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News & Events: The C.S. Lewis Correspondence Project

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News and Events

The C.S. Lewis Correspondence Project

The C.S. Lewis Correspondence Project was organized in 2022 for the purpose of making available to scholars and readers transcriptions of all extant Lewis letters. This work is being coordinated through the Marion E. Wade Center and with permission of the C.S. Lewis Company and HarperCollins publishers. Its goal is to produce an electronic database of Lewis letters similar to what Cambridge University Library has done for the letters of Charles Darwin through its Darwin Correspondence Project.

While much of C.S. Lewis's correspondence has been published over the years, a large portion of his letters remains either unpublished, lost, or undiscovered. It is estimated that Lewis wrote more than 10,000 letters in his lifetime. About a third of these (3,208) appeared in the three volumes of *Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, edited by his one-time secretary, Walter Hooper. Hooper documented information on 70 to 80 additional Lewis letters before his death in 2020. The Lewis Correspondence Project continues that work. The current count of known additional letters and letter fragments by Lewis which are not found in *Collected Letters* stands at 732.

The first priority of the Project is making transcriptions of those additional letters available. This will not occur quickly. The timeline on even this small aspect of the Project is likely years in the future as many logistical and technical issues must be resolved. In addition, funding will need to be secured for staff time, digital storage, and purchasing a digital platform. However, the gathering of transcriptions has begun already so that the content can be made available as soon as the Project essentials are in place.

Lewis's letters are spread around the world in repositories ranging from private collections to institutional holdings. This project hopes to create a single digital repository of Lewis's correspondence that will be a permanent resource for Lewis scholars and regular readers, especially as the published letter collections become more difficult to access. Lewis's letters provide important insight into his thought and impact in areas from theology and philosophy to literature and writing. They also reveal the care he took in answering each missive and allow others to benefit from the advice he offers. An example of this is found in his previously unpublished letter of 22 May 1952, shown below, which was sent to children at the Grittleton House School in Wiltshire.

A team of seven Lewis scholars and other specialists from four countries form the Steering Committee of the C.S. Lewis Correspondence Project:

- Norbert Feinendegen (Germany)
- Monika B. Hilder (Canada)
- Bruce R. Johnson (USA)
- Laura Stanifer (USA)

- Arend Smilde (Netherlands)
- Charlie W. Starr (USA)
- Jill Walker (USA)

The Steering Committee is soliciting information on additional Lewis letters. Those with information are invited to contact Bruce R. Johnson at csletter@gmail.com. This announcement, including the accompanying letter transcription, is being published at approximately the same time in four journals: *VII: Journal of the Marion E. Wade Center*; *Journal of Inklings Studies*; *Mythlore: A Journal of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*; and *Sehnsucht: The C. S. Lewis Journal*.

TO CHILDREN AT THE GRITTLETON HOUSE SCHOOL¹ (P)²

Magdalen, College,
Oxford,
May 22d. 1952

My dear Grittletonians³ – Thanks for your nice and interesting letters. Like you, I am sorry that Peter and Susan are not coming back to Narnia, but I think, being the two eldest, they are now getting to the age at which people stop having that sort of adventure for a time – they may start having it again later, but not for some years. The new book is called *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Lucy and Edmund find Caspian (now King of course) on board ship, sailing to the Eastern end of the Narnian world. There will be lots about Reepicheep. And there will be a Sea Serpent, and a Dragon, and lots of strange islands. I do hope you will all like it. I intend to have seven of these stories altogether – that is, four more after the next one. They will be called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The ~~fourth~~ ^{fifth} sixth book goes right back to the beginning and explains how there came to be that magic Wardrobe in the Professor's house – for of course you will have guessed that the old Professor must have known something about things like that himself, or else he would never have believed what the children told him. I don't know yet what will happen in the seventh. What do you think would be a good thing to end the whole series with? Of course Aslan will come into them all.

I wonder what other books you all like. I like George MacDonald's two *Curdy* books,⁴ and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and *The Wind in the Willows*. Do you write stories yourselves? I did at your age: it is the greatest fun.⁵

Love and good wishes to all,
yours ever / C.S. Lewis

P.S. E. Nesbitt's books are splendid, I think: especially *The Phoenix and the Wishing Carpet* and *The Amulet*.⁶

Notes

¹ The Gittleton House School was a small, independent school which operated from 1951 to 2016 in the Wiltshire Cotswolds, England.

² “P” is the abbreviation Walter Hooper used in *Collected Letters* for documents held in private collections. This Lewis letter is currently listed for sale by the Manhattan Rare Book Company. <https://www.manhattanrarebooks.com/pages/books/2231/c-s-lewis-clive-staples/autograph-letter-signed>.

³ “Gittletonians” is a playful imitation of Arnold Lunn’s 1914 novel *The Harrovians*, a critical account of public school life in Britain. It was based on the diary Lunn kept while attending Harrow School in Harrow on the Hill, Greater London.

⁴ Curdie is a character in both *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and *The Princess and Curdie* (1883).

⁵ His childhood stories about Animal-Land were combined with his brother’s stories about India to form the world of Boxen.

⁶ These books by Edith Nesbit are entitled *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904) and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906).

⁷ This transcription includes inconsistencies and errors original to Lewis’s letter.