

## **Copy for Newsletter**

In 2009, I was fortunate enough to win an award from the John 'Bud' Velde Visiting Scholar Program to spend a month at The Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. According to the library's website, Velde was a major benefactor, whose bequest endowed 'a professorship for the head of preservation, the construction of a preservation lab, a collections endowment to acquire and preserve materials in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the visiting scholars endowment, and a graduate assistantship. Although perhaps not as widely recognised as it deserves to be, Illinois is one of the world's great research libraries, and the fourth largest University library in North America. Illinois holds, for instance, the papers of poets Carl Sandburg and W. S. Merwin, the *New Yorker* fiction editor William Maxwell, and the largest collection of Proust's correspondence outside of France. As I visited, the library was preparing celebrations around the acquisition of its eleven millionth volume, Benjamin Franklin's 1744 printing of Cicero's *Discourse of Old Age*, as well as an exhibition of Lewis Carroll items, notably photographs (as well as Carroll's luggage!) to coincide with the 2010 release of Tim Burton's film of *Alice in Wonderland*. The holdings also include the world's second largest collection of emblem books, an unparalleled collection of Milton editions, a comprehensive sweep of the English Renaissance, scripts of *Dynasty* and artwork for theatrical costumes; the University is also home to some of the digitising facilities for the Internet Archive, a not-for-profit online research resource whose value and use are ever continuing to grow.

For *H. G. Wells Society Newsletter* readers, of course, the main interest of this library is its enormous Wells collection. As many Wellsians will know, when Wells's family put his papers on sale in the 1950s, the Library was urged to acquire them by Gordon N. Ray, who was then in the English Department at Illinois, and was subsequently the editor and co-editor of

indispensable volumes of correspondence between Wells and Rebecca West, and Wells and Henry James.

On my first day, I was permitted to visit the temperature and humidity-controlled storage rooms of the Library where the Rare Books and Manuscripts are kept. The library catalogue description reads as follows:

Correspondence, pocket diaries; typescripts and or proofs of 40 novels, 37 sociological books and 11 pamphlets; typescripts and or clippings of ca. 500 unreprinted serial publications; mss. and/or typescripts of ca. 150 unpublished articles, stories, speeches, plays, films, and other papers; personal financial documents, family records, contracts and publisher's statements, address books, house inventories, other papers, and photographs of Wells's family and friends. Correspondence includes ca. 60,000 letters received and ca. 1500 from Wells.

Even this, however, does not give the full idea of simply how much Wells material is held in Illinois. I spent four working weeks in Champaign-Urbana and only consulted, very briefly in some cases, somewhere between, I estimate, half of a percent and one percent of the total holdings. The collection of correspondence to Wells alone is now estimated to be somewhere between 65,000 to 70,000 items. This must be one of the great archives of twentieth-century correspondence: anybody who was anybody wrote to Wells, and he wrote back. I returned from the United States with a greater appreciation of the years and years of hard work that turn 'papers' into 'an archive': every single item from the first page of *The Time Machine* to the copies of his own books Wells presented to his wife Jane, to the contents of Wells's own library, to the 'alluvial deposits' such as restaurant bills and pictures drawn by Wells's children must have a number and a place in the catalogue.

The correspondence in particular should remind us of Wells's significance as a public intellectual and historical figure in the first half of the

Twentieth Century, an aspect of his life and work that perhaps has not received as much attention as it should. The research I undertook, however, was largely directed towards my critical study of H. G. Wells and artistic culture (which I hope will be published next year), so the bulk of the material I consulted was manuscripts and typescripts of the novels. The distinction between the two is worth making – since, as anyone who has worked on Wells archives will tell you, the impenetrability of Wells's handwriting is a serious obstacle to making the most of interpreting this material. When reading the manuscripts of *The Time Machine*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, I often had open beside me Bernard Loing's detailed and meticulous study of the manuscripts *H. G. Wells à L'Oeuvre: Les Débuts d'un Écrivain (1894-1900)* – and was relieved to discover that even such dogged and experienced hermeneuts of the Wells hand as Loing, and *Correspondence* editor David C. Smith, occasionally have to resign themselves to the occasional '[word undecipherable]' in their transcriptions. The manuscripts themselves give a fascinating glimpse of Wells's practice as a writer. Wells would write in hand, then pass the holograph MSS to a typist, and then annotate the typewritten sheets with balloons of text a number of times until he was satisfied – or, at least as satisfied as Wells ever was with his published output. Authorial intention can never be known or stated for certain, of course, but writing literary criticism does involve a certain amount of trying to get inside an author's imagination: and the Wells collection at Illinois is the next best thing to meeting the man himself.

Since the published text represents what the author decided to leave in, what literary critics tend to look for in manuscripts therefore is often change of mind or heart. The novels in which I happen to be most interested are among those which caused Wells most anguish: in the narration of the Lewishams' marital troubles, the painful genesis of *Kipps* from the abandoned *The Wealth of Mr Waddy*. Most of these novels occupy five or six large boxes: in the case of *Tono-Bungay*, I consulted over two thousand sheets, with Wells cancelling or rewriting whole swathes of text up to as late a stage as their

having been set in proof. I had wondered if the proverbial decline in quality of Wells's later fiction was a consequence of his taking this part of his output less seriously than at the beginning of his career, but on the evidence of the careful attention to revision and rewriting of the manuscripts of his post-World War One novel *Joan and Peter*, this is certainly not the case.

One also receives a powerful sense of the importance that Wells assigned to the undertaking of being an author and public figure. In correspondence to his agent J. B. Pinker, or to a prospective American publisher, Wells insists on his distinctiveness and significance as a writer like no other, claiming his right to produce whatever work he considers to be important in any number of genres, fictional or non-fictional. Wells's sense of mission is not mere authorial self-conceit, but springs from a sense that what he has to say must be heard, or the consequences for the human race could be disastrous.

I left Illinois with a great deal of new material for my book, but also a yearning to return. On my very final day, the Library staff were able to unearth Wells's final unpublished work *Exasperations* (which did not then appear in the catalogue), a collection of later essays on the lines of *The Fate of Homo Sapiens*. Time did not permit me, however, to look at the holdings around very important Wells book such as *Anticipations*, *The Outline of History* and *Experiment in Autobiography*; I would also dearly love to have spent more time decoding tricky handwritten cruces even in the novels whose manuscripts I did have the opportunity to read. I have also discussed with the Curator of Special Collections Chatham Ewing the possibility in future of making some material from the Illinois Wells collection available in future, whether through Society publications or by other means (copyright permitting, of course). I should also mention here the many personal kindnesses shown me during my visit by the Library's Director of Public Programmes Dennis Sears, by Chatham, and by Chatham's predecessor, Gene Rinkel, whose article on the archive in the 2002 *Wellsian* and edition of Wells's 'picshuas' will be known to members, and who continues to be very much

involved in matters Wells at Illinois – I could not have asked for more welcoming or generous hosts during my stay.

At the time of going to press, applications will have closed for the 2010-11 round of the Visiting Scholar Program, but details will appear in future years here:

[http://www.library.illinois.edu/rbx/research\\_grants.htm](http://www.library.illinois.edu/rbx/research_grants.htm)

Simon J. James

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Copy for Annual Report:

In 2010, I took over the editorship of the *Wellsian*. My predecessor, Dr John S. Partington really took the journal forward, I feel, assuring its status as a peer-reviewed international scholarly publication. I can only hope to maintain John's level of success as editor, and have been greatly pleased by the standard and number of the excellent submissions for the 2010 issue. 2011 will, we hope, feature material from the Society's very successful conference last year on *Ann Veronica*.

As some Society members will know, last year I was lucky enough to visit the Wells Collection at the University of Illinois. I will be writing about this experience for the *Newsletter*, but I can report that this was a marvellously stimulating visit, and that the Library staff were immensely helpful and generous in assisting my research. The draft of my book on Wells is now nearly finished, and I hope it will appear next year; my planned future projects will include making some Wells resources more widely available by putting them online.