

U DX252 Letter from Philip Larkin to Mrs Constance Saville 1956

Biographical Background:

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 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.

John Saville, born 2 April 1916, was a Greek-British Marxist historian. He attended the London School of Economics and, while there, joined the Communist Party of Great Britain. He married Constance Saunders in 1943.

He fought during the Second World War and following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, broke away from the Communist Party Historians Group and became a supporter of

Hull History Centre: Letter from Philip Larkin to Mrs Constance Saville

the New Reasoner group which condemned the Soviet invasion. Saville was promoted to Professor of Economic History at the University of Hull in 1973, where he had taught since 1947. From 1972 onwards he was one of the editors of the Dictionary of Labour Biography.

Constance died in 2007 and John died on 13 June 2009.

Custodial history:

Donated by Constance Saville, Hull, January 1998

Description:

Letter from Philip Larkin to Mrs Constance Saville regarding a potential trip to see a Russian film which he cannot attend.

Extent: 1 item

Related material:

Papers of Philip Larkin [U DPL]

Philip Larkin's photograph collection [U DLV]

Papers of the Larkin family [U DLN]

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]

Papers of Monica Jones [U DMA uncatalogued]

Photocopies of letters from Larkin to Monica Jones (collated by Anthony Thwaite as part of his research) [U DX341]

Books given to Monica Jones by Philip Larkin

Papers of Maeve Brennan [U DMB uncatalogued and closed to 2033]

Professor John Saville [U DJS uncatalogued]

Access conditions:

Access will be granted to any accredited reader

U DX252/1

Handwritten letter from Philip Larkin, signed by Larkin, to Mrs J. Saville, regarding a potential trip to see a Russian film which he cannot attend.
1 item

15 Mar 1956