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Guide to the William Smith Papers

OSB MSS 57



by Diane J. Ducharme

June 1996

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: OSB MSS 57

CREATOR: Smith, William, 1730-1819

TITLE: William Smith papers

DATES: 1760-1823

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.4 linear feet (1 box)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of letters, poems by both William Smith and others, newspaper clippings and other material related to Smith's career in the theater and his life in retirement after 1788. The letters discuss personal news, requests for theater tickets, inquiries after Smith's health, and other matters. Letters by Thomas Coutts offer his opinion on various aspiring actors and gossip about theatrical personages; William Dolben's letters include drafts of epilogues and odes; Capel Lofft's letters contain comments on Garrick and Roscius. Edmund Kean's letter discusses his performances of Richard III. Other papers include a list of characters performed by Smith at Drury Lane, 1753-88; his farewell address from there, 1788; miscellaneous verses; and memorabilia of David Garrick.

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Requesting Instructions

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The William Smith Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

William Smith Papers. James Marshall and Marie Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

This finding aid was produced from a previously existing card set in the Manuscripts Catalog, or from another inventory. All pertinent bibliographical information has been retained.

WILLIAM SMITH (1730?-1819)

William Smith, known during his theatrical career as "Gentleman" Smith, was born in London, educated at Eton, and admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge. In 1767, after leaving Cambridge following an incident during which he drew a pistol on the proctor, Smith returned to London, became a pupil of Spranger Barry, and made his first appearance as the title hero in Nathaniel Lee's *Theodosius* at Covent Garden in January, 1753. In the following year Smith married Elizabeth Montagu Courtenay, the second daughter of viscount Hinchinbroke and sister of the fourth Earl of Sandwich. The family objected strongly to the match, and Smith reportedly offered to retire from acting were he guaranteed an annuity equal to his earnings. Elizabeth Smith died in 1762; Smith subsequently married a widow named Margaret.

In the spring of 1774, Smith ended his career at Covent Garden in the role of Macbeth, announcing his intention to retire and to devote himself to a country life in Bury St. Edmunds. Instead, he went to Paris with Mrs. Hartley, who had been playing opposite him as Lady Macbeth. Several months later he returned to England and to his second wife, and joined Garrick's Drury Lane Theatre. He appeared there until his retirement in 1788, winning particular fame for his interpretation of Charles Surface in Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, a role he originated.

Upon retiring, Smith did settle at Bury St. Edmunds, returning to the stage only once, to perform Charles Surface in a benefit at Covent Garden. He devoted himself to fox-hunting and horseracing, and died at home in 1819.

Scope and Contents

The William Smith Papers document aspects of the adult life and theatrical career of the actor "Gentleman" William Smith. The papers span the dates 1760-1823, and are organized into Correspondence, Poems, and Personal Papers series.

[Series I, Correspondence](#), is located in folders 1-47 and arranged alphabetically by correspondent. Retained copies of letters by William Smith have been listed under Smith alphabetically by recipient.

Letters concerning Smith's life in the theater and English theater in general include those by Sir George Beaumont, George Frederick Cooke, Thomas Coutts, Joseph George Holman, Edmund Kean, Thomas King, Capel Lofft, and Viscount Torrington. Kean's letter includes a discussion of his approach to the role of Richard III, while Beaumont's letters contain comments on the "Garrick School" of acting and anecdotes about the theater. The letters of William Dolben, Smith's schoolfellow, contain many compositions and Latin translation exercises as well as school and family news.

[Series II, Poems](#), is organized into three subseries: "Addresses and Other Theatrical Pieces by William Smith," "Occasional Poems by William Smith" and "Poems by Others." "Addresses and Other Theatrical Pieces" includes manuscripts of prologues, epilogues and songs composed by Smith for his own performances, including his farewell epilogue and the epilogue he delivered after his post-retirement appearance in the role of Charles Surface at the King benefit. Folder 56 contains a song in honor of Nelson's victories in Egypt, "to the tune of 'Hearts of Oak.'" "Occasional Poems" includes manuscripts of elegies, songs, and "The Death of Nelson--from the Greek."

[Series III, Personal Papers](#), includes material related to the King benefit performance; a list of roles performed by Smith from 1753 to 1788; and two folders of David Garrick memorabilia, such as an invitation to his funeral, tributes to him, and copies of anecdotes concerning him.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence

"A"		
b. 1, f. 1	Axford, John. ALS to the Rev. Mr. Barton, Warminster	1781 Apr 8
"B"		
Beaumont, Sir George Howland, 1753-1827		
b. 1, f. 2	1 ALS and 1 copy (in Martha Smith's hand) to John Taylor, Coleorton Hall Beaumont's recollections about the character of William Smith, with comments about Taylor's article on Smith in the <i>Sun</i> .	1819 Dec 12
b. 1, f. 3	2 ALS to Martha Smith, Grosvenor Square Expressions of pleasure at a book willed to Beaumont by William Smith.	1821 Jun
b. 1, f. 4	8 ALS to William Smith, [v.p.] Series of letters with nostalgic comments about the Garrickean school of acting, entertaining anecdotes about the child actor William Betty and gracious references to many of the important men of the period. A draft of a Smith reply is on the back of the first letter.	1805-07
b. 1, f. 5	Braybrooke, Richard Aldworth Griffin-Neville, 2nd baron, 1750-1825. ALS to William Smith, Billingbean	1814 June 12
b. 1, f. 6	Buccleuch, Charles William Henry Scott, 4th duke of, 1772-1819. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] With draft of Smith's reply on reverse. Accompanied by another ALS (1 p., [1810]).	1802 Aug 5
b. 1, f. 7	Bunbury, Henry William, 1750-1811. ALS to William Smith, Keswick Accompanied by two riddles, 1808.	[1803 or later]
b. 1, f. 8	Bute, Frances (Coutts) Stuart, Marchioness of, 1773-1832. ALS to William Smith, Naples Refers to her father, Thomas Coutts.	1818 Oct 6
"C"		
b. 1, f. 9	Cooke, George Frederick, 1756-1811. ALS to William Smith, London Concerns the acting of various plays and reflects the life of an actor.	1801 Dec 28
b. 1, f. 10	Cotterell-Dormer, Clement, d. 1808. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] Concerns plans to travel together.	1793 Sep 6
Coutts, Thomas, 1735-1822		
b. 1, f. 11	AL to Martha Smith, [n.p.] Note upon receiving William Smith's mourning ring for Garrick from Mrs. Smith.	1820 Mar 1

"C" > Coutts, Thomas, 1735-1822 (continued)

b. 1, f. 12	13 ALS to William Smith, [v.p.] Intimate correspondence with reminiscences about the theater and old friends, with incisive comments about young actors and political affairs.	1791-1814
b. 1, f. 13	Coutts and Co., bankers. [n.p.] Statement to Martha Smith from 1820 July to 1823 Jan.	1823 Jan 25
b. 1, f. 14	Cullum, Sir Thomas Grey, 1741-1831. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] A quite friendly, newsy letter reflecting the period.	[ca. 1812]
b. 1, f. 15	Cumberland, Richard, 1732-1811. ALS to William Smith, Tunbridge Wells Accompanied by a copy of the letter from Smith to Cumberland, 1806 Mar 12. References to William Betty.	1806 Mar 27
b. 1, f. 16	Lines written by the late Mr. Cumberland a short time before his death. Manuscript copied by William Smith.	1811
"D"		
b. 1, f. 17	Derby, Edward Smith Stanley, 13th Earl of, 1775-1851. ALS to William Smith, The Oaks	1797 May 7
b. 1, f. 18	DeTably, John Fleming Leicester, 1st Baron, 1762-1827. 2 ALS to William Smith, [n.p.]	n.d.
b. 1, f. 19	Dolben, Sir John English, 4th Bart., ca. 1750-1837. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] Enclosing a Latin ode for Smith (1 p.).	1818 Sep 5
b. 1, f. 20	Dolben, William, 1726-1814. 18 ALS to William Smith, Bury St. Edmunds These letters contain many poems and Latin translations. They are accompanied by a letter from Dolben's daughter to William Smith and by a poem of Smith.	1810-13
"E"		
b. 1, f. 21	Erskine, Thomas Erskine, 1st baron, 1750-1823. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.]	[ca. 1806]
"G"		
b. 1, f. 22	Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de, 1746-1830. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] She presents her compliments and apologies.	[ca. 1800]
"H"		
b. 1, f. 23	Holman, Joseph George, 1764-1817. ALS to William Smith, Hanover Square Concerns Holman's statement of grievances of chief actors and his "Tribute to respect" to Smith.	[1800] Apr 22
b. 1, f. 24	Hustler, James Devereux. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] With copies of Greek and Latin inscriptions for a monument to Tweddell in Athens.	1806 Feb 3

"J"		
b. 1, f. 25	Jeckyll, Joseph, d. 1837. Copy of a note to Mrs. Coutts (later Duchess of St. Albans), n.p.	1818 Feb 17
b. 1, f. 26	Jordan, Dorothy (Bland), 1762-1816. 2 ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] Refers to commemorative cup given to Thomas King; Smith has written a ballad on the reverse of the second letter.	[1800?], n.d.
"K"		
b. 1, f. 27	Kean, Edmund, 1787-1833. Letter (copy by William Smith) to Samuel Whitbread, Birmingham Concerns "flattering paneganic" by Whitbread, and also Kean's performance of Richard III.	1814 Sep 13
b. 1, f. 28	King, Thomas, 1730-1805. 3 ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] One of the letters concerns Sheridan's <i>Pizarro</i> . Accompanied by an address to the King, holograph, dated Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1800 May 24, (1 p.).	1798 May, n.d.
"L"		
b. 1, f. 29	Lansdowne, Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquis of, 1780-1863. ALS to William Smith, Bolton Street	1806 Apr 2
b. 1, f. 30	Lofft, Capell, 1751-1824. 3 ALS to William Smith, Troston Reminiscences about the theater. One letter is in verse and is accompanied by transcription.	1798-1813
"M"		
b. 1, f. 31	Mansfield, Sir James, 1733-1821. ALS to William Smith, Queen Square Mansfield was Lord Chief Justice. Smith has used the letter to write down horse race results.	[after 1802]
"N"		
b. 1, f. 32	Nelson, Horatio Nelson, viscount, 1758-1805. Letter (copy) to Lord Stowell, Victory Accompanied by a copy of Lord Nelson's prayer, "composed while the enemy's fleets were in sight", 1805 Oct 21.	1805 Jan 2
"P"		
b. 1, f. 33	Panton, Thomas, 1731-1808. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.]	[ca. 1790]
b. 1, f. 34	Portland, William Henry Cavendish Bentinck, 3d duke of, 1738-1809. ALS to William Smith, Bulstrode Relates Portland's appreciation for Smith's suggestions concerning some affairs with France.	1797 Sep 14
b. 1, f. 35	Poyntz, William Stephen, ca. 1770-1840. ALS to Martha Smith, Petworth Concerns part of William Smith's will.	1821 Mar 28
"S"		

"S" (continued)

b. 1, f. 36	Sandwich, Elizabeth (Wilmot) Montagu, countess of, 1674-1757. ALS to Elizabeth Smith, [n.p.] The letter appears to be dated 1714, but refers to her Grandson, who was not born until 1718.	[1714?] Jan 25
b. 1, f. 37	Smith, Pleasance (Reeve), Lady, 1773-1877. ALS to Martha Smith, Lowth Place Smith, William, 1730?-1819	1816 Oct 21
b. 1, f. 38	ALS to Sir George Beaumont, Bury St. Edmonds This polite letter commences their long and pleasant correspondence.	1805 Jan 28
b. 1, f. 39	ALS (copy) to William Betty, [n.p.] With a copy of a poem addressed to Betty.	1805 Feb 13
b. 1, f. 40	ALS (copy) to the Marchioness of Bute, [n.p.]	1818 Aug 1
b. 1, f. 41	AL (in 3rd person) to the Eton Club, [n.p.] Mr. Smith mittit Salutem to the Eton Club.	1808 Jan 14
b. 1, f. 42	ALS (copy) to Joseph Holman, Bury St. Edmonds Answer to Holman's letter concerning a statement of grievances of chief actors.	1800 Apr 28
b. 1, f. 43	ALS (copy) to Edmund Kean, Bury St. Edmunds Letter of introduction for Doctor Malkin. The 26th anniversary of his quitting the stage.	1814 Jun 9
b. 1, f. 44	AL (copy) to Lord John Townshend, [n.p.]	[1800?] Jul 13
b. 1, f. 45	Symonds, John, 1730-1807. AL to William Smith, [n.p.] Enclosed are two poems by Thomas Grey: "On the election of the High Steward of the university, when the contest was between Ld. Sandwich & Ld. Hardwicke," and "Inscription for the Villa of a decayed Statesman on the sea-coast". Also a transcription of the poems in Smith's hand.	[ca. 1800]
"T"		
b. 1, f. 46	Torrington, John Byng, 5th viscount, 1740-1813. ALS to William Smith, [n.p.] On Smith's Epilogue, spoken after his last benefit at Drury Lane Theatre, of which Byng was co-author. Accompanied by two copies of the epilogue.	[ca. 1788]
b. 1, f. 47	Townshend, Lord John, 1757-1833. ALS to William Smith, Bath Accompanied by another ALS (1806), discussing the sickness of C. J. Fox.	1806 Oct 19

Series II: Poems

ADDRESSES AND OTHER THEATRICAL PIECES BY WILLIAM SMITH

b. 1, f. 48	Epilogue to the Tempest, performed at the Earl of Sandwichs at Hinchingbrooke, spoken by Miss Courtenay who performed the part of Ariel. Holograph, signed "W.S."	1760
b. 1, f. 49	The Farewell Address to the Audience ... at Drury Lane Theater Holograph.	1788 Jun 9
b. 1, f. 50	Lines written and spoken by Mr. Smith after performing the part of Charles Surface in The School for Scandal for the Benefit of Mr. King May the 18th 1798.... Holograph, annotated. Two copies.	1798
b. 1, f. 51	Lines written in the Character of a British Sailor, at a Play for the Benefit of the Orphan Children of a Seaman who was killed at the Battle of Trafalgar. Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 52	Occasional Address Intended to be Spoken at the Opening Drury Lane Theatre, 10th October 1812, and Submitted to the Sub-Committee of Management for their Decision In strict conformity to their Advertisement On the theme "Scandat Phoenix felicior ignes". Holograph.	1812
b. 1, f. 53	Occasional Prologue written and Spoken by Wm. Smith, Esq. on the opening of Covent Garden Theater Holograph.	1761 Sep 17
b. 1, f. 54	Prologue to Henry 5th at the Opening Cov: Gar: Theatre after the Death of his late Majesty, George 2nd Holograph.	1760 Nov 17
b. 1, f. 55	"Since 'tis the Intent and Business of the Stage" Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 56	Song written and Sung by Mr. Smith at a Ball given at Bury St. Edmunds Nov. 1st in honor of Nelson's and Warren's victories. To the Tune of "Hearts of Oak." Holograph.	[1798?]
OCCASIONAL POEMS BY WILLIAM SMITH		
b. 1, f. 57	Bury. Jan. 25th, 1804: "Four Kingsmen lately came to town" Holographs (three copies).	1804
b. 1, f. 58	Copied from some Lines written and sent to the Young Ladys Fitzroy at Euston at Xmas by W. Smith Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 59	The Dame of Ephesus translated from Petronius by WS Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 60	The Death of Nelson--from the Greek. Holograph.	[ca. 1805]

OCCASIONAL POEMS BY WILLIAM SMITH (continued)

b. 1, f. 61	Elegy. Upon the Death of Capt. Charles Kellond Courtenay, who was killed in the last campaign in Germany Holograph	1762
b. 1, f. 62	"Farewell my Dog, companion, and my Friend" Holograph.	1786
b. 1, f. 63	For a Friend who enquired the State of Health of his Old Boy Holograph (two copies).	n.d.
b. 1, f. 64	"In Winter's cold when tempests blow" Holograph. For God-daughter Caroline Smith.	1805 Feb 14
b. 1, f. 65	Lines in affliction on my dear and best belov'd god-daughter Caroline Accompanied by printed copy. Holograph.	1805 Apr 22
b. 1, f. 66	Lines written by W. Smith on his late Friend Henry William Bunbury Esq. Holograph.	1811 May 20
b. 1, f. 67	"Say, was my vision false or did I spy" Holograph, annotated "by W.S. to Sir Wm. Dalton".	n.d.
b. 1, f. 68	"Siddons, accept the counsels of a Friend" Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 69	Song. Newmarket. Written by W.S.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 70	Waters of Babylon Paraphras'd by W. Smith Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 71	"When Farquhar's bold Highwayman met with a Priest" Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 72	Young Douglas. by W.S. Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 73	Fragments Holograph.	n.d.
POEMS BY OTHERS		
b. 1, f. 74-75	Holographs, some annotated Included are copies of "Prologue to Mr. Panton's Opera called 'The Trial'"; "Written on the Elopment of Lady Mary Singleton"; "Fragment of a Legendary Tale found in the Library of Holland House"; and a variety of occasional verses, epitaphs, and riddles annotated as sent to Smith or as copied from newspapers and magazines.	1765-1813, n.d.

Series III: Personal Papers, 1798

b. 1, f. 76	Benefit performance of <i>School for Scandal</i> for Mr. King, 1798 May Includes box ticket; playbill; holograph copy of review of Smith's performance from <i>The Star</i> ; and note by Mrs. Smith.	1798
b. 1, f. 77	Characters perform'd by Mr. Smith at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden from the 8th of January 1753 ... to the 8th of June 1788. Holograph.	[after 1809]
b. 1, f. 78	Coat of arms of Smith of Kent Holograph.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 79-80	Collection of memorabilia of David Garrick collected by Wm Smith Included are an invitation to Garrick's funeral, a tribute to Garrick by William Smith (holograph), an engraving of Garrick's arms, a copy of Garrick's verse letter to H. W. Bunbury (1774 Oct 5), "Mr. Anstey to Mr. Garrick on meeting him at a Friend's House" (with his reply), and anecdotes of Garrick.	[ca. 1779?]
b. 1, f. 81	Epitaphs and obituaries	1819
b. 1, f. 82	Genealogical and historical notes	n.d.
b. 1, f. 83	Inventories Holographs. Includes plan of a wine cellar.	1809, n.d.
b. 1, f. 84	Locks of hair	1794-1801
b. 1, f. 85	Newspaper clippings	1796, n.d.
b. 1, f. 86	Papers of Mrs. William Smith Includes a printed copy of "Ode to the Poppy, by Mrs. Smith" and a paper pattern heart and wrapper for a remedy sent to her by Lady Cullum.	n.d.
b. 1, f. 87	Printed material Includes copies of "Trout Hall"; "The Pilgrim's Prayer"; and an advertisement for "Pinetti's Capital Deceptions".	1801, n.d.
b. 1, f. 88	Wrappers and franks	n.d.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Actors -- England
Theater -- Great Britain -- 18th century

Occupations

Actors -- England

Names

Beaumont, George Howland, Sir, 1753-1827
Coutts, Thomas, 1735-1822
Dolben, William, 1726-1814
Garrick, David, 1717-1779
Kean, Edmund, 1787-1833
Lofft, Capel, 1751-1824
Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 (Stage history, 1625-1800)
Smith, William, 1730-1819

Corporate Body

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane (London, England)