

**U DX73**

**Items donated by Philip Larkin**

**[1948]-1981**

**Historical Background/Biographical Background:**

The Poetry Book Society was established by T.S. Eliot and friends in 1953. The quarterly poetry journal of the Society is the *Bulletin* and it also runs the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize for Poetry.

The Marvell Press, of Hessle, was founded by George Hartley and his wife, Jean. They published the poetry magazine *Listen*, which George Hartley edited from 1954 to 1962. Their first major publication was Philip Larkin's first mature poetry collection *The Less Deceived* in 1955, shortly before Larkin's appointment as University Librarian at Hull. Larkin went on to contribute to most issues of *Listen* and Jean later compiled a collection of essays, *Philip Larkin, 1922-1985: a tribute* (1988). Later publications by the Marvell Press included work of other poets and recordings of poetry by Larkin.

Philip Arthur Larkin was born in the Coventry suburb of Radford on 9 August 1922. Larkin began writing while still at school and became joint editor of his school magazine. He went on to study at St John's College Oxford, gaining a First Class Degree in English Literature. After university he took the job of librarian at the public library in Wellington, Shropshire, before moving to the library at University College, Leicester in 1946. Also in 1946, his novel *Jill* was published by the Fortune Press and his second novel *A Girl in Winter* appeared on the Faber list to good reviews.

In 1950 he was offered the job of sub-librarian at Queen's University, Belfast. It was whilst he was in Ireland that he had one of his most productive periods as a writer starting two unfinished novels and many of the poems which were to be included in *The Less Deceived*, such as 'Church Going'. He had a small collection, *XX Poems*, privately produced by a Belfast printer in an edition of 100 copies in 1951. Larkin's return to England in 1955 to his new appointment as librarian of Hull University coincided with the publication of his first collection of poems *The Less Deceived*, issued by the Marvell Press, of Hessle, near Hull, owned by George Hartley.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Larkin kept writing poetry. He constantly received requests for poems from editors of magazines and newspapers. Although he refused most of these requests, filing the letters away in refusal files, many of these people become good friends. The most intriguing aspect to emerge from the collection of magazines and journals which published poems by Larkin is their wide political spectrum. Larkin had no problem allowing poems to appear in the right wing *Spectator*, the left wing *New Statesman* or less mainstream journals such as the *New Humanist*. What is clear is that he liked to cultivate the 'poet of the people' impression which continued to grow with his increasing fame. Thus, he gave interviews, judged local poetry competitions as well as national ones, and answered most of the many fan letters he received.

In 1964 *The Whitsun Weddings* was published by Faber and Faber to excellent reviews. *High Windows* was published in 1975 and received universally favourable reviews and for the first time Larkin achieved success in the American market. 'Aubade', Larkin's last great poem, was published in the Times Literary Supplement in 1977.

Larkin received numerous awards, including the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (1965), seven honorary doctorates, a CBE (1975), the Companion of Literature (1978) and, most significantly, the Companion of Honour (1985). Despite serious illness, Larkin's labours continued practically to the end of his life, with his former library secretary employed to do the

## Hull History Centre: Items donated by Philip Larkin

typing. His death from cancer on 2 December 1985 produced an enormous outpouring of grief from friends, colleagues, and lovers of his poetry. He remains widely recognised as one of the most significant writers of modern poetry in English, and as an extremely successful university librarian.

### **Custodial history:**

Donated by Philip Larkin, Feb 1971 [U DX73/1], Jun 1971 [U DX73/2-3], Dec 1974 [U DX73/4] and Jul 1981 [U DX73/5]

### **Description:**

This collection contains black and white photographs of George Hartley, of the Marvell Press, and Philip Larkin as well as a catalogue of the works published by the Marvell Press (c. 1971). There is also a file of correspondence relating to Philip Larkin's editorship of the Poetry Book Society's Christmas Supplement in 1974, items relating to the official opening of the Humber Bridge and a copy of 'The Lady with the Unicorn' by Vernon Watkins.

**Extent:** 14 items & 1 file

### **Related material:**

Papers of Philip Larkin [U DPL]

Correspondence with numerous friends, fellow poets, colleagues etc, including: Barry Bloomfield [U Dx213], Colin Gunner [ U DP179], Brenda Moon, [U DX257], Andrew Motion [U DP207], James Sutton [U DP174 and U DP182], Ted Tarling [U DP177], Anthony Thwaite [U DP181]

Photographs of Philip Larkin [U DLV]

Archives of the University of Hull Brynmor Jones Library [U LIB]

Papers of the Larkin Family [U DLN]

Papers of Jean Hartley [U DJE]

Philip Larkin book collection [P/L]

'Philip Larkin, The Marvell Press and Me' by Jean Hartley [U DJE/2/2]

Undated typescript account of Listen by George Hartley [U DX151/3]

**Access conditions:** Access will be granted to any accredited reader

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U DX73/1	Corrected galley - proofs of 'The Lady with the Unicorn', by Vernon Phillips Watkins. ('Mari Lwyd Poems') 1 item	[1948]
U DX73/2	Black and white photographs relating to George Hartley and the Marvell Press, taken by Philip Larkin. With explanatory note by Philip Larkin. The photographs include some of George Hartley and Philip Larkin inside and outside Hartley's house on Hull Road, Hessle. 8 items	25 Apr- 16 Jun 1971
U DX73/3	Catalogue of the archives of <i>Listen</i> and the Marvell Press, including an index of authors. Gives details of format, date and size of letters, articles and poems published. There are no details of the contents of the items published. 1 item	c.1971
U DX73/4	File relating to the 1974 Christmas Poetry Supplement of the Poetry Book Society, edited by Philip Larkin. Includes general correspondence with Charles Osborne and Jonathan Barker of the Poetry Book Society. There is correspondence with contributors including: Dannie Abse, Kingsley Amis, Joan Barton, John Bayler and Iris Murdoch, Patricia Beer, Charles Causley, Robert Conquest, Douglas Dunn, James Fenton, Robert Garioch, John Hall, Ian Hamilton, John Hewitt, Christopher Logue, Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan, Stuart Montgomery, Alan Ross, Jon Stallworthy, Anthony Thwaite and John Wain. There is also correspondence with those to whom poems were returned including: Alan Brownjohn, Denis Enright, Gavin Ewart, Roy Fisher, Roy Fuller, Molly Holden, Elizabeth Jennings, George Macbeth, Roger McGough, Brian Patten, Peter Porter and Vernon Scannell. Contains proofs and typescripts, with some annotations, of the poems used and a Christmas Poetry Supplement from 1969. 1 file	1969-1974
U DX73/5	Programme, ticket, pass and instructions for formal opening of the Humber Bridge by The Queen. Includes plans of the Humber Bridge Toll Area for the opening. 4 items	17 Jul 1981