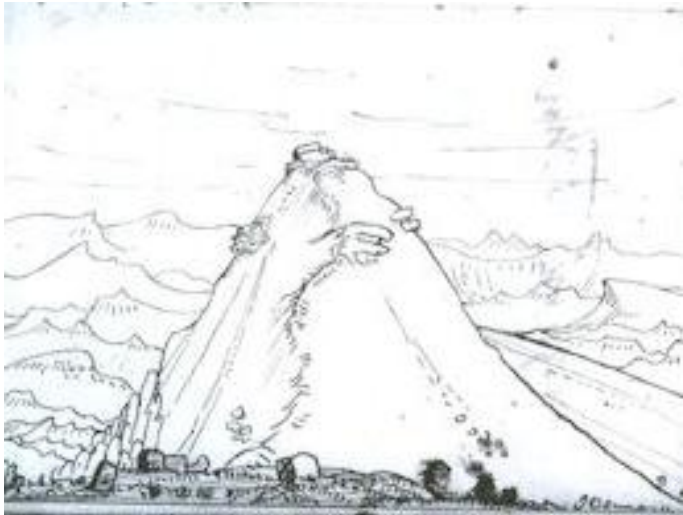




University Library, Special Collections & Archives
Highlight for June 2011

Major addition to the John Sampson archive



John Sampson (1862-1931) was the Librarian of Liverpool University Library and a literary and Romani scholar. His biography was written by his grandson, the author Anthony Sampson as *The Scholar Gypsy* (1997), and the materials on which that life was based have recently been given to the Library by the author's cousin, Sampson's granddaughter.

This major addition to the John Sampson archive contains letters between John Sampson and his wife Margaret Sampson (née Sprunt), and their family and friends; with other papers including a copy of the Sampson's visitors' book.

Augustus John.



The Visitors' Book (1909-1919) records the stream of guests who arrived at the Sampsons' isolated home Cae Gwyn, in the village of Bettws-Gwerfil-Goch, near Corwen in North Wales, and at their later home at Deeside, Llangollen, it was inaugurated by the artist Augustus John (shown left).

Other signatures include many members of their families, and university and Gypsy Lore Society friends, for example the artists James Dickson Innes (with mountain sketch, above) and Enid Jackson (with portrait of Sampson's daughter Honor, below); the poet Arthur Symons; fellow GLS members T.W. Thompson, George Hall, E.O. Winstedt; Bernard and Voika Gilliat-Smith; R.A. Scott Macfie; William Ferguson; and Oliver Purum (their Gypsy friend Oliver Lee, with 'his mark'); and the Professors of Architecture and English, Charles Reilly (with a sketch of Liverpool Town Hall) and Oliver Elton.

A large part of the archive consists of daily letters from John Sampson to (Jessie) Margaret Sprunt, later Sampson, through their courtship in the face of her family's disapproval, their secret marriage in April 1894 (initially known only to Walter Raleigh, a close University friend), their early friendship with Augustus John and his wife Ida, and their increasing estrangement and later separation. The idyllic Cae Gwyn, Sampson's weekend retreat, was a remote and lonely place for his much younger wife bringing up their three children on little money.

Sampson's letters shed light on the life of town and gown in Liverpool from the end of the nineteenth century up to Sampson's retirement in 1928. He comments briefly on life in Liverpool before, during and after First World War, including anti-German riots and the repeated internment of the unfortunate Albert Lipczinski, a Polish artist. The Sampsons' two sons, Michael and Amyas, were both on active service during the war, and the letters follow their careers closely. Michael, in the army, returned safely as a Major and MC; their younger son Amyas joined the RFC at the first opportunity, but was missing in action over France in August 1918.

The letters are also full of Sampson's university and scholarly work, and details about the expeditions he made into Wales and Yorkshire, often in the company of fellow members of the Gypsy Lore Society.



The sketch (left) which Sampson included in a letter of 1908 reproduces the 'new horrible cover' of the revived *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* (July 1908, vol. II, part 1). The actual cover illustration (above) is described by R.A. Scott Macfie, Sampson says in his letter, as 'Miss Yates looking into Pott' – a Gypsiologist's joke referring to Sampson's colleague Dora Yates and the 19th century German philologist August Friedrich Pott.



Material from the Sampson archive, including new additions, has already featured in a documentary on BBC4 about Augustus John and James Dickson Innes, and their work on Arenig Fawr in North Wales: 'The Mountain That Had to Be Painted.'

References:

University of Liverpool, Sampson papers in staff records of University archive: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/colldescs/univarchives/unistaff.html>

University of Liverpool, Sampson papers in Gypsy Lore Society archive: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/colldescs/gypsy/Sampson.htm>

University of Liverpool, Special Collections & Archives website: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>

