

Biographical Background:

Stevie (Florence Margaret) Smith was born in Hull on 20th September 1902. She was the daughter of Charles Ward Smith and Ethel Rachel Spear. When Stevie Smith was three years old her father joined the Merchant Navy as a ship's purser and left home for a life at sea. Following her father's departure Stevie moved with her mother and sisters to Palmers Green in North London, to a house in Avondale Road, which was to be Stevie's home for most of her life. Later when her mother became ill her Aunt, Madge Spear, came to live with them. Aunt Maggie played an important role in raising Stevie and her older sister Molly following the death of their mother in 1918, and was called the 'darling Lion of Hull' by Stevie. She continued to live with her aunt until 1968 when her Aunt Maggie died at the age of ninety six.

She acquired her nickname as a young woman at the age of 19 or 20, whilst riding on one of the London commons with a companion who compared her to Steve Donoghue, a popular jockey of the time. 'Steve' became 'Stevie' and the name caught on among her friends.

Education & Work

Stevie was educated at Palmers Green High School, North London Collegiate for Girls and Mrs Hoster's Secretarial Training College. From 1923 to 1953 she worked as private secretary to Sir Neville Pearson, chairman of Newnes Publishing Company, and later Sir Frank Newnes. She retired from Newnes Publishing Company in 1953 following an attempted suicide.

Publications

The first work by Stevie Smith to be published was a collection of six poems, which appeared in the *New Statesman* in 1935. Later that year, she submitted further poems to the publisher Chatto and Windus but was advised to 'go away and write a novel'. This she did, writing at home and in her office, using the yellow paper used at Newnes Publishing Company for carbon copies. 'Novel on Yellow Paper or Work It Out For Yourself' was published in 1936 (by Jonathan Cape rather than Chatto and Windus) and was an instant success. Her first volume of poetry, 'A Good Time Was Had By All', was published in 1937.

Stevie's poetry was at first less successful than her novels had been and during the late 1940s and early 1950s she was comparatively neglected as a poet. However, following the publication of her best known collection 'Not Waving But Drowning' in 1957 she became more widely known and throughout the 1960s was increasingly popular in Britain and America, as she gave poetry readings and broadcasts that gained her new friends and readers among a younger generation.

Stevie Smith was awarded the Cholmondeley Award for Poets in 1966 and the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry in 1969. She died of a brain tumour on 7th March 1971. Her work was often tinged with sadness and accompanied by whimsical line drawings. Her 'Selected Poems' came out in 1962 and won considerable attention from Philip Larkin who was responsible for assembling the archive at the Brynmor Jones Library. She went on living with her aunt, who died at the age of ninety six in 1968. She herself died in 1971 from a brain tumour.

Custodial history: Acquired by Bertram Rota 'from the holdings of a major collector who [was] dispersing his collection. [They did] not have a provenance for the drawings. The letters were obtained by him at auction some time ago.' Purchased from Bertram Rota in 2006, with the aid of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the National Libraries.

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

Description:

Includes letters from Florence Margaret (Stevie) Smith to Dr Polly Hill spanning 1946 - 1969 [U DP209/1-5]. Topics include both of their work and personal lives. There are also 13 drawings by Stevie Smith composed as illustrations for poems first published in 'The Frog Prince', published in 1966.

Extent: 17 items

Related material:

Other papers of Stevie Smith are at U DP156 and U DP197
Stevie Smith Book Collection [U SSC]

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

U DP209/1	Letter from Stevie Smith, Tower House, Southampton Street, London, to Polly Hill. Typescript, 1 page. Thanks Polly Hill for her book, saying "it looks very nice" 1 item	3 Jan 1946
U DP209/2	Letter from Stevie Smith, Palmers Green, to Polly Hill Accra, Gold Coast. Manuscripts, 2 pages Thanks Polly Hill for letter, possibility of visiting her in Accra, tea with Polly Hill's aunt and cousin, writing of new poems, the rejection of them for publication by the Listener, visit to the Tate with Olivia Manning Includes an 8-line poem which begins: "they killed a poet by neglect". 1 item	12 Nov 1953
U DP209/3	Letter from Stevie Smith, Palmers Green, to Polly Hill Thanks Polly Hill for letter and poem, suggests 'Ambit' as a possible magazine in which to publish the poem, possibility of meeting up, Stevie Smith's increasing domesticity, aged aunt living upstairs, Stevie Smith's "love- hate relationship with poetry", various mutual friends. 1 item	25 Mar 1967
U DP209/4	Letter from Stevie Smith, Palmers Green, to Polly Hill Giving directions from Ware [Hertfordshire] to Palmers Green 1 item	6 Apr 1967
U DP209/5	Letter from Stevie Smith, Palmers Green, to Polly Hill Relates to Stevie Smith's award of the Queen's Gold Medal for poetry: thanks Polly Hill for her poem and congratulations, collection ceremony, Stevie Smith's feelings and letters from friends; Polly Hill's "house on the Ouse", a previous visit by Stevie Smith to [Hiem] Hall 1 item	13 Nov 1969

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

- U DP209/6 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a woman in a long dress, on lined paper, c. 9cm x 3cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet and has writing on the back in Stevie Smith's hand. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to, and its position within the poem in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and instructions to take out the printed lines in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'I had a dream ...' p 17. Writing on reverse, may be part of a letter or draft letter: "I enclose". The drawing also appears on p 421 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975
1 item
- U DP209/7 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a figure looking downwards, on lined paper, c. 10cm x 3.5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet and has writing on the back in Stevie Smith's hand. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and instructions to take out the printed lines in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'I had a dream ...' p19. The drawing also appears on p 423 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item
- U DP209/8 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a figure wearing a hat on lined paper, c. 11cm x 5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet and has fragments of writing on the front and back in Stevie Smith's hand.
With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to, its position within the poem and instruction to remove horizontal lines, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and instructions to take out the printed lines and fragments of writing, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Dear Child of God', p 20. The drawing also appears on p 424 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

- U DP209/9 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink and pencil drawing of two linked figures, on lined paper, c. 15cm x 12.5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet and has writing on the back in pencil including some short-hand. Underneath the drawing is written: "A backward look" and two further lines of writing including shorthand, the last two lines crossed out. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin.
Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Avondale', p 42. The pencil lines of the drawing were not included when the drawing was published. The thin lines of glue visible on both sheets of paper have come from selotape used when they were later mounted (together with U DP209/10). The drawing also appears on p 445 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item
- U DP209/10 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of two birds, on plain paper, c. 7.5cm x 6.5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet. Underneath the drawing is written: "A backward look" and two further lines of writing including shorthand, the last two lines crossed out. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to and the position of another drawing next to it, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Avondale', p 43. The thin lines of glue visible on both sheets of paper have come from selotape used when they were later mounted (together with U DP209/9). The drawing also appears on p 446 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

- U DP209/11 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a figure carrying a ball or small hoop, on plain paper, c. 18 cm x 4.5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet and is part of a letter dated [] November 1954. There are fragments of typescript and manuscript. On the back of the paper is an [unpublished] ink sketch of 6 faces. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to, and instructions to remove the writing which overlaps the drawing, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and notes on other instructions, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Hymn to the Seal' p49. When the drawing was published the typescript had been removed but not the manuscript. The drawing also appears on p 452 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item
- U DP209/12 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a woman wearing a hat, on lined paper, c. 17cm x 12.5cm. Paper is cut and torn from a larger sheet and has shorthand notes entitled 'Band' back in Stevie Smith's hand.
With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, instructions to take out the printed lines, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Piggy to Joey' p 65. The drawing also appears on p 468 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

- U DP209/13 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a dancing figure, on lined paper, c. 12.5cm x 10cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to and other incomplete notes (crossed out) in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, instructions to take out the printed lines, in publisher's hand
The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'How Cruel is the Story of Eve' p 78
This item is linked to U DP209/14. The second sheet with notes here is part of the same sheet as that attached to U DP209/14, the paper was torn in half along a diagonal line - possibly by the publisher. The second sheet in U DP209/14 includes the end of the incomplete note described here. The drawing also appears on p 481 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975
1 item
- U DP209/14 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a figure in a tall hat, carrying a sword and crying, on unlined paper, c. 12.5cm x 10cm. There are notes in ink and in pencil, some crossed out. Paper is cut from a larger sheet, the lower part of a letter head can be seen: "President: H.R.H. The Duchess of Gloucester". With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: instructions on alterations to be made to the drawing in (removing a shamrock on the hat, and printed type) in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and note about painting out, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'How Cruel is the Story of Eve' p 79
This item is linked to U DP209/13. The second sheet with notes here is part of the same sheet as that attached to U DP209/13, the paper was torn in half along a diagonal line - possibly by the publisher. The second sheet here includes the end of the incomplete note described in U DP209/13. The drawing also appears on p 482 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.
1 item

Hull History Centre: Stevie Smith Papers

- U DP209/15 Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a woman with one arm raised above her head, on lined paper, c.13cm x 11.5cm. Paper is cut from a larger sheet, there are fragments of letters, or part of another drawing along one edge; and very faint pencil notes on the back in Stevie Smith's hand. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem it relates to, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, in publisher's hand. This paper too has been torn from a larger sheet, after Stevie Smith made her notes - the title of the poem in Stevie Smith's hand is incomplete. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'I am a Girl who loves to Shoot' p93
1 item
- U DP209/16 Two drawings by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince [1966]
Ink drawing of a cottage, garden and seated figure, on unlined paper, c. 12cm x 12.5cm. The drawing has a caption: "'A happy rural seat of various view" (Milton)' in Stevie Smith's hand. There is also a pencil note 'Mr Ros Williamson' and a note in red ink 'Why are the clergy' in other hands. The paper is cut from a larger sheet. Ink drawing of a flower, on unlined paper, c. 9cm x 6cm. With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawings: the poem to which they relate, their position and instruction to omit the caption, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, and reduction or enlargement, in publisher's hand. The two drawings were originally attached to this notepaper with pins. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'I love the English County Scene' p 95. The drawing of the flower also appears in Harold's Leap, published in 1950. The first drawing also appears on p 498 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975; the second drawing appears on p 275.
1 item

U DP209/17

Drawing by Stevie Smith for The Frog Prince

[1958]

Ink drawing of a neatly dressed woman, with her hands clasped in front of her, on unlined paper, c. 18cm x 6cm. With caption: "... continue de rire comme une hyene " [still laughs like a hyena]. Paper is cut from a larger sheet, on the reverse is part of a typed letter from [Mi]chael George, 27 Epple Road, Parsons Green, Fulham.

With second sheet containing notes relating to the publication of the drawing: the poem to which it relates, a reference to 'Some are More Human than Others', instructions to remove the caption, in Stevie Smith's hand; the block / page number, reduction or enlargement, and removing the caption, in publisher's hand. The drawing was originally attached to this notepaper with a pin. Published in The Frog Prince, with the poem 'Northumberland House' p 102. A partial enlargement of this same drawing is published on p30 of Some Are More Human Than Others, a sketch book by Stevie Smith, published by Gaberbacchus, 1958. The drawing also appears on p504 of the Collected poems of Stevie Smith, 1975.

1 item