

Plantagenet Somerset Fry Collection

MS 5121

The collection consists of manuscripts, typescripts and proofs of many of Somerset Fry's works including *Mysteries of History*, *The Cankered Rose*, *Castles*, *Roman Britain*, *Great Commanders*, *Constantinople*, *The Wonderful History of the Jews*, *3000 Questions and answers*, *The Children's History of the World*, *The Tower of London*, *Antique Furniture and Collecting Junk*; poetry; biographical notes; business correspondence; newscuttings; photographs of Somerset Fry

The Collection covers the year's c.1900s - 1996.

The physical extent of the collection is 81 files.

Introduction

Plantagenet Somerset Fry was born Peter Fry in January 1931, the third child and only son of a distinguished naval engineer and a pianist. In his youth he added Somerset to his surname by deed poll, and Plantagenet was a nickname, relating to his advocacy of Richard III, which he adopted at university. As a sickly and accident-prone loner, interested in collecting historical facts and autographs, Peter did not fit in at school at either Christ Church Cathedral School or Lancing College, nor did he shine academically. In 1948 he entered St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, but although he enjoyed himself and met the girl who later became his first wife, he failed his exams and had to leave after a year.

From this time on his father refused to support him further financially and Peter took a variety of jobs in order to survive. In 1950 he joined the staff of the National Film Board of Canada as a librarian and projectionist and at the same time began to read for a London University external degree, supplementing his income by writing articles for *Picture Post* and other magazines. In 1952 at the age of 21 Peter came into some money left to him by his grandmother ten years earlier. On the strength of this he gave up his job, married Audrey Russell against the wishes of his parents, and went on a spending spree for six months, indulging his love of motor cycles and crashing at Brands Hatch. He failed his London degree, and was penniless again, so he became a schoolmaster in Weybridge while living in Kensington, acquired a taste for bizarre clothing and a vintage Rolls Royce which he could not afford and aimed to go to Oxford.

In 1954 Peter went up to Oxford to read history at St Catherine's Society, later College, a modern foundation for less well-off, non-residential students. He and Audrey had only a small London County Council grant to live on and times were hard, but Plantagenet was in his element and found that the eccentricities which

had set him apart elsewhere helped him to fit in to Oxford. In 1955, in search of extra income, he became a contestant on the TV show Double Your Money and won the jackpot of £512. The strangely dressed red-bearded young man with an unusual name and an encyclopaedic knowledge of historical facts became a celebrity, and he received several offers from publishers. His first book, *Mysteries of History*, was published before he went down and his second, a biography of Elizabeth I called *The Cankered Rose* commissioned. This began a successful career as a writer of popular histories for adults and children and guides to antiques and collecting. Until 1980 Plantagenet combined this with various editing and public relations jobs, culminating in five years as editor of books for HMSO, and then became a full-time writer. From 1980 until 1984 he was a Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, Cambridge and from 1984 onwards a Senior Member of that institution, a privilege that he greatly enjoyed.

Although successful professionally Plantagenet was less happy personally. In 1956 his wife Audrey joined a year's horse-riding expedition from Spain to Belgrade and the marriage did not survive the separation. In 1958, soon after winning another jackpot on Double Your Money, Plantagenet married Daphne Yorke, a 22 year old debutante, and Hughie Green was a guest at the wedding. Unfortunately, soon afterwards she was diagnosed with an incurable kidney disease, a fact which Plantagenet concealed from her for two years until her death in February 1961. He set up a medical research trust in her memory which still exists. In the summer of the same year Plantagenet met Leri Butler, a divorcee 24 years his senior, and married her in November 1961. This marriage ended in divorce in 1973 and in 1974 Plantagenet married a writer, Fiona Whitcombe, with whom he collaborated on histories of Scotland and of Ireland and who survived him.

Plantagenet's health was never robust and he also suffered injury in a succession of car crashes, after one of which he was confined to a wheelchair for some years. He could be over sensitive, especially where his academic credentials or the correct spelling of his name were concerned, and took offence easily. Although he did make a living from writing non-fiction, a notoriously difficult task, he was perpetually worried about money and, as he did not use an agent, had to do all his own negotiations with publishers.

In 1996 Plantagenet Somerset Fry was told that he was dying of bowel cancer. He refused treatment and died by suffocating himself with a plastic bag at the age of 65.

- MS 5121/A** Papers relating to books
1955-1996
- MS 5121/A/1** World History
1968-1996
- MS 5121/A/1/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Children's History of the World'
1968-1996
Manuscripts, typescripts, notes, correspondence and proofs
- 30 items
- MS 5121/A/1/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'Wonderful History of the Jews'
1970
Manuscripts, typescripts and notes
- MS 5121/A/1/3** Papers relating to the publication, 'History of the World for children', published by Hamlyn
1969
Manuscripts, typescripts and correspondence
- 5 items
- MS 5121/A/1/4** Papers relating to the publication, 'Date Book of World History', published by Hamlyn
1971-1978
Manuscript

**MS
5121/A/1/5** Papers relating to the publication, 'Macmillan History in Pictures'
1977
Manuscripts, typescripts and notes

**MS
5121/A/1/6** Papers relating to the publication, 'Readers Digest World Social
History'
1991
Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts and
correspondence

MS 5121/A/2 Encyclopedias etc.
1970-1985

**MS
5121/A/2/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Purnell Library of Knowledge'
articles on Vikings etc
1970
Manuscripts, typescripts, correspondence and notes

**MS
5121/A/2/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'Constantinople'
1970
Manuscripts and typescripts

**MS
5121/A/2/3** Papers relating to the publication, 'Deans Children's
Encyclopedia'
1985
Revised typescripts, notes, correspondence and contract

2 items

**MS
5121/A/2/4** Papers relating to the publication, 'Junior Dictionary'
undated
Manuscripts and typescripts

MS 5121/A/3 Questions and Answers
1970s-1989

**MS
5121/A/3/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Questions', published by
Collins
1970s
Manuscripts, typescripts and correspondence

**MS
5121/A/3/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'Answer Book of History'
1972
Manuscripts and typescripts

2 items

**MS
5121/A/3/3** Papers relating to the publication, '3000 Questions and
Answers', published by Collins
1988-1989
Manuscripts, typescripts and gallery proof

3 items

**MS
5121/A/3/4** Papers relating to the publication, '3000 More Q & A', published
by Collins
undated
Manuscripts and typescripts

3 items

- MS 5121/A/4** British History
1955-1991
- MS 5121/A/4/1** Papers relating to the publications, 'Mysteries of History' and 'The Cankered Rose'
1955-1959
2 revised typescripts

2 items
- MS 5121/A/4/2** Papers relating to the publication, '2000 Years of British Life', published by Collins
1975-1976
Manuscripts, typescripts, correspondence and proofs

2 items
- MS 5121/A/4/3** Papers relating to the publication, 'Beautiful Britain'
1980
Revised typescripts and gallery proof
- MS 5121/A/4/4** Papers relating to the publication, 'British History from the air', published by CUP
1980-1982
Synopsis and notes
- MS 5121/A/4/5** Papers relating to the publication, 'Cambridge and surrounds' for Britain's Heritage
1981
Manuscripts, typescripts, notes and correspondence

**MS
5121/A/4/6** Papers relating to the publication, 'Roman Britain'
undated
Manuscript notes, revised typescripts, page proofs, index proofs,
revised proofs and correspondence

17 items

**MS
5121/A/4/7** Papers relating to the publication, 'The Heritage of Britain',
published by Hamlyn
1982
Manuscripts, revised typescripts and correspondence

**MS
5121/A/4/8** Papers relating to the publication, 'Clans of Scotland' B. Trodd
1991
Manuscripts, revised typescripts and correspondence

**MS
5121/A/4/9** Papers relating to the publication, 'From Stone to Iron; the first
40 centuries'
undated
Typescripts

MS 5121/A/5 Historical Biography
1968-1990

**MS
5121/A/5/1** Papers relating to the publications, 'Rulers of Britain' and 'They
Made History', published by Hamlyn
1968-1970
Typescripts

2 items

MS
5121/A/5/2 Papers relating to the publication, 'Famous Women; Famous Men', published by Zebra Books, Evans
1970s
Manuscripts and typescripts

2 items

MS
5121/A/5/3 Papers relating to the publication, 'Boudicca'
1970s-1980s
Manuscripts, typescripts and proofs

2 items

MS
5121/A/5/4 Papers relating to the publication, 'Great Caesar'
1973
Manuscripts, typescripts, gallery proofs and page proofs

5 items

MS
5121/A/5/5 Papers relating to the publication, 'Great Commanders'
undated
Typescripts and revised typescripts

2 items

MS
5121/A/5/6 Papers relating to the publication, '1000 Great Lives/ 1000 Great People'
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts, proofs and correspondence

8 items

MS
5121/A/5/7 Papers relating to the publication, 'Kings and Queens', published by DK
1990
Manuscript notes, typescripts, correspondence, financial correspondence 1993-5

8 items

- MS
5121/A/5/8** Papers relating to the publication, 'Zebra Book of Inventors'
undated
Typescripts and newscuttings
- MS
5121/A/5/9** Papers relating to the publication, 'People of Long Ago',
published by Macmillan, for the 'Look it up' series
undated
Manuscripts and revised typescripts [unpublished?]
- MS 5121/A/6** Architecture, Guide Books etc
1976-1990
- MS
5121/A/6/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Chequers', published by
HMSO
1976-1977
Manuscripts, typescripts and proofs
- 2 items
- MS
5121/A/6/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'Framlingham & Orford
Castles'. an English heritage guidebook
1986
Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts, notes and
correspondence
- MS
5121/A/6/3** Papers relating to the publication, 'Tower of London'
1987-1990
Manuscripts, typescripts index, typescripts, revised typescripts,
correspondence and illustrations
- 4 items

- MS
5121/A/6/4** Papers relating to the publication, 'Battle Abbey' guidebook
1988
Manuscripts, typescripts and proofs
- 2 items
- MS
5121/A/6/5** Papers relating to the publication, 'Great Cathedrals'
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts, proofs and illustrations
- MS
5121/A/6/6** Papers relating to the publication, 'The Past Around Us'
undated
Manuscript notes and typescripts
- MS
5121/A/6/7** Papers relating to the publication, 'Rievaulx Abbey' guidebook
undated
Manuscripts and typescripts
- MS 5121/A/7** Castles
1972-1996
- MS
5121/A/7/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Castles'
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts, proofs, notes,
correspondence and large old ledger converted to notebook with
pasted-in manuscript pages alphabetically by castle
- 18 items
- MS
5121/A/7/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'British Medieval Castles',
published by David & Charles
1972

Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts and
correspondence

3 items

MS
5121/A/7/3 Papers relating to the publication, 'Zebra Book of Castles',
published by Evans
1974
Manuscripts, synopsis and typescripts

MS
5121/A/7/4 Papers relating to the publication, 'Castles', published by OUP
1982-1984
Manuscripts, typescripts and correspondence

MS
5121/A/7/5 Papers relating to the publication, 'Irish Castles'
1991
Synopsis, Typescript chapter and correspondence

MS
5121/A/7/6 Papers relating to the publication, 'Castles Action Pack',
published by DK
1994-1995
Manuscripts, typescripts, proofs and illustrations

MS
5121/A/7/7 Papers relating to the publication, 'Castles of Britain & Ireland'
1996
Proofs

2 items

MS 5121/A/8 Antiques etc
1970-1993

**MS
5121/A/8/1** Papers relating to the publication, 'Antique Furniture'
undated
Typescripts, revised typescripts, articles and press cuttings

**MS
5121/A/8/2** Papers relating to the publication, 'The World of Antiques',
published by Hamlyn
1970
Manuscripts, typescripts, proofs, notes and book

4 items

**MS
5121/A/8/3** Papers relating to the publication, 'Collecting Junk'
1972
Typescripts

**MS
5121/A/8/4** Papers relating to the publication, 'Collecting Inexpensive
Antiques'
1973
Manuscripts and revised typescripts

**MS
5121/A/8/5** Papers relating to the publication, 'Antiques'
1984
Manuscripts and typescripts

**MS
5121/A/8/6** Papers relating to the publication, 'Handbook of Antiques
Furniture'
1991-1992
Manuscripts, typescripts, revised typescripts, proofs,
correspondence and line drawings by D Davson

6 items

- MS
5121/A/8/7** Papers relating to Antiques books
1993
Manuscripts, typescripts, notes, illustrations [photos and
drawings] and lecture
- MS
5121/A/8/8** Papers relating to the publication, 'Crafts', published by Peter
Davies
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts and notes
- MS 5121/B** Papers relating to articles, talks etc.
1956-1993
- MS 5121/B/1** TV treatments - 'Robin Hood'; 'Hereward the Wake'; 'Memory'
1956-1963
Typescripts and synopsis for TV treatments - Robin Hood
(1956); Hereward the Wake (1957); Memory (1963)
- MS 5121/B/2** Evening News articles Tales of the Tower
1964-1965
Typescripts and correspondence
- MS 5121/B/3** Short feature articles on Historical Personages and Events
1964-1965
Typescripts and correspondence

- MS 5121/B/4** Articles on Towns
1965-1970
Typescripts, correspondence and newscuttings
- MS 5121/B/5** Readers Digest projects
1970s-1980s
Manuscripts, typescripts and correspondence
- 3 items
- MS 5121/B/6** Short articles for British Commemorative Medals Society
1975
Typescripts and correspondence
- MS 5121/B/7** Cambridge Extra-Mural Course
1986-1992
Teaching correspondence
- MS 5121/B/8** Roman Britain Lecture - Wolfson college course
undated
Revised typescripts
- MS 5121/B/9** Jewish Chronicle articles
undated
Typescripts and newscuttings

- MS
5121/B/10** Various articles chiefly Famous People or Events
undated
Typescripts and revised typescripts
- MS
5121/B/11** 18th Century Architecture in Britain
undated
Manuscripts and revised typescripts
- MS
5121/B/12** Synopses
undated
Typescripts, manuscripts and correspondence
- MS
5121/B/13** Round the world in 39 1/2 minutes - Talk
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts and revised typescripts
- MS
5121/B/14** A journey round the furniture of Europe 1300-1800 Article
undated
Typescripts
- MS
5121/B/15** Antiques and historical articles
undated
Manuscripts and typescripts
- MS
5121/B/16** Evening news articles - Plantagenet's Progress etc
undated
Newscuttings

- MS
5121/B/17** Summer school on English furniture
1993
Manuscripts and typescripts
- MS
5121/B/18** Writing on English furniture
undated
Manuscripts, typescripts and correspondence
- MS
5121/B/19** Talks on castles
undated
Manuscripts and typescripts
- MS 5121/C** Personal and business papers
c.1900s-1989
- MS 5121/C/1** Autograph book belonging to Robin Fry made into a notebook
undated
- MS 5121/C/2** Notebook kept at Lancing
1948

- MS 5121/C/3** 'Personal' envelope
undated
Manuscripts poetry, Life story typescript chapter headings and
newscuttings
- MS 5121/C/4** Oxford' envelope
undated
Photographs etc
- MS 5121/C/5** Personal newscuttings
undated
- MS 5121/C/6** Family papers
c. 1900s
Sketchbook of Indian scenes by H.M.W. [4th wife Fiona's father
Henry Maurice Whitcombe 1900-1983] + folder of papers
relating to HMW + photographs of PSF
- MS 5121/C/7** Newscuttings of book reviews
1957-1959
- MS 5121/C/8** Book contracts
1965-1989