactions*, 1924. 5 copies.  
 'Anthony Munday's Spelling...' , *Bibliographical Society*, 1923. 3 copies.  
 Boxes f-h.
- 7/6 Typescript articles and short stories. Box i.
- 7/7 Three scrapbooks of reviews and a folder of loose reviews. Box i.

### **MSB 8 Miscellany**

- 8/1 British theatre: programmes, reviews, posters &c.; ts. article on props, with illustrations.
- 8/2 Disputes: court proceedings, complaints &c.
- 8/3 Odd notebooks, invitations, greetings cards &c. Includes Hints to Cat Lovers (1925) recommending cocaine for cats.
- 8/4 Work by other Somervillians: A Christmas Legend by **Viola Garvin** (1916) (ts. of a play); poems and notes by **Dorothy Rowe** (1912).

### **MSB 9 Photographs**

- 9/1 MSB's childhood, including three in decorative frames. Box a.
- 9/2 A small album of snaps, mostly of MSB in adulthood, animals and friends. Box b.
- 9/3 MSB as an adult. Selected scans, including portraits of MSB at different ages and a photo of her with Sir John Gielgud (scans MSB 9-3-1,2,3 & 4). Box b.

- 9/4 MSB family members, including some in (broken) frames. Box b.
- 9/5 Friends, including **Marjorie Barber & D.L. Sayers**. Selected scans (DLS 1 & 2, MB 1 & 2). Box b.
- 9/6 Theatrical stills, most of Shakespearean productions, including one of Laurence Olivier, Edith Evans and John Gielgud in *Romeo and Juliet* (possibly 1935; scanned MSB 9-6). Box b.
- 9/7 Animals (pets) including the cat Timothy White, about whom D.L. Sayers wrote a poem (see 4/3; scanned MSB 9-7). Box b.
- 9/8 Buildings and landscapes. Box b.
- 9/9 Unknown people. Box c.

**MSB Add. Ms. Boxes 1 & 2** (accompanying the manuscript deposited by Chicago University Press in 1982)

More *Lisle Letters* material, including presentations to MSB from Chicago University Press; chronicles of the commissioning and publishing process; a photograph album; correspondence, with letters to MSB from Joan Bakewell, **Barbara Craig, Evelyn Irons, Daphne Park**, Roy Strong and Hugh Trevor-Roper *inter alia*; brochures, articles, features and reviews.

**MSB Add. Mss. Box 3** (formerly AO3-3)

MSB's Photograph album, dd. Jack Reading (MSB's Executor) 2003. Including snaps of Somerville and of **D.L. Sayers**.

**MSB Add. Mss. Box 4** (formerly AO3-4)

Glass plates of photographs, dd. Barbara Reynolds, 2003. Including plates of Oxford, dated 1912 and of what appears to be a school pageant.

**MSB Add. Mss. Box 5**

Photographs, dd. Jack Reading (via Barbara Reynolds), 1995. A miscellany mostly of MSB or friends, including a few Somervillian peers (some duplicated elsewhere). More glass plates, with prints, of Oriel, punting &c.. (see scans MSB Add. Mss. 5-1, 2).

