

GB 0440 Bateson

## **John Innes Foundation Historical Collections**

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The Letters of William Bateson.

As a former Librarian of the John Innes Institute, I was asked, 3 years ago, to work on a part-time basis cataloguing the letters of the first Director of the John Innes Horticultural Institution: William Bateson. This project is financed by the Trustees of the John Innes Institute.

William Bateson, (1861-1926), was Professor of Biology at Cambridge, when, in 1909, he was offered the post of Director of the newly-founded John Innes Horticultural Institution, situated at Merton, then a London suburb.

William Bateson worked for most of his life on the problem of the nature of species. To this end he collected records of variations that existed in living organisms. This work culminated in the publication of his book entitled: "Materials for the Study of Variation", 1894, a work which, to quote from the periodical "Nature", "marked an era in biological thought."

Bateson's next line of enquiry was into the behaviour of varieties on crossing. He carried out complex breeding experiments on Lepidoptera, followed by work on plant breeding and poultry breeding.

When Gregor Mendel's work was discovered in 1900, Bateson recognised its great importance. In 1901 he communicated a Report to the Evolution Committee of the Royal Society, summing up the evidence and showing the significance of Mendel's discovery.

But the Biometrical School, headed by Professor Weldon of London University, opposed these views, minimising the importance of Mendel's discovery. In 1902 Bateson answered these criticisms with his book: "Mendel's Principles of Heredity: a Defence".

Bateson became the "founder and inspirer" of a Cambridge School of Biologists, and Cambridge University created the Chair of Biology for him in 1908.

In 1910, with the acceptance of the Directorship of the John Innes Horticultural Institution, the Cambridge period came to an end. Summing up Bateson's work at John Innes, and quoting again from "Nature": "When he went there was nothing: in a few years there grew up a splendidly equipped station...and an enthusiastic and devoted band of workers". His position at the John Innes gave Bateson better facilities for promoting cooperation between the practical breeder and the man of science - a cooperation which he felt to be of primary importance.

The Papers of William Bateson at the John Innes Institute.

These consist of:

The John Innes Collection. Nearly 2,000 original letters and other papers housed at the John Innes Institute, plus about 50 of Bateson's notebooks and his personal collection of books and reprints.

The Baltimore Collection or Coleman Collection. copies of about 1500 letters which were deposited with the American Philosophical Society Library at Baltimore in 1964. There they were sorted and a general inventory was prepared by William Coleman. The letters were then microfilmed and the John Innes Trustees advanced the necessary funds for photocopies to be made from this microfilm.

The Galton Collection. Photocopies of about 70 Bateson Letters from University College, London's collection of Galton Papers, kindly donated by the Manuscripts Librarian.

The Hancock Collection. These letters were located by Dr. Alan Cock, of Southampton University, in a series of cabin trunks and boxes at the home of William Bateson's grand-daughter at Hancock, U.S.A. Dr. Cock is currently working on a biography of William Bateson. These letters and other papers were brought to J.I.I. by Dr. Alan Cock and the J.I. Archives Section photocopied them in 1981. The originals will be deposited by Dr. Cock in the Cambridge University Library, to be shelved with the Baltimore Collection. Miss Carol Newman, Dr. Cock's assistant, has compiled an author catalogue of this collection. The letters are arranged in groups, sometimes by subject, sometimes by correspondent. The Hancock Collection consists of about 3,000 letters.

The Hurst Collection. This is a collection of letters written by William Bateson to the English geneticist C.C. Hurst. Among this vast collection are 234 letters from Bateson to Hurst. At present the J.I.I. holds no copies of these letters. All the original Hurst letters have been deposited in the Dept. of Archives at the University of Cambridge Library. The letters have been catalogued by correspondent and annotated by C.C. Hurst's widow, Rona Hurst. Staff of the J.I.I. Archives Section will be travelling to Cambridge to obtain photocopies of these letters.

The Lipset Collection. This is a collection of Bateson Family Papers, collected by David Lipset of California University, author of a biography on William Bateson's son, Gregory, entitled: "Gregory Bateson: the Making of a Scientist", and published in 1980.

David Lipset deposited 19 packets of Bateson family letters with the Library of the American Philosophical Society in 1980. The Manuscript Librarian of the A.P.S., Mr. Stephen Catlett, had the letters microfilmed at our request and these microfilm copies are now part of the Bateson Collection at the J.I.I.

The Lipset Collection has been catalogued by correspondent, but has not yet been included in the computerised catalogue being compiled by the Archives Section.

The Computerised Catalog of the Bateson Letters at the J.I.I.

Cataloguing work began on the photocopied letters comprising the Coleman Collection. William Coleman had already divided the letters into groups by subject and correspondent.

Each letter, as it came through the cataloguer's hands, was given a running no. from 1 to 2599 (-the letter that has been catalogued most recently).

If we look at the main catalogue, we see this running no. in the left hand column. Next comes the name of the author of the letter. To save time William Bateson's name was abbreviated to "B W" and his wife Beatrice had the abbreviation "B B", names of other members of the Bateson family were also abbreviated. The figures and letters in the right hand column are location numbers.

On the second line of each entry, reading from left to right, come: the last two digits of the year, a number signifying the month, and one or two numbers signifying the day the letter was written. This is followed by an abbreviated version of the address from which the letter was written.

The 3rd line of the entry for each letter comprises keywords indicating subjects and names mentioned in the letter concerned. These can continue on to the 4th and 5th lines if necessary. The final line of each entry is available for any general remarks concerning the letter, such as doubt about its date, author, illegible signature, etc.

The main computerised catalogue of the Bateson Letters is accompanied by 3 indexes or dictionaries.

The dictionary of descriptors or keywords comprises an alphabetical list of names of people, periodicals, societies and other organisations mentioned in the Bateson Letters. Reading from left to right, the first column is the name of the person or society, etc., followed by a code number. On the right are written expansions of abbreviated names or titles or any other explanations necessary. The first two digits of the code numbers generally indicate the position in the alphabet of the first letter of the name, 01 being A, for instance.

This name index is followed by an alphabetical index of keywords for subjects mentioned in the Bateson Letters. The majority of these consists of scientific terms, names of plants and animals, but some non-scientific keywords are included, e.g. art, politics, philosophy, music, languages, etc. The code numbers of subjects are compiled as follows. The first 2 digits indicate the UDC classification number for the subject where this has proved feasible. The last 2 digits are merely running numbers.

The third dictionary is one of addresses from which the letters were sent. These addresses had to be abbreviated so that they would occupy only 15 spaces for the programme. The left hand column consists of an alphabetical index of the abbreviated form of the address. Usually, the finding word in this index is the first 4 letters of the name of the town or village in the address. The centre column shows the code number for each address. The first digit indicates the country from which the letter originated, e.g. 4 = G.B., 7 = USA, Canada, etc. The 2nd and third digits indicate the initial letter of the town or village in which the letter was written, e.g. a Durham address would be coded 404, etc. The 4th digit of the address code is simply a running number. The right hand column of the addresses dictionary shows the fully expanded addresses.

Two further indexes are being compiled: one of correspondents arranged alphabetically and one of names of people to whom the letters were addressed. The numbers in the left hand column show the number of the letter in the Bateson Letters Index.

The subject matter of the letters is wide-ranging as a glance at the keyword subject index will show. In his genetical studies William Bateson

wrote to and received letters from colleagues concerning insects, birds, fungi, protozoa, mammals, plants, amphibia, fish, not to mention the letters on other subjects which keenly interested him, such as the teaching of classics in schools, admission of women to university degrees, Chinese art, spiritualism, politics and sociology and many many more.