

Catalogue of the diaries and commonplace books of FREDERIC WILLIAM WATKYN-THOMAS, FRCS (1887-1963); Including diaries of ADA (DIANA) WATKYN-THOMAS, née CLAYTON (1899-1985)

Creator: Watkyn-Thomas, Frederic William (1887-1963) consulting surgeon

Covering dates: 1913-1963

Extent and Medium: 5; boxes

Repository: Cambridge University, Trinity College Library

Content and context

Frederic Watkyn-Thomas was born on 10 April 1887, son of W. Watkyn-Thomas of Papcastle, Cumberland. He was educated at Tonbridge School and was admitted to Trinity College Cambridge in 1906, where he was an exhibitioner and Bean W. Levy student, obtaining his Bachelor of Medicine in 1914. He completed his clinical studies at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London and was awarded the Brackenbury and Holden scholarships. Qualifying as a Doctor of Medicine in 1914, he entered the Royal Army Medical Corps immediately and served until 1920 when he was demobilised with the rank of Major.

Having been admitted a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) of England in 1921, Watkyn-Thomas was appointed to the consultant staff of the Central London Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital (which later became the Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital). In 1933 he joined the staff of the Royal Ear Hospital, part of University College Hospital. For many years he was a civilian consultant to the Royal Navy and became a member of the Royal Navy Personnel Research Committee and the Flying Research Committee. As well as serving as President of the Section of Otology of the Royal Society of Medicine, he was on the council of the British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists, Abstracts Editor for the *Journal of Laryngology* and a regular contributor to the *Medical Annual* until 1954. In 1953 he edited a textbook on *Diseases of the Throat, Nose and Ear* and wrote the entire section on the ear himself.

Watkyn-Thomas was described by his colleagues at the RCS as a bibliophile with a fine library. Traces of his collection can still be found in booksellers' catalogues through mentions of the bookplate of Frederic and Diana Watkyn-Thomas.

Ada Margaret Katherine Macgregor Clayton, known as Diana by her husband and friends, was born in Broughton, Lancashire, on 31 January 1899 to Walter Norton Clayton and Annie Macpherson Macgregor. She married Frederic Watkyn-Thomas in January 1928, in St George's, Hanover Square. A keen diary writer, she is responsible for the most detailed accounts of the Watkyn-Thomases' life in London in the early years of their marriage and during the Second World War.

The "Diaries of the War" series, thus named by Diana, and later organised in chronological order by Watkyn-Thomas, is witness to the worries and disruptions the war brought to a family living in the capital at that time. Bombing raids, rationing and life in the shelters all feature in the diaries, although the couple eventually managed to "keep calm and carry on" almost as normal during the war years. A few references to the inevitable

distress of those years can be found in later diaries, and especially in the comments Watkyn-Thomas made on Diana's and his own diaries when revising them in the 1950s and 1960s. The "Summary of Life Events" (item A 37), written between 1956 and 1963, also contains a few notes about the war: "Today [27 August 1940] took beds down to our basement room and [...] slept underground until 3 May 1945". "[6 October 1940] Went round to inspect the dreadful bombing of Kensington".

Diana contributed significantly to the series of holiday diaries too, which were written jointly by the couple. Sitting alongside the main diary for the year, and sometimes comprising more than one year, they describe the couple's regular fishing trips to Scandinavia and Iceland, and their long summer stays in those countries. Initiated mostly by Diana, the diaries were then complemented by Frederic's comments, written at various stages - from later in the same day, to a few weeks afterwards, or even a few years in some cases - and for which Diana would sometimes leave space after her diary entries.

Watkyn-Thomas undertook a revision of all diaries in the last ten years of his life. Most annotations refer to dates of events, or specifications, such as "Our last visit to Kolåsen", preceded by a question mark, written on the frontispiece of a 1951 holiday diary (item B 25). Even commonplace books were not spared a revision. Watkyn-Thomas added dates, subjects, and re-arranged the contents. Some commonplace books contain comments or tales, among which can be found a few humorous ones relating to life at Cambridge at the beginning of the Twentieth Century (item C 8). Rather than just a collection of quotes, the commonplace books witness to the reflective attitude of Watkyn-Thomas, who collected newspaper cuttings, wrote book revisions, reported conversations, and noted his observations on specific subjects throughout his whole life.

Between 1956 and 1963, up until his death, Watkyn-Thomas used a 1956 blank diary to create a summary of all main events of his life from 1906 to early 1963 (item A 37). He made notes under each day, mentioning events that happened on that specific day in previous years, including theatre performances, films seen at the cinema, letters received, reunion dinners in College and holidays.

Watkyn-Thomas died in London on 31 January 1963. A photographic portrait, taken in 1943, can be seen at the National Portrait Gallery.

The collection of 64 diaries and 18 commonplace books written by Frederic and Diana Watkyn-Thomas was part of a bequest of £500 to the Trinity Families Fund, made on the condition that "the College takes possession of [Watkyn-Thomas's] diaries, retains them sealed for 50 years, and then deals with it as it thinks fit." A heavy metal box containing the documents was sent from London on 4th November 1963 by Rashleigh & Co. Solicitors and was received by Dr. J.R.G. Bradfield a few days later. The box was opened in November 2014, and the contents catalogued in 2015.

Information taken from:

RCS: <http://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/biogs/E005485b.htm>

Townsley.info: <http://www.townsley.info/gedcom/dat138.htm>

National Portrait Gallery: <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw103268/Frederic-William-Watkyn-Thomas>

A. Diaries of Frederic William Watkyn-Thomas

A 1	Diary (1 vol)	1926-27
A 2	Diary (1 vol)	1937
A 3	Diary (1 vol)	1938
A 4	Diary (1 vol)	1939
A 5	Diary (1 vol)	1943
A 6	Diary (1 vol)	1944
A 7	Diary (1 vol)	1945
A 8	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1945
A 9	Diary (1 vol)	1946
A 10	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1946
A 11	Diary (1 vol)	1947
A 12	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1947
A 13	Diary (1 vol)	1948
A 14	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1948
A 15	Holiday diary (1 vol)	1948-1951
A 16	Diary (1 vol)	1949
A 17	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1949
A 18	Diary (1 vol)	1950
A 19	Diary of appointments (1 vol)	1950
A 20	Diary (1 vol)	1951
A 21	Diary (1 vol)	1952
A 22	Diary (1 vol)	1953
A 23	Diary (1 vol)	1954
A 24	Holiday diary, jointly written with Diana Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1954
A 25	Diary (1 vol)	1955
A 26	Holiday diary, jointly written with Diana Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1955-1957
A 27	Diary (1 vol)	1956
A 28	Diary (1 vol)	1957
A 29	Diary (1 vol)	1958
A 30	Holiday diary, jointly written with Diana Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1958-1960
A 31	Diary (1 vol)	1959
A 32	Diary (1 vol)	1960
A 33	Diary (1 vol)	1961
A 34	Holiday diary, jointly written with Diana Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1961-1962
A 35	Diary (1 vol)	1962
A 36	Diary (1 vol)	1963
A 37	Summary of life events	[1962-1963]

B. Diaries of Ada (Diana) Watkyn-Thomas

B 1	Diary, jointly written with F.W. Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1929
B 2	Diary (1 vol)	1929-1930
B 3	Diary (1 vol)	1930-1931
B 4	Diary, with notes by F.W. Watkyn-Thomas (1 vol)	1931
B 5	Diary (1 vol)	1932
B 6	Diary (1 vol)	1935
B 7	Diary (1 vol)	1935-1936

B 8	Diary (1 vol)	1936-1937
B 9	Diary of the War no. 1, with notes by F.W. Watkyn-Thomas dated 1954 (1 vol)	1939
B 10	Diary of the War no. 2 (1 vol)	1939-40
B 11	Diary of the War no. 3 (1 vol)	1940
B 12	Diary of the War no. 4 (1 vol)	1940
B 13	Diary of the War no. 5 (1 vol)	1940-41
B 14	Diary of the War no. 6 (1 vol)	1941
B 15	Diary of the War no. 7 (1 vol)	1941
B 16	Diary of the War no. 8 (1 vol)	1941-42
B 17	Diary of the War no. 9 (1 vol)	1942
B 18	Diary of the War no. 10 (1 vol)	1942
B 19	Diary of the War no. 11 (1 vol)	1942-43
B 20	Diary of the War no. 12 (1 vol)	1943
B 21	War diary	1944
B 22	Holiday diary, titled "Back to the Wowlywows", jointly written (1 vol)	1946
B 23	Holiday diary, jointly written (1 vol)	1947 and 1950
B 24	Holiday diary (1 vol)	1948
B 25	Holiday diary (1 vol)	1951
B 26	Diary (1 vol)	1952
B 27	Holiday diary, jointly written (1 vol)	1952 and 1953

C. Commonplace books, by F.W. Watkyn-Thomas

C 1	General (1 vol)	1955
C 2	General (1 vol)	
C 3	Americans: a commentary started after Suez (1 vol)	
C 4	Earliest pages: ? 1913 (1 vol)	
C 5	Edward VIII (1 vol)	
C 6	Elegant Extracts (1 vol)	
C 7	Gerolstein (1 vol)	
C 8	The Golden Silence, or, "Can't you keep your big mouth shut?" (1 vol)	
C 9	Notes to French History; C. D'O. Gowan (1 vol)	
C 10	Overheard (1 vol)	
C 11	People: see also under "Vermin and Slime" (1 vol)	
C 12	Politics (7 cards in an envelope; one blank)	1961-63
C 13	Rudyard Kipling (1 vol)	
C 14	Soldiers: The Brutal and Licentious; a Rapacious and Licentious soldier; Edmund Burke (1 vol)	
C 15	Some Comments (1 vol)	
C 16	Some great thoughts (1 vol)	
C 17	Useful Sources (1 vol)	1960-61
C 18	Vermin and Slime: Part I; The Left wing (1 vol)	