

MANUSCRIPTS MATTER

WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS

19 OCTOBER 2006

Good morning. My name is Clive Field, and I have the privilege of being Director of Scholarship and Collections here at The British Library. It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all today on behalf of the Library's Board and Executive. We are delighted to see so many faces in the audience, and representative of so many parties with an interest in the future of modern literary manuscripts. We extend an especially warm welcome to our international guests.

As the national library of the United Kingdom, the British Library naturally has a significant degree of responsibility for, and involvement in, the preservation of the English literary heritage. We have been collecting in the field for more than 250 years and, during that time, have built up some very important holdings which attract researchers from all over the world. We continue to be very active in acquiring modern literary papers.

The present conference arises from an initiative launched by The British Library in September 2004, from which the Working Group chaired by Chris Smith has emerged. The conference has been organised by the Library in collaboration with the Institute of English Studies at the University of London, and with academic and funding support from seven UK and US partners: Bernard Quaritch Ltd, the Bodleian Library, the Friends of the National Libraries, the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, the John Rylands University Library at the University of Manchester (where I worked for 13 years), and the Robert W Woodruff Library at Emory University. We offer sincerest thanks to all these partners. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to Professor Warwick Gould at the Institute of English Studies and to my many colleagues at the Library, not least Jamie Andrews and Eileen Kinghan and my former colleague Chris Fletcher, who have put such an exciting programme together for us.

Although the current roots of the conference go back only two years, the issues which we shall be discussing have been live ones for half a century. Many of our speakers and panellists during the next two days have had a long involvement in advocating the cause of modern literary manuscripts. The roll-call of names demonstrates how important a topic we are considering, and how its tentacles touch so many people in this country and abroad. The range of bodies and interests represented here, and their international reach, is testimony to the criticality of our work to world civilisation. Some of these voices of advocacy, including Philip Larkin's, are sadly no longer with us, and a number who are very much with us cannot attend today for one reason or another. We think here particularly of Roy Davids and extend our warmest good wishes for his recovery from surgery.

We see this conference as part of an ongoing dialogue and action plan, not just an end in itself. The British Library fully intends, working with all of you, to press the case for modern literary manuscripts and to play our part in acquiring and preserving them for posterity. For that reason, it is vital that we have a full record of the proceedings of this conference. We shall, therefore, be sound recording every moment, purely for archival purposes by our Sound Archive. We therefore ask you: a) to switch off your cellphones and any other devices which could be intrusive, and b) to wait for the microphone when contributing to discussions and to introduce yourself before speaking. We appreciate your co-operation in this matter.

When The British Library was contemplating establishing the Working Group, from which this conference has sprung, we were very clear that we needed a prominent and independent chair to lead us. We were thrilled when, amidst his already crammed diary, Lord Smith of Finsbury accepted the Library's invitation to champion the cause. Not only is he a prominent public figure, with a distinguished record of service in many spheres, amongst them a notably effective spell as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, but he also has a keen personal interest and an academic pedigree in the study of English literature. The British Library is especially indebted to Chris for laying the foundations for the extension of legal deposit to the non-print world. I am delighted to leave you in his capable hands for the first and introductory session of our conference.

Dr Clive Field