

PENNSSTATE



Guide to the Arnold Bennett Letters and Literary Manuscripts, 1903-1931

Accession number: 1997-0068R
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Descriptive Summary

Creator: Bennett, Arnold

Title: Guide to the Arnold Bennett Letters and Literary Manuscripts, 1903-1931

Accession number: 1997-0068R

Provenance: Purchased from various dealers, 1968-1997.

Extent: .45 cubic feet

Repository: Pennsylvania State University, University Libraries, Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Access

Unrestricted access.

Preferred Citation

Arnold Bennett Letters and Literary Manuscripts, 1903-1931, Acession 1997-0068R, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Special Collections Library, University Libraries, Pennsylvania State University.

Arrangement

Organized into four series: Ephemera, Letters, Writings, and Photographs.

The Letters are arranged alphabetically by correspondent, thereunder chronologically. The Writings are arranged alphabetically by form, thereunder alphabetically by title of work.

Biographical Note

Novelist, short story writer, playwright, editor, journalist, and scholar, Enoch Arnold Bennett was born 27 May 1867, in the pottery district of northern England in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England, the son of Enoch (a potter turned solicitor) and Sarah Ann Longson Bennett. The large house the family moved to in Burslem later became the Arnold Bennett Museum. Bennett attended Burslem Endowed School and also attended art school. As the eldest of six children in an achievement-oriented family, Bennett felt pressured to succeed; he developed a lifelong stammer that would later prevent him from giving public readings. He worked as a clerk in his father's law office from ca.1885-1888. In 1888 Bennett twice failed his legal examinations; his father, though exasperated, consented to his move to London to become a shorthand clerk in a law office. In London, Bennett frequented "cultural" circles. He sent stories to magazines, and began selling old and rare books by mail. In 1894 he gave up the law and, with his father's help, took a position with the weekly magazine *Woman*.

At *Woman*, Bennett served as assistant editor, 1893-1896, and editor, 1896-1900. Bennett the journalist is a lively writer, usually amusing, often wise, always readable. His interests range widely across worldly affairs, his observations are realistic and shrewd, his judgments detached and compassionate. In the six years 1894-1899 Bennett published more than seven hundred periodical pieces. By far the greatest number were book reviews, followed in order by theater reviews, music reviews, and his own light fiction. In 1900 he quit his editorship to become a full-time writer. In 1895, he published the story "A Letter Home" in the prestigious magazine *The Yellow Book*, and began a novel, *A Man from the North*, which, upon its publication in 1898, was regarded as an impressive debut. One month after that novel's publication, Bennett's *Journalism for Women* was published, helping establish the pattern of prolific, diverse output that would typify his career. He contributed articles to the journal *Academy*, was director of the *New Statesman*, 1915; wrote weekly "Books and Persons" column for *New Age* under the pen name Jacob Tonson, 1908-1910, and for the *London Evening Standard*, 1926-1931. He co-managed the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London, with Sir Nigel Playfair and Alistair Tayler, during the 1920s.

Despite a widening experience of the world, the temperamentally shy Bennett longed for a settled married life. In 1906, at age thirty-nine, he proposed to an American woman, Eleanor Green, with disastrous results. Green, sister of the novelist Julian Green, broke off the engagement after wedding invitations had been sent out, for reasons that have never been clearly explained. Green herself later described the fiasco as a ridiculous misunderstanding. After this rebuff, Bennett met and married on 4 July 1907 a tall, striking, French dressmaker's assistant, Marie Marguerite Soulie, who had recently become his secretary in Paris where he had gone to live after the death of his father in 1902. He and Marguerite made their home in the French countryside near Fontainebleau and then in Paris for several years. In 1912 they went to live in Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. They had no children. The marriage was a failure, ending in separation in 1921 when Soulie would not grant Bennett a divorce. However, his early married years evidently provided him with the proper environment to create his first masterpiece, the 1908 novel *The Old Wives' Tale*. This two hundred thousand-word book was written in ten months, by hand, during a period in which Bennett--an insomniac--also produced two shorter, comic novels, 1908's *Buried Alive* and *Helen with the High Hand*, published in 1910.

The year of *The Old Wives' Tale*, 1908, also saw the publication of Bennett's most successful "pocket philosophy," *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*, as well as the first indications of his success as a dramatist with *Cupid and Common Sense*. Bennett would have major box-office successes with 1911's *The Great Adventure*, 1912's *Milestones*, and 1922's *Mr. Prohack*, as well as numerous smaller successes, but dramatic writing was, for him, a swimming against the current: George Bernard Shaw, who tried to teach him the craft, finally concluded that Bennett wrote plays as if they were novels. *Clayhanger*, the first novel in a trilogy of that name, was published in 1910. It was immediately successful in England and America, and helped solidify Bennett's position as an important man of letters, as did its sequel, *Hilda Lessways*, published one year later.

By World War I, Bennett was one of the most famous authors of the day in England, and his views were sought, and they were given in profusion. He had friends in government, he served on voluntary and official war committees and eventually in the government itself, in the ministry of information as director of propaganda in 1918. Occasionally he wrote at the request of the government, as with the small book that followed from his official tour of the front (*Over There: War Scenes on the Western Front*, 1915), and in articles on the Irish uprising in 1916. Bennett's postwar life was marked by marital strife and a decline in his journalistic output. Both, however, began to improve after he met the actress Dorothy Cheston in 1922; the two moved into a house in London, and though they were not formally married, Cheston eventually took the name Bennett by deed poll. Near the end of that year, Bennett began writing *Riceman Steps*, often considered his finest later novel, which was received favorably upon its 1924 publication by such luminaries as Wells, Hardy, and Joseph Conrad. In 1926 Cheston gave birth to Bennett's daughter, Virginia, and Bennett published another successful, dark novel, *Lord Raingo*, which has been called one of the great political novels in English.

Bennett's last novel, 1930's *Imperial Palace*, was a long-planned opus that examines in detail the workings of a great hotel. It was Bennett's second hotel novel, the early *The Grand Babylon Hotel* being his first; but while ambitious, serious, and commercially profitable, *Imperial Palace* was trumped by another hotel novel published the same year, Vicki Baum's bestselling *Grand Hotel*. On January 1, 1931, he dined with James and Nora Joyce; at the hotel, he insisted on drinking water despite the waiter's warning that it was not safe, and within twenty-four hours Bennett was ill. Bennett died 27 March 1931, in London, England, of typhoid fever.

Scope and Content

The collection contains letters from Arnold Bennett to his editors, friends, and colleagues; manuscripts of his fiction (essay "Hotel Profiles;" the novel *Lord Raingo*; novella *The Death of Simon Fuge*; two review columns, "Books and Persons;" and short story "The Great Illusion); an incomplete printed copy of the novel *Leonora* ; a theater program for *London Life*; and a black-and-white photograph of Bennett.

Correspondents include George Alexander, Ernest Benn, Mr. Berman, Mr. Brandt, Harold Davies, Newman Flower, Henry James Forman, Alice M. Head, G. Jean-Aubry, Alice Kauser, Messmore Kendall, Leon M. Lion, Archibald Marshall, James F. Muirhead, Ivor Nicholson, Eileen Mary O'Connor, Edwin Alfred Rickards, F.E. Rosher, Miss Ross, M.P. Shiel, Lincoln Springfield, William Orton Tewson, Charles Wakefield, Rowan Walker, Frederick Whelen, Gransby Williams, and the editor of *Catholic Book Notes* .

The bulk of the correspondence are fifty-five letters and postcards from Arnold Bennett to Eileen O'Connor, daughter of the Irish Lord Justice of Appeal, whom Bennett met in 1919 when she was 17 and with whom he corresponded until his death, besides advising her on how to write, he recommends authors for her to read and comments on the works of authors such as D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. He also discusses his own work schedule, his relations with H.G. Wells and E. McKnight Kauffer, his travels on the continent, his health, etc. Also in the collection is a letter of introduction to General Smuts written by Bennett for O'Connor, and five letters to O'Connor from other correspondents.

Bennett's twenty-one-letter correspondence with editors Alice M. Head and Ivor Nicholson at *Nash's Magazine* concerns articles he wrote for the magazine. There also are fifteen letters to Newman Flower at Cassell's, his book publisher, and fifteen to F.E. Rosher mostly concerning financial investments and luncheons. The bulk of the remainder of the correspondence are single letters.

Index Terms

These materials are indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Pennsylvania State University. Researchers wishing to find related materials should search the catalog under these index terms.

Personal Name Subjects

Bennett, Arnold, 1867-1931 -- Archives

Bennett, Arnold, 1867-1931 -- Correspondence

Bennett, Arnold, 1867-1931 -- Manuscripts

Topical Subjects

Authors, English -- 20th century -- Correspondence

Authors, English -- 20th century -- Manuscripts

Correspondents

Alexander, George, Sir, 1858-1918
Benn, Ernest J. P. (Ernest John Pickstone), Sir, 1875-1954
Berman, Mr.
Brandt, Mr.
Catholic Book Notes
Davies, Harold Haydn, 1897-1952
Flower, Newman, Sir, 1879-1964
Forman, Henry James, 1879-1966
Head, Alice M.
Jean-Aubry, G. (Georges), 1882-1950
Kauser, Alice, 1872-1945
Kendall, Messmore, 1872-1959
Lion, Leon M., 1879-1947
Marshall, Archibald, 1866-1934
Muirhead, James F. (James Fullarton), 1833-1934
Nicholson, Ivor
O'Connor, Eileen M. (Eileen Mary)
Rickards, Edwin Alfred, 1872-1920
Rosher, F. E.
Ross, Miss
Shiel, M. P. (Matthew Phipps), 1865-1947
Springfield, Lincoln
Tewson, William Orton, 1877-1947
Wakefield, Charles Cheers Wakefield, 1st viscount, 1859-1941
Walker, Rowan
Whelen, Frederick, b. 1867
Williams, Gransby

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence

Manuscripts for publication

Container List

Ephemera Series

Ephemera, 1924-1930.

Box 1

Folder 2

Theater program (*London Life*, 1924, includes essay by Bennett, "Writing for Drury Lane"); clipping (review of Bennett's *Journal of Things New and Old*, by Isabel Paterson, *New York Herald Tribune*, 21 Nov. 1930); "Famous Living Writers" thumbnail sketch and photo of Bennett (Columbus, OH: American Education Press, undated)

Letters Series

Letters, 1903-1931.

Box 1

Folder 4

Letter to George Alexander, 1914

Box 1

Folder 4

Letters (two) to Ernest Benn, 1929

Box 1

Folder 4

Letter to Mr. Berman, 1916

Box 1

Folder 4

Letters (two) to Mr. Brandt, 1925

Box 1

Folder 4

Letter to Editor, Catholic Book Notes, 1916

Box 1

Folder 4

Letter to Harold Davies, 1930

Box 1

Folder 4

Letters (fifteen) to Newman Flower, 1918-1931

Box 1

Folder 4

Letters (three) to Henry James Forman, 1919-1925

Box 1

Folder 4
Letters (six) to and from Alice M. Head, *Nash's Magazine*, 1927-1929
Box 1
Folder 4
Letters (eight) to G. Jean-Aubry , 1917-1927
Box 1
Folder 4
Letters (two) to Alice Kauser, 1911
Box 1
Folder 4
Letter to Messmore Kendall, 1928
Box 1
Folder 4
Letter to Leon M. Lion, 1921
Box 1
Folder 4
Letters (four) to Archibald Marshall, 1915-1924
Box 1
Folder 4
Letters (two) to James F. Muirhead, 1918-1928
Box 1
Folder 4
Letters (fifteen) to and from Ivor Nicholson, *Nash's Magazine*, 1926-1927
Box 1
Folder 5
Letters (fifty-five) to Eileen O'Connor, 1920-1931
Plus five letters to O'Connor from other correspondents, and a letter of introduction to General Smuts from Bennett for O'Connor.
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Edwin Alfred Rickards, 1915
Box 1
Folder 6
Letters (fifteen) to F.E. Rosher, 1913-1919
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Miss Ross, 1926
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to M.P. Shiel, 1928
Box 1
Folder 6
Letters (four) to Lincoln Springfield, 1911-1913
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to William Orton Tewson, 1919
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Charles Wakefield, 1927

Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Rowan Walker, 1928
Box 1
Folder 6
Letters (two) to Frederick Whelen, 1914
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Gransby Williams, 1916
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Dear Sir, 1904
Box 1
Folder 6
Letter to Dear ? [candidate for membership in the Royal Thames Yacht Club], 1915

Writings Series

Writings, 1903-1931.

Writings by Arnold Bennett

Box 1
Folder 3
Essay: "Hotel Profiles," undated
I. The Egoist, II. The bland wanderer [mss., 8 p.]
Box 1
Folder 7
Novel: *Leonora*, 1903
[(Rahway, N.J.: Mershon Company, 1903), printed, 46 leaves; stamped "ex-Library of Congress copyright surplus duplicate;" marked "incomplete" in pencil on paper cover]
Box 1
Folder 8
Novel: *Lord Raingo*, undated
Synopsis, chapters 69-74 [holograph; carbon typed copy; typed copy edited by Bennett; 8 p. notes; typescript, "Pneumonia"]
Box 1
Folder 9
Novella: *The Death of Simon Fuge*, 1907
[mss., bound, 42 leaves]
Box 1
Folder 11
Reviews: "Books and Persons" columns, 1927-1931
Review of *Therese Desqueyroux*, by Francois Mauriac (Athens, 5 May 1927); review of George Jean Nathan (London, 25 Jan. 1931) [AMsS]
Box 1
Folder 12
Short Story: "The Great Illusion," undated
[mss., draft, corrected, 8 p.]

Writings About Arnold Bennett

Box 1

Folder 1

"Arnold Bennett as I Knew Him," by Eileen O'Connor, [after 1931]

[TMs., 77 leaves]

Photograph Series

Photograph, undated

Box 1

Folder 10

Black-and-white photograph of Arnold Bennett, undated