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1. Identity statement area

Reference Code: IE/NGI/Y66

Title: Jack Butler Yeats letters to J. C. Miles.

Dates of Creation: 1896-1940.

Level of Description: Fonds.

Extent and Medium: 1 box.

2. Context area

Name of creator:
J. C. Miles; Jack Butler Yeats, 1871-1957.

Biographical history
Jack Butler Yeats (1871–1957), painter, was born 29 August 1871 at 23 Fitzroy Road, London, youngest child of the artist John Butler Yeats (1939-1922) and Susan Yeats (née Pollexfen), sister to William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Elizabeth Corbet Yeats (1868-1940), also known as Lolly Yeats, and Lily Yeats (1866-1949), born Susan Mary 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 re-joined 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 1890s 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 Shelmiddy (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 London and Dublin in 1899 and this would remain the central theme of his work for many years. 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, 5th 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 the 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 20th 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 1912 he published a book of illustrations called *Life in the west of Ireland*. 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 1930s and 1940s. 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 1940s Yeats began to spend increasing periods in the Portobello nursing home, he lived there permanently from 1955, and died there 28 March 1957.

Little is known about J. C. Miles; he did holiday with Yeats on the Norfolk Broads in [1899] and purchased Yeats’s painting *The publican*.
Immediate source of acquisition: Purchased, 2008.

3. Content and structure area

Scope and content: 1. Letters from Jack Butler Yeats to J. C. Miles (1896-1940); 2. Characters for the miniature theatre play *Esmerelda Grande* by Jack Butler Yeats (1900); 3. Ephemera relating to Cuala industries (1908-1923); 4. Press clippings relating to Jack Butler Yeats (1903-1936); 5. Miscellaneous items (c.1910-1930).

Appraisal, destruction, and scheduling information
All records have been retained.

Accruals
None expected.

System of arrangement: This fonds has been further subdivided into five series by type of material for ease of access and use.

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 legislation.

Language/scripts of material
English

Physical characteristics and technical requirements
No special requirements

Finding aids
NGI/Y66 full descriptive list

5. Allied materials area

Allied material area
Other collections within 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:

6. Description control area

Archivists note: Descriptions prepared by Dorothy Redmond, May 2013.


1. Letters from Jack Butler Yeats to J. C. Miles
Series
1896-1940

Includes letters from Yeats to Miles in which Yeats discusses his work, home life, travels to Ireland and New York, leisure activities and interests, acquaintances, and makes arrangements to meet with Miles and his wife. Many of the letters and envelopes are illustrated. Also includes stencil painting bookplates, a catalogue for Yeats Sketches of life in the west of Ireland exhibition (1899), and a receipt for Miles’s subscription to A broadsheet.

Y66/1/1  1896
1 item, 2pp

Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, The Chestnuts, Chertsey, Surrey to J. C. Miles.
Yeats hopes J. C. and Mrs Miles will be able to visit soon. He sends a drawing which represents ‘Bungay Races’ and the ‘Tipples rush’ (not enclosed). Includes a sketch of a scene from Bob Habbijam’s ‘Palais de Justice’, where Yeats watched a boxing match.

Y66/1/2  [1896]
1 item, 2pp

Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, The Chestnuts, Chertsey, Surrey to J. C. Miles.
Yeats describes a visit to a boxing show in Bethnal Green and includes sketches of the master of ceremonies Ben Harris, the two combatants, and a character from Bungay races whom he saw there.

Y66/1/3  8 February 1897
1 item, 2pp

Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, The Chestnuts, Chertsey, Surrey to J.C. Miles.
‘Chertsey is now going in as a rival to Venice’ due to floods. An almost full length, profile, self-portrait sketch accompanies the comment ‘My pride is in my pocket – 3 guineas…..what a good thing for me I went to Bungay before they cut it 0/1.’ Yeats refers to an advertisement in Sporting Life for Habbijam’s Boxing and hopes to be able to accept an invitation to visit Miles in the Spring.
4 April [1897]

Y66/1/4

1 item, 2pp

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, The Chestnuts, Chertsey, Surrey to J. C. Miles.
Yeats regrets he and Mary Cottenham Yeats cannot accept an invitation to visit because they are moving out their house and he has a lot of work to do. The letter was accompanied by a drawing for Miles to use as a book plate for the ‘Kackayack the Monkey’ book (not enclosed).#

24 December 1898

Y66/1/5

1 item, 2pp

Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J.C. Miles
Yeats sends Christmas greetings to Miles and regrets that he and Mary Cottenham Yeats were unable to accept an invitation to visit the [Norfolk] Broads the previous summer. Yeats suggests visiting Miles in London February. He includes a sketch of the apex of a roof where thatchers have been working and a sketch of a seated man, captioned: ‘he feels like Christmas indoors’.

[1899]

Y66/1/6

2 items, 4p

Printed invitation for the private view day, and catalogue of, Jack Butler Yeats’s exhibition Sketches of life in the west of Ireland, Walker’s Gallery, 118 New Bond Street, London.

10 August 1899

Y66/1/7

1 item, 2pp

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles
Yeats writes about a proposed trip to the Norfolk Broads with Miles. He has a friend named Low staying and is swimming every evening.

14 August 1899

Y66/1/8

1 item, 2pp

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, near Dartmouth, South Devon to J. C. Miles
Concerns a mix-up regarding the dates of the planned trip to the Norfolk Broads with Miles and his wife, but the week long holiday can go ahead.
Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles

Yeats and Mary Cottenham Yeats will be in London in January on route to Dublin; he does not think he will have an exhibition in London. Discusses life at Cashlauna Shelmiddy. He comments on Miles’ move to a new house and on the ‘decorous war’, adding a sketch of the generals going in and out of a club in Piccadilly, London.

Yeats and Mary Cottenham Yeats spent six weeks in Galway during July and August. He includes sketches of two sailing boats ‘with home made sails with pictures onto them’. Also includes Cashlauna Shelmiddy stencil logo of snail and round tower. He enclosed for Miles a stencil of the English boxer Jem Mace (1831-1910) on brown paper (not included). Yeats expresses a wish to meet Miles in London in October.

Illustrated letter with envelope from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth.

Yeats thanks Miles ‘for all the beautiful little figures from your pantomime and the sporting pictures.’ He also thanks Miles for subscribing to A Broadsheet and asks if they can meet in London the following week. Includes Cashlauna Shelmiddy logo of snail and round tower.

Letter with nineteen stencil bookplate designs, and an envelope, from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth.

Yeats and Mary Cottenham Yeats are going to Ireland in September and in October he will have an exhibition in Dublin. He describes the Regatta in Dartmouth and a trip to London where they saw the Japanese plays and encloses seventeen stencil pirate book plates, three of which are inscribed ‘James Flaunty’. Includes Cashlauna Shelmiddy logo of snail and round tower.
24 December 1900
Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlaun a Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles.
Yeats suggests meeting Miles in London in February. The publisher Elkin Matthews has just published a little play book by Yeats which he encloses; Pamela Colman Smith is to publish A Broadsheet with Yeats, he encloses a handbill. Features two sketches: a full length self-portrait and a half-length portrait of a boxer 'looking like a preacher'.

January 1902
Receipt for subscription to A Broadsheet for 1901 made out to J. C. Miles, signed by Jack B. Yeats

22 April 1902
Postcard from Jack Butler Yeats to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth. Yeats writes over a faint [hectograph print] of Yeats’s pirate character James Flaunty. He is glad Miles liked the Broadsheet and he elaborates on some of the characters illustrated in it.

24 December 1902
Postcard from Jack Butler Yeats to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth. Postcard features a stencil illustration of two young women in an outdoor setting by Mary Cottenham Yeats.

27 December 1902
New Year's greeting postcard from Jack Butler Yeats to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth. Features a [hectograph print] of theatre production scene of a masquerade ball by Jack Butler Yeats.

27 December 1902
New Year greeting postcard from Jack Butler Yeats to J.C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth.
Features a stencil painting of a fiddler seated on the back of a chair by Jack Butler Yeats. Yeats discusses the drawing of the theatre production scene of a masquerade ball in his previous postcard of the same date (Y66/1/16).

**Y66/1/19**  
[c.1903]  
1 item, 1p  
Partial letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles  
Yeats recounts a visit to neighbours to see a young badger. He expects to spend four-six weeks in Ireland. He has ‘two good things’ for the August/September issues of *A Broadsheet*.

**Y66/1/20**  
22 July 1903  
1 item, 6pp  
Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles  
Yeats tells Miles he will go to Dublin in August for his exhibition. He describes sailing a boat made from a straw bottle found on the beach. Relates that he and Mary Cottenham Yeats have been designing banners for Loughrea Cathedral, county Galway, Ireland, to be embroidered by the Dun Emer Guild under the supervision of Lily Yeats. Mentions that he has put on a play on his miniature theatre stage for the local valley children at Strete, Devon. He comments on the book *The Fancy* by John Hamilton Reynolds and relates that the *Broadsheet* has been discontinued but may start again. Includes a sketch of a model boat on water, a cartoon sketch of Yeats smoking a huge cigar that was given to him the previous night, a full length portrait sketch of the boxer Jem Mace in overcoat and top-hat standing against the ropes of a boxing ring, a stencil painting of a pirate, and a sketch of a rowing race/regatta captioned ‘A Rowlandsonian scene’.

**Y66/1/21**  
3 September 1904  
2 items, 5pp  
Illustrated letter, with envelope, from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles.  
Yeats describes in detail the visit he and Mary Cottenham Yeats paid to New York in March-April 1904 and includes four illustrations of scenes from the trip: a man enjoying a ‘free lunch’ in a New York hotel, a large house with veranda which he visited, an Italian marionette play, an injured cyclist and his bicycle being loaded into an ambulance [by a police officer].
Y66/1/22  3 January 1905
2 items, 4pp
Letter, with illustrated envelope, from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth
Yeats tells Miles that he is making a ‘shadow show’ for the valley children and includes sketches of two of the characters. [John] Masefield has sent Yeats the history of Theodore the pirate in verse. Envelope illustrated with cross-section of a [pirate] ship showing a male figure seated below deck.

Y66/1/23  December 1905
1 item, 2pp
Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles
Yeats sends Miles a little book ‘which Masefield has done the introduction to and I have done the drawings’. Yeats describes his time in Ireland in the Autumn and then his journey to Manchester to make sketches of life there. He and Mary Cottenham Yeats are preparing to entertain the valley children with a [miniature theatre] ‘galanty show’ – includes a sketch ‘Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday’.

Y66/1/24  [22 December 1906]
2 items, 5pp
Illustrated letter and envelope from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth
Yeats recounts the nearly three months he and Mary Cottenham Yeats spent in Ireland especially time spent in [Clifden, county Galway]. He includes a full page map sketch of Ardbear bay, Clifden, county Galway, showing local landmarks and the Quay house where they stayed. The envelope features two stencil paintings of a cowboy on a horse.

Y66/1/25  10 January 1907
2 items, 4pp
Letter, with illustrated envelope, from Jack Butler Yeats, Cashlauna Shelmiddy, Strete, Devon to J. C. Miles, The Denes, Great Yarmouth
Yeats thanks Miles for sending him the cutting about the English boxer Jem Mace. He describes an account he saw in an American newspaper about the boxer John L. Sullivan. He sends Miles some work he has done and asks him to return it. Envelope features a paper seal with original illustration in ink and [gouache] of Theodore the pirate with seascape to rear.
Illustrated letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Red Ford house, Greystones, county Wicklow to J. C. Miles
Yeats writes from his new home and states that he has been so busy house-hunting that he and Mary Cottenham Yeats have not been to the west of Ireland this year. He describes seeing his aeroplane though states he has no desire to go ‘aloft’ himself. Includes a sketch of [Theodore] the pirate, and a sketch of two men with small steam engines strapped to their backs.

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, Red Ford house, Greystones, county Wicklow to J. C. Miles
Yeats writes of his love of books of voyages and travel. He describes looking for books on Dublin’s second hand bookstalls. Relates that John Masefield has had a big success with his book of poetry *The Everlasting Mercy*. Yeats mentions that he did not think much of Reinhardt’s *Oedipus* in a Dublin theatre last year.

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, care of Miss [Martha] Jowett, 62 Longridge Road, Earlscourt, London to J. C. Miles
Yeats suggests various days to show Mr and Mrs Miles his exhibition and dine with them in London.

Letter from Jack Butler Yeats, 18 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, to J. C. Miles, with enclosures.
Yeats has asked his publishers to send this letter and enclosures to Miles with a copy of his just published novel [*Sailing, Sailing Swiftly*]. Includes an envelope and a card inscribed ‘J.C. Miles from Jack B Yeats with every good wish Dublin May 15th 1933’
Letter and envelope from Jack Butler Yeats, 18 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin to J.C. Miles, 28 Lansdowne Road, Bedford, England. Yeats writes that he is glad to know that Miles is ‘in some comfort and peace.’ He tells Miles of his sister Lily Yeats’s embroidery of a design after a Burne-Jones drawing of a ship. He comments on the successes enjoyed by Dublin theatres at this time and relates an anecdote from the film censor. His brother’s widow [George Yeats] continues as a director of the Cuala Press, as does Miss Colum, sister of Padraic Colum. He gives news of his niece Anne Yeats and nephew Michael Yeats. His recent one man exhibition was a success and Yeats describes in detail his painting In Memory of Boucicault and Bianconi (1937) (NGI 4206). Includes a small sketch of a Bianconi coach.

2. Characters for the play Esmerelda Grande by Jack Butler Yeats

1900
Series
2 items

Y66/2/1 1900
1 item, gouache and ink on card, 22 x 7 cm

Colardo Maduro in the play of Esmerelda Grande by Jack Butler Yeats. Original cardboard cut-out male character from Yeats’s miniature theatre play.

Y66/2/2 1900
1 item, gouache, graphite, and ink on card, 17 x 25 cm


3. Ephemera relating to Cuala Industries

Series
1908-[1923]
8 items
Y66/3/1 [1908-1923]  
Series: 8 items

File of prospecti, handbills, and other advertising material relating to Cuala industries, Churchtown, Dublin.  
Includes lists of books, a handbill for *A broadside* by Jack Butler Yeats, a card regarding ‘visitor’s day’ and a prospectus listing embroidery, clothing, prints, portieres, banners, ‘church work’, and *A broadside*.

4. Press clippings relating to Jack Butler Yeats.  
Series  
[1903]-1936  
4 items

Includes press cuttings relating to Yeats work, his tiem in New York (1904), and a clipping of a photograph of Pamela Colman Smith.

Y66/4/1 [?1903]  
1 item

Press cutting of photograph of Pamela Colman Smith (*The Green Sheaf*).  
Pamela Colman Smith (1878-1951) collaborated with Yeats on *A Broadsheet* in 1902. She launched a magazine *The Green Sheaf* in 1903 which ran for 13 issues.

Y66/4/2 16 March 1909  
1 item

Press cutting entitled ‘The Smiling English’ with comments by Yeats on the differences between American and English facial characteristics.  
Inscribed in pencil on reverse: ‘16/3/09’ and ‘Mail’

Y66/4/3 [?1934]  
1 item

Press cutting of an illustration by Yeats from *The Turf Cutter’s Donkey* (1934) by Patricia Lynch.

Y66/4/4 [?1936]  
1 item

5. Miscellaneous items

Series
[1909-1911]
5 items
Includes a watercolour landscape by an unidentified artist, a letter by an unidentified writer, a list of stalls for a sale of work, and a 1911 copy of the National Service League Notes.

Y66/5/1  19 August 1909
1 item
Watercolour, artist unknown, showing Ranworth church spire on the Norfolk Broads. Title written in an unknown hand bottom right hand corner ‘Ranworth from Howning’, dated bottom left hand corner 19.8.09 with a monogram.

Y66/5/2  14 August 1911
1 item, 2pp
Letter from an unknown writer, Frissingfield Vicarage, Harleston, [Suffolk] to ‘My dear John’ [perhaps J. C. Miles]. The writer describes the illness of Hester who has undergone surgery and is in a serious condition.

Y66/5/3  1 October 1911
1 item, 4pp
A copy of ‘National Service League Notes’, published by the National Service League, 72 Victoria Street, Westminster, London. The National Service League was a British pressure group founded in February 1902 to alert the country to the inadequacy of the British Army to fight a major war and to propose the solution of national service.

Y66/5/4  [c. 1900-1930]
1 item
Print reproduction of a head and shoulders studio photograph of an unknown man.

Y66/5/5  [c. 1910-1920]
1 item, 1p
Handwritten list of names for stalls, probably at a garden fete or sale of work. Including ‘Provisions Ye Boars Head Refreshment stall Ye olde Chelsea Bun(ne) house’ etc