

Noel Carnduff: on his search for his father's papers.



In 1986, I became curious about my father's writings. Returning to Belfast after thirty years' absence, I went to the [Linen Hall Library](#) but was disappointed to find only his last play, *Castlereagh*, and two books of poetry, *Songs of the Unemployed* and *Songs of the Shipyard*.

Determined to locate the missing material, I knew only that four plays had been performed in the Empire Theatre, Belfast and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Letters to the Abbey Theatre archives, Trinity College Library, and a few of the institutions in Belfast produced nothing, and it was not until my next trip back to Belfast that I had my first stroke of luck. I heard of a chance remark by a member of Bangor Amateur Theatre Company who, having borrowed *Castlereagh* from the Linen Hall, discovered a different play tucked inside it, "all about Orangemen". I guessed that the play was *The Stars Foretell* and went immediately to the Linen Hall where I found that unknown to the Library it was indeed with *Castlereagh*.

Encouraged, my search began in earnest with letters and articles to the press and to BBC and Radio Éireann archives and to former members of the Young Ulster Society formed by my father in 1936. In September 1986, a copy of *Give Losers Leave to Talk* was left for me in the Linen Hall. A BBC producer directed me to relatives of Richard Hayward and Jimmy [J.R.] Mageean. Mageean had appeared in *Workers* at the Abbey Theatre in 1932 and, just two weeks after contacting his daughters in America, I received three acts of *Workers*. Mageean was not in the first act, which is probably why it was, and still is, missing.

On Mary Carnduff's death in 1990, I inherited what papers remained in her possession: substantial parts of my father's autobiography, cuttings books, and private correspondence, including his private, wartime *Journal to Mary*. Some of these letters refer to a play, *Derry*, but to my great disappointment I have so far been unable to trace either this or *Traitors*.

In 1991, an exhibition of my father's work at the Linen Hall revived interest and produced two scripts, *Death Has No Calendar* and an extract from *Bluebeard*, a pantomime performed by the Harold Norway Theatre Company at the Ulster Hall in 1937. The exhibition also prompted the last secretary of the Young Ulster Society, Miss Lamb, into recalling she had placed its papers in the Linen Hall, but these have yet to surface. Luckily, however, a former secretary, Winnie Nesbitt, found the Society's *Minute Book for 1943-47* in her attic and passed it to me.

Writing in 1998 and reviewing the past twelve years, I am both amazed and gratified that such fragile links have produced the substantial body and variety of material recorded in this catalogue. My enthusiasm to add to it is undiminished, but at 78, I must look to the future and its safekeeping. I have decided, therefore, to lodge the [Thomas Carnduff Archive at Queen's University Library](#). I do so trusting that it will prove a rich resource for students of Ulster drama from all over Ireland, ensure that my father's work is enjoyed by later generations, and that his place in Irish literature is never again so completely forgotten.

Noel Carnduff: 1998