



**Miscellaneous letters written and received by Jack Butler Yeats,  
[c.1910]-1953**

**National Gallery of Ireland: Yeats Archive**

**IE/NGI/Y33**

## 1. Identity statement area

**Reference Code:** IE/NGI/Y33

**Title:** Miscellaneous letters written and received by Jack Butler Yeats, [c.1910]-1953.

**Dates of Creation:** [c.1910]-1953.

**Level of Description:** Fonds

**Extent and Medium:** 1 folder, paper textual documents.

## 2. Context area

**Name of creators:** Jack Butler Yeats, 1871-1957.

### Biographical

Jack Butler Yeats (1871–1957), painter, was born 29 August 1871 at 23 Fitzroy Road, London, youngest child of the artist John Butler Yeats (1839-1922) and Susan Yeats (née Pollexfen), sister to William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Elizabeth Corbet Yeats (1868-1940), also known as Lolly Yeats, and Susan Mary Yeats (1866-1949), better known as Lily Yeats. Jack spent his early years moving with his family between London, Dublin, and Sligo as his father, a former barrister, struggled to establish himself professionally and financially as an artist. As a result Susan Yeats and her children spent lengthy periods with her family, the Pollexfens, who were merchants with milling and shipping interests in Sligo.

In 1879 Jack Butler Yeats settled in Sligo with his grandparents, where he remained until 1887. During this time Jack was close to both of his grandparents and enjoyed a period of childhood comfort and security never experienced by his siblings. Jack Butler Yeats claimed Sligo as a formative influence in his life, and said he rarely painted a picture 'without a bit of Sligo in it'. It was during his time in Sligo that he developed his passion for boats and the sea through contact with his grandfather's shipping business. During the period from 1879 the rest of the family lived in London, and then Dublin, until their return to London to live at Eardley crescent, south Kensington, in 1886. Jack rejoined the family in London in 1887 in order to pursue his studies in art, initially at the South Kensington School of Art, and then at the Chiswick School of Art, following the family's move to 3 Blenheim road, Bedford park in 1888. It was at this time that Jack began his career as a black and white journalistic illustrator with *The vegetarian*, this would continue throughout the 1890's with work for other publications such as *Paddock life*, *Ariel*, and *Lika joko*, along with design work for Allen and sons in Manchester

It was at the Chiswick School of Art that Jack Butler Yeats met his future wife, fellow student, Mary Cottenham White, in 1889. Jack Butler Yeats married Mary Cottenham

White 24 August 1894 at Emmanuel Church, Gunnersbury, Surrey, following which they settled at the Chestnutts, Surrey until May of 1897 when they moved to a cottage called Cashlauna Shelmidy (Irish for Snail's castle) in the coastal village of Strete, Devon.

Concurrent with their move to Devon Jack Butler Yeats decided to move away from illustration to establish himself as a serious watercolour artist. In his first six months in Devon Jack produced the forty three watercolours of Devon life which would form the catalogue for his first exhibition of watercolours at the Clifford gallery, Haymarket, London in November of 1897. Jack Butler Yeats's first *Life in the west of Ireland* exhibition took place in Dublin in 1899 and this would remain the central theme of his work for many years. In 1912 he published a book of illustrations called *Life in the west of Ireland*. From 1900-1910 regular trips to Ireland were made by Jack Butler Yeats and his wife as they travelled around the west, notably Galway, Mayo, Sligo, and Donegal, with Jack sketching characters and scenes as he gathered material for his work. Jack and Mary Cottenham Yeats were regular guests at lady Isabella Augusta Gregory's home at Coole park, county Galway during this period, where they developed close friendships with Robert Gregory and his tutor reverend Thomas Arnold Harvey, who would remain a lifelong friend to Yeats.

In 1902 Jack Butler Yeats and Pamela Colman Smith co-edited *A broadsheet*, published by Elkin Mathews; Jack went on to edit the 1903 editions alone. In 1904 Jack Butler Yeats and Mary Cottenham Yeats travelled to New York for his first solo exhibition in the United States of America, at the Clausen galleries, 5<sup>th</sup> avenue; this was organised by the American lawyer and patron of the arts, John Quinn, whom Yeats had met in Dublin in 1902. Quinn bought a significant number of Yeats's paintings in the early part of the century before turning his attentions toward the modernist movement. In 1905 Yeats travelled with John Millington Synge to the congested districts of the west of Ireland for the Manchester Guardian newspaper. Synge provided an account of conditions while Yeats illustrated the articles. Yeats went on to illustrate *The Aran islands* and *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* by Synge in addition to illustrating the works of several other authors and contributing illustrations to the Dun Emer and Cuala industries. Also in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Yeats published a number of plays for miniature theatre and a collection of short stories for children entitled *A little fleet* in [1909]. In 1908 Yeats returned to the format of his earlier illustrated ballad monthly broadsheet to produce *A broadside* which he edited until 1915, producing 84 issues with 252 drawings.

In 1910 Jack Butler Yeats and his wife returned to Ireland, settling at Red Ford house, Greystones, county Wicklow and Yeats began to develop himself as an oil painter. In 1913 Jack Butler Yeats was chosen for the *International exhibition of modern art*, Armory Show in New York, in 1914 he was elected Associate Royal Hibernian Academy, and full member the following year. His early paintings share the realist approach of his graphic work and concentrate on scenes of rural and urban life as in *Before the Start* (1915). In 1917, following a period of mental health difficulties, Jack

Butler Yeats and his wife moved to Marlborough road, Donnybrook, Dublin. Yeats's style changed radically in the later 1920s. As time went on Yeats experimented more with colour and used larger canvases. The subject matter of his later paintings is more obscure, although the work remains figurative.

Jack Butler Yeats and his wife made their final move to 18 Fitzwilliam square, Dublin, in 1929. In addition to his career as an artist, Jack Butler Yeats published several plays and novels throughout the 1930's and 1940's. Yeats was a prolific painter in the last two decades of his life when he increasingly reused earlier compositions and themes to create paintings such as *Many Ferries* (1948) and *Grief* (1951). Mary Cottenham Yeats died at the Portobello nursing home in 1947. In the late 1940's Yeats began to spend increasing periods in the Portobello nursing home, he lived there permanently from 1955, and died there 28 March 1957.

**Archival history:**

These items were transferred from the NGI director's office to the Yeats Archive in 2000 - their provenance is unknown. It is unclear if these items were acquired together or separately though they have been treated as a collection for cataloguing purposes.

**Immediate source of acquisition:**

Unknown.

### **3. Content and structure area**

**Scope and content:**

Includes a letter from Kathleen Scott, [c.1910-1930]; three letters from William Kirkpatrick Magee relating to visiting Yeats in Greystones [c.1916]; an illustrated letter with envelope from Jack Butler Yeats to John Butler Yeats, 1921; a letter from Constantine P. Curran to Jack Butler Yeats, 1938; and a letter from Jack Butler Yeats to Thomas MacGreevy, 1953.

**Appraisal, destruction, and scheduling information**

All records have been retained.

**Accruals**

None expected.

**System of arrangement:** Arranged chronologically.

### **4. Conditions of access and use**

**Conditions governing access**

Access by appointment and in accordance with NGI Library and Archive access policy.

**Conditions governing reproduction**

Material may only be reproduced, in accordance with NGI Library and Archives access policy, with permission of the archivist, and in accordance with relevant Copyright and Data Protection legislation.

**Language/scripts of material**

English

**Physical characteristics and technical requirements**

Paper textual documents, no special requirements.

**Finding aids**

Y33 descriptive list

## 5. Allied materials area

**Allied material area**

Other collections from the Yeats Archive at NGI. Significant Yeats family collections are also held by the National Library of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin, and several other repositories internationally.

**Publication note:**

The following publications were used in the compilation of this finding aid:

Arnold, Bruce, *Jack Yeats*, Yale University Press, London, 1998.

Pyle, Hilary, *Jack Butler Yeats: a biography*, Routledge, London, 1970.

Pyle, Hilary, *Portrait of an artistic family*, Merrill Holberton, London, 1997.

Royal Irish Academy, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Cambridge, 2009.

## 6. Description control area

**Archivists note:**

This catalogue was compiled by Pauline Swords, June 2012.

**Conventions:**

ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description. 2nd edition. Ottawa: International Council on Archives, 2000.

**Y33/1**

[c.1910-?1930]

1 item, 2pp

Letter from [the sculptor] Kathleen Scott, 174 Buckingham palace road, London, to Jack Butler Yeats.

Scott encloses a cheque for £10.10 [for a Yeats work] and invites Yeats, when in London, to come and see how nice it looks 'on my black walls'.

Associated code: Y Mus Y28 3.7

**Y33/2**

December 1916-[?1917]

File, 3 items, 6pp

Three letters to Jack Butler Yeats from William Kirkpatrick Magee, 1 Lakelands Park, Terenure and latterly 7 Hume street, Dublin.

Magee proposes in two December [1916] letters possible dates to visit Yeats in Greystones, county Wicklow. Third letter, dated 'May 24' relates to gloves left at Yeats' home. 'John Eglinton' (Magee's pen name) inscribed on reverse of each letter by Yeats.

**Y33/3**

19 January 1921

File, 2 items, 5pp

Illustrated letter with envelope from Jack Butler Yeats, 61 Marlborough Road, Donnybrook, Dublin, to John Butler Yeats, 317 West 29<sup>th</sup> street, New York.

Jack thanks his father for a book on Renoir and the article 'The education of Jack Butler Yeats' which was published in the *Christian Science Monitor* 2 November, 1920. He includes an illustration of two seamen on the Dublin docks with the explanation: 'in this wintry weather I like to be down the quays to see the old retired decrepit seamen...'. Relates that Claire Marsh is painting a portrait of Mary Cottenham Yeats and news of a party at Susan Mitchell's. Envelope also includes a graphite half length profile portrait of woman.

Associated code: Y Mus Y28 3.1

**Y33/4**

19 December 1938

1 item, 1p

Letter from Constantine P. Curran, 42 Garville Avenue, Rathgar, Dublin to Jack Butler Yeats.

Curran thanks Yeats for the 'exquisite gifts'.

Associated code: Y Mus Y28 3.3

**Y33/5**

19 February 1953

File, 2 items, 3pp

Letter with envelope from Jack Butler Yeats, Portobello house, Portobello bridge, Dublin to Thomas MacGreevy, care of M. Jean Coulomb, Carrefour de L'Odeon, Paris.

Yeats writes to inform MacGreevy that his paintings are hung for the London exhibition should MacGreevy be in London and have an opportunity to see them. Relates that he is well and being treated well at the Portobello nursing home. Mentions a number of nurses. Refers to a letter in *The listener*.

Associated code: Y Mus Y28 3.2