

PRESS RELEASE

Thursday, 28th April 2016

National Library of Ireland receives donation of W.B. Yeats's Nobel Prize medal

The [National Library of Ireland](#) (NLI) has today (28.04.16) announced the receipt of the medal awarded to W.B. Yeats for winning the Nobel Prize in Literature. The medal, valued at €1.5m, and the accompanying diploma were donated to the Library by the Yeats family and were received at a special event at the NLI this afternoon.

W.B. Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923 for his “always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation”¹. In his presentation speech, Per Hallström, then Chairman of the Nobel Committee of the Swedish Academy, praised Yeats's ability to “follow the spirit that early appointed him the interpreter of his country, a country that had long waited for someone to bestow on it a voice”. Yeats himself considered the award of the prize as less for himself than his country, calling it Europe's welcome to the Free State, which is particularly poignant in this decade of commemoration.

The Yeats family has been a longstanding supporter of the NLI and facilitated the Library's acquisition of W.B. Yeats's personal library in 2002. The family also donated a substantial collection of editions of the works of W.B. Yeats to the Library, along with biographical and critical works. Thanks to a series of gifts from the Yeats family, the Yeats Collection at the National Library is now the largest archive of Yeats manuscripts and books in the world. The collection is at the heart of the award-winning exhibition: *Yeats: The Life and Works of William Butler Yeats* which is free and open to all. More than 66,000 visitors attended the exhibition in 2015. Included in the display are original manuscripts of his poems and plays, material relating to the occult and examples of his automatic writing.

Commenting on the donation of the Nobel Medal to the National Library, Dr Sandra Collins, Director of the National Library of Ireland, said: “We are honoured to receive W.B. Yeats's Nobel Prize medal and we are extremely grateful for the extraordinary generosity of generations of the Yeats family. The Library already holds the personal library and papers of W.B. Yeats and the donation of his Nobel Prize medal really completes the story of one of Ireland's greatest poets here in the National Library.

“The donation also highlights the importance of tax reliefs such as Section 1003 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997, which relates to the donation of important national heritage items to the Irish national collections. Since the introduction of the tax relief, the National Library has been fortunate to receive a number of very valuable collection items, including manuscripts of James Joyce's ‘Finnegans Wake’ and the Sean O'Casey archive.”

Granddaughter of W.B. Yeats, Catriona Yeats, who attended today's event, added: “The donation of the W.B. Yeats Nobel Prize medal and citation to the National Library of Ireland, together with related letters and telegrams of congratulation to the poet on his winning the award, continues a longstanding family tradition and we are delighted that the medal will be added to the Library's Yeats Collection.”

Further information about the NLI is available at: www.nli.ie.

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Note to Editors

- Dr Sandra Collins, Director of the NLI, and Catriona Yeats, granddaughter of W.B. Yeats, are available for interviews on request.
- Photographer Marc O'Sullivan has been commissioned to cover the reception and will issue photographs to picture desks this afternoon.

About the Library: The mission of the National Library of Ireland (NLI) is to collect, preserve, promote and make accessible the documentary and intellectual record of the life of Ireland and to contribute to the provision of access to the larger universe of recorded knowledge. It is open, free of charge, to all those who wish to consult the collections. The Office of the Chief Herald in Kildare Street and the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar are both part of the National Library. Further information is available at www.nli.ie. Follow the NLI on Twitter [@NLIreland](#), Facebook [National Library of Ireland](#), [Flickr on the Commons](#) and [Vimeo](#).

¹ The Nobel Prize in Literature 1923". *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2014. Web. 21 Apr 2016.
<http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1923/>