

U DP187

Papers of John Masefield

1925-1994

Biographical Background:

John Masefield was born in Ledbury, Herefordshire in 1878. At the age of sixteen he entered the merchant navy although he deserted a year later after completing an Atlantic voyage and became a vagrant in America.

In 1894, Masefield boarded the *Gilcruix*, destined for Chile recording his experiences while sailing through extreme weather and was awed by the beauty of nature. On reaching Chile, Masefield suffered from sunstroke and was hospitalized, eventually returning home as a passenger aboard a steam ship. In 1895, Masefield returned to sea on a windjammer destined for New York City. However, the urge to become a writer and the hopelessness of life as a sailor overtook him, and in New York, he deserted ship. He lived as a vagrant for several months, before returning to New York City, he did many odd jobs, finding work as an assistant to a bar keeper.

Masefield returned to England in 1897 where he found work as a journalist. For a while he worked under Charles Masterman, the literary editor of the *Daily Chronicle*. Masefield's first published book was *Salt Water Ballads* (1902). After joining the *Manchester Guardian* in 1907, Masefield continued to write poetry and 1910 saw the publication of his collected work *Ballads and Poems*. This was followed by *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911) and *The Widow in the Bye Street* (1912).

Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, Masefield joined the Red Cross and served in France and then went on the Dardanelles expedition with an ambulance unit and witnessed the Gallipoli disaster. When Masefield returned to England, he was recruited by Charles Masterman, the head of Britain's War Propaganda Bureau (WPB). Masefield was sent to America to give lectures on how Britain was winning the war. On his return, Masefield reported to Charles Masterman that he had been heckled at meetings when talking about the Dardanelles campaign. Masterman asked Masefield to write a pamphlet to counter the image in America that the British had been defeated at Gallipoli. In his pamphlet, *Gallipoli*, published in 1916, Masefield attempted to show the glory of the campaign. In 1917 Masefield wrote another pamphlet, *The Old Front Line*, for the War Propaganda Bureau. In the pamphlet Masefield described German retreats on the Western Front and provided a considerable number of stories of heroic deeds performed by members of the British Army.

Masefield's *Collected Poems* (1923) sold in great numbers, as did the novels *Sard Harker* (1924) and *Odtaa* (1926). In 1930 Masefield became poet laureate a post he held until his death. He was awarded the Order of Merit by King George V and in 1937 was President of the Society of Authors. He produced more volumes of poetry, two novels about the sea, *Dead Ned* (1938) and *Live and Kicking* (1939) and two volumes of autobiography, *So Long to Learn* (1952) and *Grace Before Ploughing* (1966).

He died on 12 May 1967 and his ashes were placed in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Custodial history:

Purchased at auction at Messrs Phillips, 101 New Bond Street, London on 17 March 1994

Hull History Centre: Papers of John Masefield

Description:

Collection of letters and other items found on the desk of John Masefield after his death in August 1967 regarding the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, 1965 - '[Philip] Larkin's Year'

Extent: 43 items

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DP187/1	Letters to John Masefield From Lord Tyron (Privy Purse Office, Buckingham palace) (5); Cecil Day-Lewis, Jill Day-Lewis, David Cecil (2), Helen Gardner, William Plomer, Laurence Whistler (2), Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden 16 items	Jan- Jun 1965
U DP187/2	Invitation to join the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry Selection Committee 1 item	[1965]
U DP187/3	Voting paper 1 item	1965
U DP187/4	Typescript letter signed. Witter Brynner (New Mexico) to John Masefield. Seasonal greetings. 1 item	5 Jan 1965
U DP187/5	Typescript letter signed. Osbert Sitwell to John Masefield regarding (Committee?) membership arrangements 1 item	26 Jul 1965
U DP187/6	Typescript letter signed. Gilbert Murray to John Masefield regarding membership of (Queen's Gold Medal?) Committee 1 item	5 Dec 1965
U DP187/7	Letters from John (6) and Constance (2) Masefield to Constance Belliss. Also 2 invitations 10 items	Mar 1928- Jun 1935
U DP187/8	In Memorium card for 'Isaline' 1 item	22 Jul 1925

Hull History Centre: Papers of John Masefield

U DP187/9	Christmas cards. John Masefield to Richard and Dolly Knowles, Westward Ho, Devon. 4 items	1960s
U DP187/10	Envelope containing miscellaneous papers a) Autograph notes on poetry as a spoken art, by John Masefield, undated b) Receipt. Refund of pension contributions, 1 May 1964 c) Photograph. Railway carriages in Spain (note by Judith Masefield), 1925 3 items	c.1925-1964
U DP187/11	Pamphlet. The Ledbury Scene, by John Masefield [Hereford: Jakemans, 1951]. Autograph copy. 1 item	1951
U DP187/12	Offprint. 'John Keats: the reactions of a genius to tuberculosis and other adversities', by Robert L. Pitfield, from Annals of Medical History, p.530-546 1 item	mid-20th cent.
U DP187/13	Envelope containing U DP187/1-12 annotated: 'Aug. 67. As found on his desk papers relating to the Queen's Medal '65'. 1 bundle	Aug 1967
U DP187/14	Sale catalogue 1 item	17 Mar 1994