

PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday, 27th September 2017

National Library announces major acquisitions of remarkable Yeats treasures

The [National Library of Ireland \(NLI\)](#) has today (27.09.17) announced details of a number of major new Yeats acquisitions. These acquisitions include the purchase from the Yeats family, via Sotheby's, of more than 500 letters between WB Yeats and his wife George Yeats.

The letters between WB and George Yeats were due to be auctioned by Sotheby's in London on 27th September. The National Library was offered the opportunity to acquire them for the national collection several months prior to the auction taking place. Agreement was reached that the letters should not be included in the sale, and they are now being purchased privately for €725,000, a purchase made possible by special allocation funding of €500,000 provided by Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys, with the balance covered from the NLI's own resources.

The letters between WB and George Yeats show many facets of their relationship through more than 20 years. They begin with passionate love letters written in the days before their marriage on 20th October 1917, with Yeats writing to George Hyde Lees on 5th October: "My thoughts are always with you – at first you were but a plan & a dream & then you became a real woman, & then all in a moment that real woman became very dear. And now I watch every post for your first letter. I keep wondering how you will begin it, what you will say."

Later letters – affectionate and practical – discuss Yeats' movements, meetings, work (writing, theatrical work, collaborations, occult activities) and the domestic realities of daily life, such as this letter to "My dear George", saying "This morning when the Valet was setting out my shirt etc we discovered that I had only one vest which is in need of a wash. Can you send me one – if not wire and I will buy one." Most were written during stays in England and elsewhere, including visits to the USA and with Ezra Pound in Rapallo.

Correspondence from George Yeats to WB Yeats includes interesting letters written during the Irish Civil War, as well as letters discussing the Abbey Theatre, publications, and access for scholars to WB Yeats' papers. Together with the marital letters, there is a small group of other Yeats family letters.

In addition to the advance purchase of these letters, the National Library today purchased a number of items at auction, for €72,675, supported by funding of approximately €50,000 from a family charitable trust. All of the items were by the poet's artist father John Butler Yeats, including: a watercolour self-portrait; portraits of the artist's daughters Susan Mary 'Lily' Yeats and Elizabeth Corbet 'Lolly' Yeats as adults and sketches of them as children; a pen and ink drawing of WB Yeats' mother, Susan Pollexfen Yeats, and pencil sketches of George and WB Yeats.

The NLI has also announced the forthcoming donation by the Yeats family of both the remaining Yeats family archive and items currently on loan to the NLI for its Yeats exhibition. The donations will be made under Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, the tax relief available in respect to donors of important national heritage items to the Irish national collections.

The donation includes more than 700 letters written by John Butler Yeats to his children, many illustrated with drawings and sketches, and more than 600 letters received by WB Yeats from a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, including many fellow writers such as TS Eliot, Ezra Pound, George Moore, Sean O'Casey, GK Chesterton, and Cecil Day Lewis. Items currently on display in the NLI's WB Yeats exhibition, including pictures and other items which belonged to WB Yeats, will now be donated to become part of the NLI's permanent collection.

These letters and objects are the latest treasures in a series of remarkable WB Yeats material acquired by the NLI from the Yeats family over almost 80 years, since George Yeats donated original manuscripts of the poems 'Oisín' and the 'Wanderings of Usheen' in 1939.

The donations are valued at an estimated €8.4m, while purchases total €1.54m [details of all donations and purchases are included in the Note to Editors below].

Commenting on the acquisitions, Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphreys said: "I am delighted that, over the past number of months, I have been in a position to assist both the National Library of Ireland and the National Museum of Ireland in acquiring significant additional sets of letters, items of furniture and other artefacts. These acquisitions add substantially to the State's archive of Yeats material. The co-operative approach in managing the acquisition between the Museum and Library will also allow for major exhibitions to be held in the future using the collections of both institutions."

NLI Director, Dr Sandra Collins added: "WB Yeats spent many happy years writing in the National Library, so it is really fitting that we hold the most important collection of Yeats material in the world, now enhanced even further by these extensive new acquisitions."

"The Yeats collection is at the heart of our free, award-winning exhibition on WB Yeats, which has welcomed 700,000 visitors since it opened in 2006. We look forward to featuring the new acquisitions when the much-loved Yeats exhibition is redeveloped as part of our major four-year building programme. We are excited to be able to share these wonderful treasures with all our visitors."

"We are delighted that the National Museum, which has also acquired Yeats material with funds allocated from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, will be collaborating with us to lend their new acquisitions to also be featured in our redeveloped exhibition."

Chairman of the NLI's Board, Paul Shovlin commented: "The National Library of Ireland is grateful to Minister Humphreys for the allocation of €500,000 in special funds to enable this excellent acquisition for the Library. The Library's collections continue to grow with some exceptionally important additions thanks to Minister Humphrey's support."

Speaking on behalf of the Yeats family, Caitríona Yeats said: "The Yeats Family are delighted that the largest Yeats Collection in the world is housed in the National Library of Ireland. The Nobel Medal he received in 1923, and a vast quantity of Yeats Family papers and books, are now in the Library. We are pleased that this material is in the safe hands of the Library's archivists and that it is available to those interested in studying and writing about one of Ireland's great poets WB Yeats."

ENDS

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Note to Editors:

- Director of the NLI, Dr Sandra Collins is available for comment on request.
- Images of a small number of letters between WB and George Yeats are available here: <http://bit.ly/2hvT4gp>. Details for the individual letters are:
 - WBY letter to George Yeats, 5 October 1917: Letter written shortly before their marriage on 20 October 1917, in which WBY writes: "My beloved: My thoughts are always with you – at first you were but a plan & a dream & then you became a real woman, & then all in a moment that real woman became very dear. And now I watch every post for your first letter. I keep wondering how you will begin it, what you will say."
 - George Yeats letter to WBY, 1923, in which she writes: "it seems strange to me that I have no feeling of fear over the future, but this very lack of anxiety increases my belief that there is no need for fear, for if I do not fear for you when you are my whole world surely my instinct is right?"
 - WBY letter to George Yeats re. vest: he writes: "My dear George, This morning when the Valet was setting out my shirt etc we discovered that I had only one vest which is in need of a wash. Can you send me one – if not wire and I will buy one."

About the Library: The National Library of Ireland is the library of record for Ireland. Established in 1877, it shares the story of Ireland with the world through its unique collections. The NLI cares for more than ten million items, including books, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, prints, maps, drawings, ephemera, music and digital media. The Library is open, free of charge, to all those who wish to consult the collections. The five strategic priorities for the National Library of Ireland for 2016-2021 are to collect, protect, connect, innovate and collaborate. Further information is available at www.nli.ie. Follow the NLI on Twitter [@NLIreland](https://twitter.com/NLIreland), Facebook [National Library of Ireland](https://www.facebook.com/NationalLibraryofIreland), [Flickr on the Commons](https://www.flickr.com/photos/nliireland/) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8vYUgUgUgUgUgUgUgUgUgUg).

The Yeats Collection at the National Library: Acquisitions from the Yeats family, 1939-2017:

The National Library of Ireland adds each year to the national collections. Acquisition decisions are informed by the NLI's collection policy and available funding. Sources of funding include the Library's own resources, special allocations by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and private donations. The approach to securing funding is made on a case-by-case basis, and in line with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies the NLI seeks Board approval for substantial financial commitments.

The NLI is also an eligible body to receive Section 1003 Heritage Donations. Under Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997, tax relief is available in respect of the donation of important national heritage items to the Irish national collections. If the donation is assessed as being of national significance, relief in the form of a tax credit equal to 80% of its market value is granted by the Irish Government.

The following is a list of acquisitions from the Yeats family, 1939-2017:

Date (year)	Description	Donor	Donation/Purchase	Estimated Value in €	Notes
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1939	Original manuscripts of the poems 'Oisín' and the 'Wanderings of Usheen' by WB Yeats, c.1886-1887. Three items, MS 3726	Mrs. George Yeats	Donation	75,000	
1957/58	Manuscripts, typescripts, corrected proofs and other notes of 19 plays by WB Yeats, with similar material and some letters re George Moore's Diarmuid and Grainne. MSS 8758-8777, 8906.	Mrs. George Yeats	Donation	190,000	
1962	Four volumes of cuttings of reviews of the earlier work of WB Yeats and some articles by him; WB Yeats correspondence re Abbey Theatre MSS 12,145-12,146 (two albums of cuttings of reviews and other articles referring to WB Yeats, c. 1897-1904; 1904-09); MS 13,068 (correspondence of WB Yeats relating to the Abbey Theatre, about 500 documents, c. 1900-30)	Mrs. George Yeats	Donation	90,000	
1962	An album used by WB Yeats for copies or drafts of early poems with some poems on loose leaves and sketches by George W. Russell MS 12,161	Mrs. George Yeats	Donation	50,000	
1964	Extensive manuscript materials, drafts, revisions, etc. of the poems of WB Yeats MSS 13,165-13,593: huge corpus of WB	Mrs. George Yeats	Donation	1,500,000	

	Yeats literary manuscripts				
1985	Papers of WB Yeats and Jack B Yeats MS Collection List 16 Correspondence and personal papers of WB Yeats and the Yeats family; includes WB's correspondence with Lady Gregory	Senator Michael Yeats	Donation	2,000,000	
2000	Collection of papers of WB Yeats, mainly relating to spiritualism and the occult, consisting of 100 notebooks and copybooks and 130 files of loose papers, in 9 archival boxes. (S.1003 Heritage Donation valued at £300,000) MS Collection List 60	Yeats family	Heritage Donation, Section 1003	508,000	S.1003 valuation corrected for inflation (CSO inflation calculator) and converted from IR£ to Euro.
2002	The personal library of William Butler Yeats (S.1003 Heritage Donation valued at £952,000). See NLI catalogue 'W. B. Yeats Library'	Yeats family	Heritage Donation, Section 1003	1,450,000	S.1003 valuation corrected for inflation (CSO inflation calculator) and converted from IR£ to Euro.
2003	William H O'Donnell, 'William Butler Yeats' Art Collection. A catalogue raisonné'. Typescript, ca. 225pp. 1980 Working copy 'for use by Ms Anne Yeats'	Yeats family	Donation	500	
2004	Manuscript items associated with WB's Library	Senator Michael Yeats	Donation	10,000	
2016	Yeats Nobel medal and diploma. (S.1003 Heritage Donation valued at €1.5m)	Yeats family	Heritage Donation, Section 1003	1,500,000	S.1003 valuation

2016	Correspondence (including telegrams and letters) relating to the award of the Nobel Prize to WBY	Yeats family	Donation	100,000	
2016-2017	Correspondence between James Joyce and WB Yeats, the Dream Diary of George Yeats, and the Yeats family library	Yeats family	Purchase	729,605	This acquisition was supported by a special allocation of €518,000 in funding from Minister Humphreys, and the remainder from the NLI's own resources
2017	Eliot, T.S., 'The poetry of W.B. Yeats'; signed typescript of a lecture delivered at the Abbey Theatre in June 1940, and a copy	Yeats family	Purchase	11,500	
2017	Letters between George and WBY Yeats, and a small number of other family letters	Yeats family	Purchase	725,000	This acquisition was supported by a special allocation of €500,000 in funding from Minister Humphreys, and the remainder from the NLI's own resources
2017	Drawings, sketches, watercolours and oil paintings by John Butler Yeats			€72,675	Purchase supported with funds of €50,000 from a family charitable trust
Pending	Yeats family papers including the correspondence of John Butler Yeats (S.1003 Heritage Donation valued at €923,000)	Yeats family	Heritage Donation, Section 1003	923,000	S.1003 valuation
	Total (estimated value)			Donations: €8,396,500 [€8.4m]	Purchases were enabled by special allocation funding

				Purchases: €1,538,780 [€1.54m]	of €1.018m from Minister Humphreys, and €50,000 from a family charitable trust. The balance came from the NLI's own resources.
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