Hesketh Pearson:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Pearson, Hesketh, 1887-1964
Title:	Hesketh Pearson Papers
Dates:	1789-2001 (bulk 1921-1964)
Extent:	13 document boxes (5.46 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Hesketh Pearson Papers document the career and personal life of the biographer and author of short stories, dramatic works, and travel books through correspondence, manuscripts, proofs, photographs, clippings, diaries, and notebooks. The papers were formerly in the possession of biographer Michael Holroyd, who served as Pearson's literary executor and, after the death of Pearson's widow Joyce in 1975, his heir; consequently the collection also includes papers and correspondence generated by Holroyd in these capacities.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-4915
RLIN Record #:	TXRC03-A16
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research. Part or all of this collection is housed off-site and may require up to three business days notice for access in the Ransom Center's Reading and Viewing Room. Please contact the Center before requesting this material: reference@hrc.utexas.edu

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase, 2003 (R15158)
Processed by:	Richard Workman, 2003, updated by Kelsey Handler, 2012
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketches

Hesketh Pearson

Hesketh Pearson published his first full-length biography, *Doctor Darwin*, when he was 43. By the time of his death thirty-four years later he had written another eighteen biographies, three travel books (all with Hugh Kingsmill), three books of reminiscences (one written with Malcolm Muggeridge), four collections of brief lives, a collection of short stories and essays, and a book on the craft of biographical writing, as well as numerous articles and talks. In England he was the most popular and successful biographer of his time.

He was born Edward Hesketh Gibbons Pearson on 20 February 1887 in Worcestershire, England, to Thomas Henry Gibbons Pearson, a farmer, and the former Amy Mary Constance Biggs. Instead of pursuing his education beyond grammar school, he worked at a series of jobs and traveled through North and South America. In 1911 his passion for Shakespeare and the theater led him to try his hand at acting, and he joined the company of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, playing minor roles. He also acted with the companies of Harley Granville-Barker and Sir George Alexander.

After three years' service during World War I with the Army Service Corps in the Middle East, during which he was mentioned in dispatches and earned the Military Cross, Pearson left with the rank of captain and returned to the stage. He began writing short stories and articles and published his first book, *Modern Men and Mummers*, a collection of biographical vignettes, in 1921. With the success of his first full-length biography, *Doctor Darwin* (1930), he left the stage and supported himself by writing for the rest of his life.

In 1912 he married the actress Gladys Rosalind Bardili, and they had a son, Henry Car Hesketh Pearson, who was killed in 1939 in the Spanish Civil War. Gladys died in 1951 and the same year he married Dorothy Joyce Ryder, who survived him.

A mutual interest in Frank Harris led to his meeting Hugh Kingsmill Lunn in 1921, and the two formed a close friendship. Lunn dropped his last name when he began publishing biographies and novels and was known both professionally and privately as Hugh Kingsmill. Together they wrote three books of a unique mix of travel writing, reminiscence, and literary gossip. Kingsmill died in 1949.

Throughout his career Pearson made the acquaintance of many celebrated writers and performers, including Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris, Alfred Douglas, Max Beerbohm, Sir Francis Galton, Winston Churchill, P. G. Wodehouse, and G. K. Chesterton.

Pearson died 9 April 1964.

Michael Holroyd

Michael Holroyd, Pearson's heir and literary executor, was born in London on 27 August 1935. After work in a solicitors' firm and service in the army, he made the acquaintance of the novelist William Alexander Gerhardie, who encouraged him to produce his first biography, *Hugh Kingsmill: A Critical Biography* (1964), during the writing of which he and Pearson became friends.

His next book was the highly successful *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* (1967-1968), followed by *Augustus John: A Biography* (1974-1975). By this time Holroyd was so esteemed as a biographer that he received a record £625,000 advance for his next book, which was the four-volume *Bernard Shaw* (1988-1992), a project that took almost twenty years to complete and was received with unprecedented acclaim.

Holroyd is married to the writer Margaret Drabble and lives in England.

Sources:

"(Edward) Hesketh (Gibbons) Pearson." *Contemporary Authors Online*, http://galenet.galegroup.com (accessed 9 October 2003).

Jones, A. R. "Michael Holroyd." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Vol. 155. Detroit: Gale, 1995.

Pearson, Hesketh. Hesketh Pearson by Himself. London: Heinemann, 1965.

Scope and Contents

The Hesketh Pearson Papers document the career and personal life of the biographer and author of short stories, dramatic works, and travel books through correspondence, manuscripts, proofs, photographs, clippings, diaries, and notebooks. The papers were formerly in the possession of biographer Michael Holroyd, who served as Pearson's literary executor and, after the death of Pearson's widow Joyce in 1975, his heir; consequently the collection also includes papers and correspondence generated by Holroyd in these capacities. The papers are arranged in five series: Series I. Works, 1894-1982 (8 boxes); Series II. Correspondence, 1910-1963 (2 boxes); Series III. Personal, 1789-1959 (7 folders); Series IV. Joyce Pearson, 1964-1975 (2 folders); and Series V. Michael Holroyd, 1926-2001 (21 folders).

The Pearson papers throw light on the working processes of a biographer: how subjects are chosen or abandoned, where and how biographical information is sought, negotiations with publishers, and the difficulties that can arise in dealing with subjects or their heirs. In addition, Pearson's correspondence and diaries are replete with opinions on literary, political, and religious topics as well as information on the subjects of his books, details of his working methods, information about his and his correspondents' personal lives, and discussions of well-known figures living and dead, particularly in the fields of literature and theater.

The collection contains significant amounts of correspondence and research material concerning several of the subjects of Pearson's biographies: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, W. S. Gilbert, Frank Harris, Sir Walter Scott, Beerbohm Tree, and Oscar Wilde. Among the correspondents are A. P. Buckland-Plummer, Adrian Conan Doyle, Norman Charles Hunter, Hugh Kingsmill, Arthur Leonard Ross, Robert Sherard, and P. G. Wodehouse.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Works, 1894-1982 (8 boxes)

This series is divided into two subseries: A. Books, 1894, 1920-1982, and B. Other Works, 1903-1959. The subseries dealing with his book-length works is arranged alphabetically by book title, reflecting the way many of his papers were originally filed, including those letters and clippings he frequently placed inside his personal copies of his books; the Correspondence series may also contain material on the same subjects, as Pearson's filing was not always consistent. Within each title materials are arranged in this sequence: manuscripts, correspondence, research materials, page proofs (all of which bear corrections in Pearson's handwriting), illustrations, and clippings. Authors of correspondence are identified in the Index of Correspondents in this guide.

Most of Pearson's books are represented by at least some materials in the collection, beginning with his first full-length biography, Doctor Darwin (1930). Handwritten manuscripts are here for Pearson's two last books: Extraordinary People (1965, incomplete) and Hesketh Pearson by Himself (1965). Correspondence in the collection indicates that Pearson and, after his death, his wife sold most of his manuscripts as well as his correspondence with such famous figures as George Bernard Shaw, Frank Harris, and Winston Churchill. Of particular note in this series are correspondence and clippings documenting the extremely unfavorable reaction of some of the children of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to Pearson's biography of their father, particularly that of Adrian Conan Doyle; these materials are arranged chronologically and extend into the period of Holroyd's executorship in order to present more fully the history of this episode. The correspondence and research materials for Extraordinary People mainly concern Frank Harris and include a 1920 letter from Sir Basil Thomson of the Metropolitan Police discussing Harris's pro-German activities during World War I. Throughout the correspondence and research materials there are many transcriptions of letters by figures such as Shaw, Harris, Alfred Douglas, Beerbohm Tree, and Gilbert and Sullivan that were used in writing the biographies; these transcriptions have not been indexed.

The Other Works subseries contains mostly shorter works written by Pearson: articles, book reviews, diaries, dramatic works, juvenilia, a notebook, and the manuscripts or page proofs of short stories and talks. All items are arranged either alphabetically by title or chronologically if untitled. The juvenilia are two volumes of a "magazine" the teenaged Pearson wrote for his family, primarily containing brief lives of famous persons. The diaries, covering 1923-1924 and 1940-1959, are a rich source of information about Pearson's extremely wide circle of friends in the literary world. The diaries for 1940-1941 were supplemented by Pearson with indexes of persons mentioned in their pages. The last actual diary entry is on 6 August 1945, followed by several dated notes made by Pearson as he reread the volumes over the next few years.

Series II. Correspondence, 1910-1963 (2 boxes)

The correspondence is arranged in alphabetical order by correspondent, with incoming and outgoing letters interfiled. A highlight of the papers is Pearson's lively correspondence (1921-1949) with his close friend and coauthor Hugh Kingsmill. Their letters, numbering over 700, are not complete: there is no correspondence from Kingsmill for the year 1946, and Pearson's letters between 15 August 1940 and 25 January 1948 are missing. Occasionally they enclose correspondence from other writers with their letters; these third-party letters have been indexed only when they are originals and not transcriptions. Other correspondents well represented in this series are the playwright Norman Hunter, Shaw's friend Eleanor O'Connell, Harris's former associate A. P. Buckland-Plummer, Harris's literary executor Arthur Leonard Ross, Wilde biographer Robert Sherard, Scott scholar Percy R. Stevenson, and writer P. G. Wodehouse. The Wodehouse folder also contains Pearson's 1947 correspondence with Frank Soskice of the Royal Courts of Justice in an effort to determine if, on Wodehouse's return to England, he would be prosecuted for having participated in German radio broadcasts during World War II. Although Pearson was the biographer and close friend of Shaw and knew Harris well, no original letters from either are in this collection.

Series III. Personal, 1789-1959 (7 folders)

Among the personal items in the collection are the correspondence of Pearson's mother's family (including the Biggs, Bree, and Moilliet families) from 1789 to 1912 and arranged chronologically; records, correspondence, medals, and a photograph album containing about 225 photographs documenting his military service in Mesopotamia during World War I; acting scripts for the Forum scene in *Julius Caesar* prepared by Granville-Barker and Tree and used by Pearson during his career on the stage; various birth and marriage certificates and driver's licenses; the program of Pearson's memorial service and obituaries; and snapshots and portrait photographs. Among the photographs is a series of snapshots of Pearson, his first wife Gladys, and their friends John Wardrop and Eleanor O'Connell taken by George Bernard Shaw on an occasion that is recorded in Pearson's diary for 6 August 1945.

Series IV. Joyce Pearson, 1964-1975 (2 folders)

Most of the letters addressed to Pearson's widow Joyce are letters of condolence upon her husband's death in 1964. There are also a few letters written to and from friends and family before her death in 1975. Everything in this series is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Series V. Michael Holroyd, 1926-2001 (21 folders)

In this series Holroyd's works are grouped together and arranged alphabetically, followed by a small number of business papers mostly consisting of book contracts, his correspondence arranged alphabetically with incoming and outgoing letters interfiled (including several letters from Pearson), and finally some third-party works and correspondence and a small amount of unidentified materials. The bulk of Holroyd's papers concern his biography of Kingsmill, written with guidance from Pearson; his involvement with the publication of new editions of Pearson's works; and his own articles on Pearson and Kingsmill. The chronologically arranged correspondence associated with the writing of *Hugh Kingsmill* (1964) tells the story of Holroyd's difficult negotiations with Kingsmill's widow, Dorothy Hopkinson, over the use of Kingsmill's literary remains and includes several letters from Pearson.

Related Material

Elsewhere in the Ransom Center (in the George Bernard Shaw Collection) is the typescript of Pearson's biography of Shaw, *G.B.S.: A Full Length Portrait* (1942), with extensive corrections and additions in Shaw's handwriting. A large number of letters from Shaw to Pearson and a few from Pearson to Shaw are in the same collection. The Frank Harris Collection also contains Pearson correspondence.

Letters from Pearson to his publishers and to other correspondents such as Shaw are housed at the University of Bristol Library and at Cornell University. Handwritten manuscripts of many of his books are at Northwestern University Library.

Separated Material

The purchase also included almost one hundred books, about two-thirds of which are by Pearson and the rest primarily by Hugh Kingsmill. Many of Pearson's copies of his own books bear his handwritten emendations to the text, which may or may not have been incorporated into subsequent editions. All books were transferred to the Ransom Center Library.

In addition, about forty theater programs from 1880 to 1932, mostly documenting Pearson's career as an actor, were transferred to the Performing Arts Collection at the Ransom Center; a detailed listing is available on request.

Index Terms

People

Buckland-Plummer, A. P.

Butler, Ralph, 1883-. Cockburn, F. B. Doyle, Adrian Conan Frazer, Allan. Galton, Francis, cSir, 1822-1911. Gerhardie, William Alexander, 1895-. Holroyd, Michael. Hopkinson, Dorothy, b. 1903. Hunter, Norman Charles, 1908-1971. Hurry, Colin. Kingsmill, Hugh, 1889-1949. Muggeridge, Malcolm, 1903-1990 O'Connell, Eleanor. Pearson, Joyce Ryder. Ross, Arthur Leonard. Sherard, Robert Harborough, 1861-1943. Stevenson, Percy R. Wodehouse, P. G. (Pelham Grenville), 1881-1975.

Organizations

A. P. Watt Ltd.

Subjects

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Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), 1836-1911.

Harris, Frank, 1855-1931.

Scott, Walter, Sir, 1771-1832.

Shaw, Bernard, 1856-1950.

Tree, Herbert Beerbohm, Sir, 1853-1917.

Wilde, Oscar, 1854-1900.

Biography.

Travel writing.

Places

Great Britain--Biography.

Document Types

Christmas cards.

Diaries.

Galley proofs.

Juvenilia.

Photographs.

Postcards.

Scripts.

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- Gordon-Page, Augusta--9.2
- Gore, John, b. 1885--1.14
- Graham, Arnold F.--11.3
- Grant, W. B.--1.14
- Great Britain. War Office--11.3
- Gribble, Francis Henry, 1862-1946--1.14
- Grierson, Herbert John Clifford, Sir, 1866-1960--5.14
- Hall, Barbara--12.14

- Hamill & Barker (Frances Hamill)--9.3, 12.14
- Hamilton, Hamish, 1900- --9.3
- Hamish Hamilton Ltd. (Hamish Hamilton, Christopher Sinclair-Stephenson)--10.2, 12.14
- Hamlett, Adèle E.--12.14
- Harding, Lyn--1.14
- Hare, June--1.10
- Harper & Brothers (Russell Lynes)--9.3
- Harrison, Henry--9.3
- Hart-Davis, Rupert, 1907- -- 10.3, 11.8 (see also Jonathan Cape)
- Harvey, Basil--9.3, 11.8
- Hatteras, Michael--1.3
- Havers, Lydia--11.8
- Haynes, E. S. P. (Edmund Sidney Pollock), 1877-1949--9.3
- Heever, H. J. van den--see Van den Heever, H. J.
- Heinemann (Firm) (James Michie, Derek Priestley)--9.3, 12.14
- Hichens, Robert Smythe, 1864-1950--1.14
- Holloway, Baliol--1.3, 11.8
- Holman, L. B. (Leslie)--12.14
- Holroyd, Michael--11.8, 12.1, 12.13-16
- Hopkinson, Dorothy, b. 1903--12.1, 12.14
- Hordern, Eve--11.8
- House, Madeline--9.3
- Howarth, Patrick--12.14
- Howell, J. S.--1.14
- Hunter, Germaine--11.8
- Hunter, Norman Charles, 1908- --9.3, 11.8
- Hurry, Colin--11.8
- Iddesleigh, Elizabeth--9.3
- Independent on Sunday--12.14
- Inge, William Ralph, 1860-1954--11.4
- Ingrams, Richard--11.9, 12.14
- Inman, W. S.--1.14
- Iruman, Olivia--see Wigram, Olivia
- Jacobs, W. W. (William Wymark), 1863-1943--1.14
- Jeffries, Douglas--1.3
- Jonathan Cape (Firm) (Rupert Hart-Davis, Jean Mossop)--10.3, 12.1
- Jónsson, Ragnar--9.3
- Kernahan, Coulson, 1858-1943--1.14
- King, Alex M.--12.15
- Kingsmill, Edmée, 1930- --12.1
- Kingsmill, Hugh, 1889-1949--1.14, 2.1, 9.4-10.8
- Kingsmill, Tony--12.1
- Knight, George Wilson, 1897- --9.3
- Knox, Ronald Arbuthnot, 1888-1957--1.14
- Lane, Allen, Sir, 1902-1970--10.9
- Laurence Pollinger Limited (Gerald J. Pollinger)--12.15
- Lawrence Long & Co. (J. Gledhill)--12.1
- Lean, Edward Tangye--10.9
- Lee, J., Major--11.4
- Lellenberg, Jon L.--12.15
- Lewis, H. Langford (Harold Langford)--1.14

- Little, Tosh--11.8
- Lunn, Brooke Kingsmill--12.1
- Lunn, Hugh Kingsmill--see Kingsmill, Hugh
- Lyttelton, George, 1883-1962--1.14
- MacCarthy, Desmond, 1877-1952--10.9
- MacCarthy, Michael--12.15
- Macdonald and Jane's Publishers Ltd. (Penelope Hare, Gillian Vincent)--12.15
- Macgibbon & Kee (Bernard Warren)--12.15
- MacGregor, Frank--10.9, 11.8
- Mackail, Dennis--10.9
- Macmillan & Co. (Lovat Dickson, 1902-)--12.15
- Maiden, Joko--5.14, 11.8
- Malcolm, Charles A. (Charles Alexander), b. 1875--10.9
- Mannin, Ethel, 1900- --10.9
- Mason, A. E. W. (Alfred Edward Woodley), 1865-1948--1.14
- Maugham, W. S. (William Somerset), 1874-1965--10.9
- Maurois, André, 1885-1967--12.15 (in French)
- Maxwell-Scott, Patricia--5.14
- Mehra, Jagdish--10.9
- Meredith, Gertrude--1.14
- Methuen & Co. (J. Alan White)--12.1
- Miles, Bernard, 1907- --10.9
- Milne, A. A. (Alan Alexander), 1882-1956--1.14
- Mitchell, Eva--11.8
- Mitchell, W. S. (Bill)--10.9
- Mockler, Marjorie--10.9
- Moilliet, Adèle--11.3
- Moilliet, James K.--11.3
- Moilliet, Lisy--11.3
- Moilliet, Lucy Amy--11.3
- Montgomery, Louie--11.8
- Moriarty, Tessa--12.15
- Muggeridge, Malcolm, 1903- --12.15
- National Book League (Great Britain) (Jane With)--12.16
- National Museum of Wales--12.16
- Naxos AudioBooks, Ltd. (Nicholas Soames)--12.16
- New Dictionary of National Biography (Sylvia Lauzzanna)--11.31
- New Savoy (Francis Wyndham)--10.10
- Newquist, Roy--10.10
- Nisbet, Ada--11.8
- Norwood, Eille--1.14
- Observer (London, England) (Kenworthy Myron ?)--12.16
- O'Connell, Eleanor--10.10
- Oppenheim, E. Phillips (Edward Phillips), 1866-1946--1.14
- O'Rourke, Jas.--10.10
- PEN (Organization) (David Carver)--11.8
- P. F. Collier & Son Corporation (William T. Couch, David Crawford, William D. Lineham)--10.10
- Pakington ?, Js.--11.4
- Parker, W. M. (William Mathie), 1891-1973--5.14, 11.8
- Parsons, David Tree--1.3

- Parsons, Denys--1.3, 12.16
- Partridge, Bernard, b. 1861--1.14
- Partridge, Eric, 1894-1979--10.10
- Patch, Blanche, b. 1878--11.8
- Pearson, Amy Mary Constance Biggs ("Mums")--10.10
- Pearson, Dina--11.8
- Pearson, Elsie--10.10, 11.8
- Pearson, F. L.--11.4
- Pearson, Jack--11.4, 11.8
- Pearson, Joyce Ryder--12.16
- Pearson, Karl, 1857-1936--11.4
- Pearson, Molly--11.8
- Pearson, Thomas Henry Gibbons--10.10
- Penguin (Firm) (Madeleine Collinge, Barbara Phelan)--12.4, 12.16
- Phillpotts, Eden, 1862-1960--1.14
- Pijper, Cornelis--1.14
- Pound, Reginald--1.3, 10.10, 11.8, 12.16
- Preston, Kerrison--10.10
- Priestley, Derek--11.8 (see also Heinemann)
- Pullar, Philippa, 1935- -- 11.9
- Quennell, Peter, 1905- -- 12.16
- Radio Éireann (Francis MacManus)--10.11
- Rao, K. Venkoba--see Venkoba Rao, K.
- Ratcliffe, S. K. (Samuel Kerkham), 1868-1958--10.11
- Redmond, Meril ?--11.8
- Robertson, D. S. (Donald Struan), 1885-1961--5.14
- Robson, H. B.--10.11
- Rocke, Cyril, Col.--10.11
- Rogers, Edward--11.3
- Rose, Arthur--1.14
- Ross, Arthur Leonard--2.6, 11.8
- Rubinstein, Harold--11.8
- Ruck, Berta, 1878- --11.8
- Russell, Gerald--2.10
- Sabatini, Rafael, 1875-1950--1.14
- Savage Club (London, England) (Alec H. Nash)--11.8
- Senate (publishers) (Michael Downey)--12.16
- Sherard, Robert Harborough, 1861-1943--10.11
- Sherlock Holmes Society of London (Colin Prestige)--1.14
- Shirley, Mary Clara--11.4
- Short, Ernest--1.14
- Sieveking, Lance, 1896-1972--12.1
- Sloane, Olive--10.11
- Smith, E. M. C. Abel--see Abel Smith, E. M. C.
- Smith, Florence--9.5
- Smith, Nowell C. (Nowell Charles), 1871- --10.11
- Snow, C. P. (Charles Percy), 1905- --12.16
- Soskice, Frank--10.12
- Spectator (London, England : 1828) (Karl Miller)--12.16
- Spicer-Simson, Theodore--10.11
- St. Albans, Suzanne Marie Adele Beauclerk, Duchess of--12.16

- St. John, Christopher (Christopher Marie) --1.3
- Stacpoole, H. De Vere (Henry De Vere), 1863-1951--1.14
- Starrett, Vincent, 1886-1974--1.14
- Stevenson, Percy R.--5.14
- Storey, Gladys--11.8
- Strand Magazine (London, England) (Augustus Baker)--1.14
- Sunday Times (London, England : 1931) (J. W. Lambert)--1.14
- Taplinger Publishing Co. (Mrs. Terry Taplinger)--12.16
- Taylor, Robert H.--5.14
- Teitsma, Rudolf E.--10.11
- Thomas, Alan--10.11
- Thomson, Basil, 1861-1939--2.6
- Times Literary Supplement--12.16
- Tree, Felicity--see Cory-Wright, Felicity, Lady
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay, 1876-1962--10.11
- Trinity College (University of Cambridge). Library (A. Halcrow)--12.16
- Trollope, Cecily--11.8
- Trollope, Leonard--11.8
- Tyerman, Hugo Nelson--11.8
- University of Reading. Library--12.16
- Vachell, Horace Annesley, 1861-1955--1.14
- Valentine, Betty--10.11
- Van den Heever, H. J.--9.3
- Venkoba Rao, K.--10.11
- Wardrop, John--11.9
- Watson, W. (Bill)--10.11
- Watt, A. S.--1.14
- Watt, William--5.14
- Webb, C. S.--1.3
- Wetherbee, Hugh--11.8
- Wever, Jane Becker--10.11
- Wheeler, S. A.--11.3
- Whitaker, Arthur--1.14
- White, J. Alan--1.3, 2.1, 11.33
- Whitehead, Edward--1.10
- Wigram, Olivia--10.11, 11.8
- Wilmot, C. J.--1.14
- Wodehouse, P. G. (Pelham Grenville), 1881-1975--10.12
- Wood, Kathleen--11.8
- Wyatt, Woodrow--10.11
- Yerby, Frank, 1916- --9.3
- Zimmerman, John Edward, 1901- --10.11

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