

Florence Farr (1860-1917)

(MS 982)

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Susie Hilmi
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Creator:

Farr, Florence Beatrice (1860-1917) actress and author with stage name Mary Lester

Extent:

1 large folder

Administrative/Biographical History:

Florence Farr was born on 11 August 1860. She was the youngest daughter of Mary Elizabeth Whittall and Dr William Farr, a famous sanitary reformer and advocate of equal education and professional rights for women. She was educated at Queen's College London (1877-1880), received good reports but had no inclination to prepare for higher education. After an unsuccessful attempt at teaching (1880-1882), Farr gravitated to the theatre, appearing in minor parts and adopting the stage name, Mary Lester. In 1883 her father died, leaving her a sufficient amount to live on modestly. Her first novel *The Dancing Fawn* was published in 1894. That same year she became theatre producer at the Avenue Theatre, producing modern plays.

Farr preached about parity for women in employment, wages etc. amongst her intellectual circle of acquaintances. George Bernard Shaw wrote that she reacted vehemently against Victorian sexual and domestic morality and was dauntless in publicly championing unpopular causes such as campaigning for the welfare of prostitutes.

Farr had a fascination for the occult, Egyptology and theosophy. She conducted hermetic studies and belonged to an order of like-minded folk, The Hermetic Order of Isis-Urania Temple of The Golden Dawn of London. She published her first philosophical tracts, *A Short Inquiry concerning the Hermetic Art by a Lover of Philatethes* in 1894. In 1901, Florence, with a friend of Yeats's, collaborated in the writing and production of two one act plays, both recounting Egyptian magical tales. Farr later quit The Golden Dawn and joined the Theosophical Society of London.

Farr cultivated friendships with 'clever men'. Among her friends and correspondents were William and May Morris, George Bernard Shaw, John Quinn, Henry Paget, Dr John Todhunter and W B Yeats. In 1884 she married an actor, Mr Edward Emery (b 1863). They

separated in 1888 when Mr Emery immigrated to America, according to Shaw, on account of 'some trouble (not domestic)'. Shaw wrote that Florence was quite content with this situation and considered it of little importance. In 1895 she finally divorced Edward Emery on Shaw's advice.

In the 1890s, Yeats used Farr's 'golden voice' as part of his quest to encourage the rebirth of spoken poetry. In 1898 made her the stage manager for his Irish Literary Theatre and she became a regular contributor to the performance of his metrical plays. She was also involved in the performance and musical composition of a number of plays at the Lyceum and Court Theatre and New Centaury Theatres in London, between 1902 and 1906.

On 5 September 1912, Farr sailed from England for a life in Ceylon. She had been invited by Sri Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a fellow theosophist, to teach at his newly founded College for Girls in Ceylon. She acquired a position of total authority at the school as Lady Principal and supervised the teachers, care of sick children, servants and general administration. On 29 April 1917, Florence Farr died of cancer, first diagnosed in November 1916, in Colombo General Hospital at the age of 56. Her body was cremated at the home of Ramanathan.

In 1912 she left some of her correspondence with Clifford Bax in a locked black box only to be opened after her death. They were later published in Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw and W B Yeats by C Bax (ed.), The Cuala Press (1941). In preface to these letters Bax wrote that they 'show that she had too much personality to become a good actress' and were testament to her good humour. He described her as 'a woman who could inspire remarkable men' and predicted that she would be remembered primarily on account of her private friendships with eminent intellectuals of the time.

Custodial History:

Purchased at auction from Sotheby's 15 July 1998 (lot 262). Nothing is known of the previous custodial history of the papers although they may have been collected by Dorothy Paget, Florence Farr's niece.

Scope and Content:

Correspondence to and from Florence Farr, photographs of Florence Farr, reviews of Modern Women, flyers of plays, performance programmes. There are photographs, some signed, showing her in

acting roles and in her time in Ceylon. Amongst the remaining items there are performance programmes and posters.

System of Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into eight sections:

MS982/A: Correspondence from Florence Farr

MS982/B: Correspondence to Florence Farr

MS982/C: Miscellaneous Correspondence

MS982/D: Reviews of Florence Farr's Writing and Promotional Material

MS982/E: Flyers of plays, performance programmes and articles

MS982/F: Early Photographs

MS982/G: Professional and Promotional Photographs

MS982/H: Miscellaneous Printed Material

Access conditions:

Access to this collection is unrestricted for the purpose of private study and personal research within the supervised environment and restrictions of the Library's Palaeography Room. Uncatalogued material may not be seen. Please contact the University Archivist for details.

Copying conditions:

Copies may be made, subject to the condition of the original. Copying must be undertaken by the Palaeography Room staff, who will need a minimum of 24 hours to process requests

MS982/A	Correspondence from Florence Farr	1902- c1913
MS982/A/1	Letter from Farr to [her niece] Dorothy Paget Concerns some harp music; contains one line of musical notation.	1902
MS982/A/2	Letter from Farr, 20 Glebe Place, Chelsea to Dot [her niece Dorothy Paget] Expresses sympathy regarding unspecified event	16 Nov 1911
MS982/A/3	Letter from Farr, 21 Warwick Chambers, Pater Street Abingdon, to 'Dear Madam'. Response to a letter from the unidentified correspondent concerning a possible wish to recite her own writing.	27 June n.y.
MS982/A/4	Incomplete letter from Farr Discusses problem of transporting [tiles] from Colombo; asks for news of her relatives Dorothy and Peter; mentions S Jones and a letter received from Yates.	n.d. [1913- 1917]

MS982/B	Correspondence to Florence Farr	1910- c1913
MS982/B/1	Postcard from 'O. E.' [O. Elton] to Mrs Emery [Florence Farr], [Warwick] Chambers, Pater Street, Kensington, London Expresses intention of sending copy of Florence Farr's book 'Modern Woman: Her Intentions' to 'The Common Cause' for review.	31 May 1910
MS982/B/2	Letter from John Masefield, Great Hampden, Great Missenden, Bucks Compliments Florence Farr on her book and expresses regret that he can not write a review as she requested as he is no longer a reviewer.	31 May 1910
MS982/B/3	Letter from [Stanley ?], 28 Grosvenor Road, Westminster, London Expresses admiration for Modern Woman; gives chapter by chapter critique of the book	9 June 1910
MS982/B/4	Letter from [Edward] Carpenter, Millthorpe, Holmesfield, near Sheffield Praises Florence Farr on her book 'Modern Woman' but states that he is too busy to review it.	4 Aug 1910
MS982/B/5	Letter from Mrs Patrick Campbell, 33 Kensington Square, London Written in response to the publication of 'Modern Woman'	n.d. [1910]
MS982/B/6	Letter from Mrs Patrick Campbell	n.d.
MS982/B/7	Letter from [Wooo] Bauette, Henderson, Queensland, Australia Written in response to 'Modern Woman'; praises Farr for her courage in treating "plainly and yet purely" subjects which the press are too "prudish" to address; discusses colonial women at length and expounds the opinion that they are not using their	5 Aug 1913

privilege to vote; suggests Farr should contact a friend of hers, Mr M D Dunning who is visiting London.

MS982/B/8 Letter from Harry, 76 Park Hill Road Hampstead n.d. [1914-1918]

Conveys personal impressions and news about mutual friends, particularly how they are being affected by the war; discusses the state of the military alert in Bembridge such as soldiers patrolling for spies, ships being searched etc.

MS982/B/9 Typescript letter from Gilbert Murray, Condercum, Alum Chine, Bournemouth n.d.

Responding to a request from Farr gives permission for her to produce 'The Bachae'; informs her that they have selected someone else to do the music for the production of 'The Electra'.

MS982/B/10 Letter C B [Clifford Bax], The Manor House, Broughton Gilford, Wiltshire 2 Aug n.y.

Refers to return of a key, and to Farr's poetry recital; writes a joking but philosophical attack on the study of mysticism based on the idea that writing statements concerning truth is futile; comments in post script that he is reading 'The Arabian Nights' and refers to its sexual content.

MS982/B/11 Letter from Lawrence Housman, Edwards Square, Kensington, London n.d.

Thanks Farr for the gift of a book which he praises.

MS982/C	Miscellaneous correspondence	n.d.
MS982/C/1	Envelope addressed to Mr Perry Rhodes, The Third House, Finchley Village Postmarked Chelsea, London.	17 Nov n.y.
MS982/C/2	Note signed by Florence Farr. Square of green note paper with the words 'We are the music makers', signed Florence Farr.	n.d.

MS982/D	Reviews of Florence Farr's writings and promotional material	1910-1912
MS982/D/1	Promotional flyer for 'Modern Woman'. Lists the contents of the book with brief summary of the topics covered in each chapter.	1910
MS982/D/2	Promotional flyer and order form for 'Modern Woman'. Cites extracts from literary reviews, and includes photograph of Florence Farr.	1912
MS982/D/3	Promotional flyer for book entitled 'The Solemnization of Jacklin. Some Adventures on the Search for Reality, A Novel' by Florence Farr. Cites extracts from several literary reviews.	n.d. [c1912]
MS982/D/4	Review of 'Modern Woman' from 'The Automobile Owner and Steam and Electric Car Review'	n.d. [c1912]

MS982/E **Flyers of plays, performance programmes and articles** **1910-1912**

MS982/E/1 **Theatre program for 'Arms and the Man', showing at the Avenue Theatre, Saturday 21 Apr 1894.** **1894**

MS982/E/2 **Print of promotional poster for 'Arms and The Man', drawn by Aubrey Beardsley.** **c1894**

MS982/E/3 **Article entitled 'Ramathan College. Farewell and Welcome function'** **n.d.**
Details the leaving ceremony for Mrs Emery [Florence Farr]

MS982/F	Early photographs	c1864-1880
	Series of nine carte-de-visite photographs showing Florence Farr from a small child through to a young woman. Two of the photographs contain other family members.	
MS982/F/1	Family portrait showing three young girls, Etta, Emily and Florence. The names of the girls are written under the photograph and on the back.	c1864-1880
MS982/F/2	Family portrait of Florence Farr as a child with her mother Mrs William Farr. Names are written on the back of the photograph. Two copies.	c1864-1880
MS982/F/3	Portrait of Florence Farr, as a child, seated.	c1864-1880
MS982/F/4	Portrait of Florence Farr as a child, leaning over the arm of a chaise-long.	c1864-1880
MS982/F/5	Head and shoulders portrait of Florence Farr as an adolescent wearing a hat.	c 1873
MS982/F/6	Portrait of Florence Farr as an adolescent, leaning over the arm of a chaise-long.	c 1873
MS982/F/7	Portrait of Florence Farr 'aged about 19 or 20'	c 1880
MS982/F/8	Photographs of Florence Farr as a young woman Two photographs, stuck back to back.	c 1880

MS982/G	Professional and promotional photographs A series of photographs mostly of Florence Farr taken during her career as an actress. Most of these photographs appear to present her in costume performing a stage role. A few are labelled with dates and titles of performances	c1890-1916
MS982/G/1	Portrait photograph of Florence Farr wearing a pearl necklace Shows Farr seated sideways with her face to the camera, with hands clasped in her lap.	c1890-1916
MS982/G/4	Photograph of "Florence Farr, as she appeared in 'The Sicilian Idyll' by John Todhunter" Farr is in costume reclining on a hammock.	1890
MS982/G/5	Photograph of "Sidney Papel and Dorothy Papel in 'The beloved Hathor'" Image of a man carrying an unconscious woman, the woman's headaddress has been inked over. See also MS982/H/2	c1890-1916
MS982/G/6	Photograph of Florence Farr seated on a settee	c1890-1916
MS982/G/7	Photograph of Florence Farr in costume, standing next to a tiger skin.	c1890-1916
MS982/G/9	Portrait photograph of Florence Farr seated and holding a harp. Two copies	c1890-1916
MS982/G/10	Photograph of Florence Farr as the principal of Taui College in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Group portrait, with the faces of two of the teachers covered in ink.	1915-1916

MS982/H	Miscellaneous printed material	c1863-1916
MS982/H/1	Degree certificate awarded to Florence Farr. Certificate for the Cambridge University higher local examination; also includes document detailing individual courses taken by Farr and the corresponding grades.	1882
MS982/H/2	Printed copy of plays "'The Beloved of Hathor' and 'The Shrine of the Golden Hawk' . By Florence Farr and O. Shakespeare". Inscribed as belonging to Dorothy Papel.	c1906
MS982/H/3	Pamphlet entitled 'Lectures by W.B. Yates. On Poetry and The Living Voice Illustrated by Miss Florence Farr'	n.d.