Princeton University Library Collection of Sir Walter Besant Correspondence, 1876-1901: Finding Aid

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Biography/History

Sir Walter Besant (1836-1901) was one of the most prolific and widely-read novelists, popular historians, and social critics of the late Victorian era. He was also a philanthropist, antiquary, secretary of the Palestine Exploration Fund, originator of the People's Palace in East London, and a vigorous campaigner for authors' rights. He helped found the Society of Authors in 1884 and edited its journal until his death. Besant was knighted in 1895.

Description

This collection consists primarily of the correspondence of English novelist and historian Sir Walter Besant (1836-1901). A sizeable portion includes 100 letters sent by Besant to his publisher, Chatto & Windus (London), from 1881 to 1901. Amongst other topics that are documented, many letters relate to his publications, the Society of Authors, and the Palestine Exploration Fund.

Some photographs, ephemera, and writings relating to Besant are scattered throughout.

Access and Use

Access

Collection is open for research use.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. No further photoduplication of copies of material in the collection can be made when Princeton University Library does not own the original. Inquiries regarding publishing material from the collection should be directed to RBSC Public Services staff at rbsc@princeton.edu. The library has no information on the status of literary rights in the collection and researchers are responsible for determining any questions of copyright.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition

The collection adheres to a Departmental practice of combining into one collection material of various accessions relating to a particular person, family, or subject.

The collection has been assembled from various purchases and gifts from Seven Gables, David Holmes, Diana J. Rendell Inc., Bart Auerbach, Henry Briston, Farahan and Dupre, and John Watson Ltd, and others. The letter relating to the Palestine Exploration Fund is a gift of Mark Samuels Lesner.

Appraisal

No appraisal information is available.

Processing and Other Information

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Princeton University Library Collection of Sir Walter Besant Correspondence, Box and Folder Number; Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Encoding


Descriptive Rules Used

Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

Subject Headings

· Chatto & Windus (Firm)
· Society of Authors (Great Britain)
· Authors--Societies, etc.--History--19th century--Sources.
· Copyright, International--History--19th century--Sources.
· Authors, English -- 19th century.
· Authors and publishers -- England -- 19th century.
· Correspondence.
· Novelists, English -- 19th century.
· Publishing history
Contents List

Letter Addressed "Dear Sir", 1894
accessionnumber: AM 17247

Letter to Andrew Chatto, 1890
accessionnumber: AM 20737

Letters to Chatto & Windus, 1881-1901
accessionnumber: AM 20837
Description: 100 letters from Besant to his publishers, Andrew Chatto and W.E. Windus. Among other things, they shed light on the relationship between author and publisher, include commentary on Besant's works, and provide information about international copyright.

Acquisition and Appraisal: Purchase, 1972
Custodial History: The letters appear to have formerly been part of the Burton Historical Collection at Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

Letter Addressed "Dear Sir," Concerning the U.S. Copyright Act of 1891, 1892
accessionnumber: AM 1991-74
Description: Sent of behalf of the Society of Authors, and includes an enclosed completed questionnaire by Besant about the Copyright Act.

Incoming Letters, 1884-1899
accessionnumber: AM 1992-100
Description: Includes letters from William Allingham (1888), Sir Hall Caine (1891-1897), Frederick Hamilton, Earl of Dufferin (1887), Sir George Grove (1892), Anthony Hope Hawkins (1899), Sir Henry Irving, Andrew Lang, Sir Henry Newbolt (1889), Archibald Philip Primrose, Earl of Rosebery (1884), Herbert Spencer (1897), and William Watson. A few letters of others are also included: Charles Stuare Calverley (C.S.C.) to Mr. Bell (1879); Garnet Joseph Wolseley, 1st Viscount Wolseley to Alexander George Ross (1889); and Theodore Watts-Dunton to Lady Besant (1890).

Letter from Herbert Spencer, 1897
accessionnumber: AM 1992-122

Letter to Lord Monkswell, 1891-1901
accessionnumber: AM 1992-128
Description: Several letters, including a memorandum from The Authors Club as well as a copy of The Authors Club rules.

Outgoing Letters, 1885-1901
accessionnumber: AM 1993-36
Description: Some correspondents include H. Rider Haggard, John Charles Fox, and J. Howard Whitehouse. Also included is the poem "May Dew," lines from "Faith and Freedom," and two receipts for Chatto & Windus.

Letters to His Typist, 1894-1901 Box: 1 Folder: 10
accessionnumber: AM 1993-52
Description: 11 letters

Letter to Mr. Toynbee, 1896 Box: 1 Folder: 11
accessionnumber: AM 1993-52

Outgoing Letters, 1876-1900 Box: 1 Folder: 12
accessionnumber: AM 1993-74
Description: Unidentified recipients

Letter from Herbert Spencer, 1894 Box: 1 Folder: 13
accessionnumber: AM 1993-146

Outgoing Letters, 1874-1900 Box: 1 Folder: 14
accessionnumber: AM 1993-157

Letter Addressed to "My Dear Professor", 1886 Box: 1 Folder: 15
accessionnumber: AM 1995-50

Charles Eyre Parcos(?), 1881 February 19 Box: 1 Folder: 16
accessionnumber: AM 1996-64
Description: Clarifying his relationship to the wife of his brother, the Rev. Frank Besant, for purposes of an article about Besant.

Walter Pritchard, 1900 May 10 Box: 1 Folder: 17
accessionnumber: AM 1998-04
Description: Regarding the production of an American play.

B. Knowles, 1894 March 28 Box: 1 Folder: 18
accessionnumber: AM 1998-45
Description: Regarding "The People's Palace."
Scrapbook Materials, 1884-1901
accessionnumber: AM 1998-64

Description: Includes a letter to Lawrence Barrett (1884), a photographs of Besant and James Rice, clippings, including an obituary
Also includes photocopies of materials related to William Black. Original items related to Black were removed and added to the M. L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists (C0171).

Outgoing and Incoming Correspondence, 1876-1900
accessionnumber: AM 1998-82

Outgoing Letters, 1876-1899

Description: Includes letters to G. Holiworth (1884), Edwin Oliver (1898), W.H. Picton (1897), E. Vizetelly, A.P. Watt (1893), Mr. Warren (1891), Mr. Wilson (1900), among others.

Incoming Letters, 1894-1900

Description: Includes letters from Edwin Arnold (1900), Sir Michael Foster, Richard Monckton Milnes, Baron of Houghton (1894), and James Payn. Also included in an undated engraving of Besant.

Letter Addressed to "Dear Sir" Sent on Behalf of the Society of Authors, 1891
accessionnumber: AM 1999-97

Letter from James Rice, 1869
accessionnumber: AM 2000-87

Outgoing Letters and Images, 1871 May 8-1891 September 19
accessionnumber: AM 2018-45

Description: Consists of seven letters from Besant (1836-1901) to various recipients. Most are fairly terse; two are pasted inside volumes of Besant's works, London and Reading in Rabelais. Also included are two images of Besant on ephemeral items.

Letters and Images, 1871 May 8

Description: Includes letters to Bullen(?) (1871), Anthony Salmeri(?) (1893), W.W. Senior(?) (1897), and others who are unidentified. There is also the signed bottom of a letter.
Images include a Tuck's postcard with an image of Besant by C.W. Quinnell, and Ogden's Guinea Gold Cigarettes card, no. 325, with Besant's photograph.

Letter to Howell Rogers, 1890 December 22
Description: Thanks Rogers for the two ballads and letter; reference to the Society of Authors in one of the verses in the book ("merry monks of Thelema").
Attached to Roger's annotated copy of Besant's book, Reading in Rabelais (1883).

Letter to MacColl(?), 1891 September 19

Description: Encloses a note of explanation (not present) with regard to a mistake in his book, London, and inquires whether the recipient will be at the Authors' Club to dine with Émile Zola. The letter is attached to the front pastedown of Besant's London (1892), which includes an annotation on the first flyleaf.