

THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Report on the papers of
RONALD GEORGE WREYFORD NORRISH, FRS
(1897 - 1978)
chemist

deposited in the
Cambridge University Library

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1982

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Catalogue of the papers of

RONALD GEORGE WREYFORD NORRISH, FRS

(1897 - 1978)

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Compiled by: Jeannine Alton

Julia Latham-Jackson

1982

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The work of the Contemporary Scientific Archives Centre, and the production of this catalogue, are made possible by the support of the following societies and institutions:

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This small manuscript collection represents all that survives of Norrish's distinguished career. The material was received by courtesy of Sir Frederick Dainton and Professor B.A. Thrush, joint authors of the Royal Society Memoir of Norrish (Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society, 27, 1981), to whom we are also grateful for information about some of the items (see especially C.2).

The collection consists of correspondence received by Dainton and Thrush while they were working on the Memoir, a few school and undergraduate diaries and notebooks, and some rather miscellaneous notes, drafts and correspondence. These include a complete draft for a very early (1922) unpublished paper on 'Colour and Atomic Constitution ...' (C.1) and some interesting notes on disassociation, c.1930 (C.2), which illustrate the basis of much of Norrish's classical photochemical work in the nineteen thirties. The surviving correspondence owes its survival to chance rather than merit and in any case is very sparse, although there are a few interesting letters which reflect on Cambridge chemistry in the early nineteen hundreds (C.7).

Norrish's school chemistry set is in the Science Museum, South Kensington, London.

SECTION B

DIARIES AND NOTEBOOKS B.1 - B.7

- B.1 Hard cover Perse School exercise book labelled 'R. Norrish. IVth Form. Science. Magnetism and Electricity'.
- B.2 Pocket diary, 1919.
- B.3 Brown notebook labelled 'R.G.W. Norrish. Emmanuel College. Chemistry. Jan. 1919', containing accounts of experiments, January-May 1919.
- B.4 Cambridge Pocket Diary for the academic year 1919-20.
- B.5 Cambridge Pocket Diary, 1920-21.
- B.6 Pale green notebook labelled 'Analytical Chemistry. Volumetric and Gravimetric Estimations. Organic Analysis. R.G.W. Norrish. Emmanuel College Cambridge'. Contains accounts of experiments, 1920-21.
- B.7 Small black notebook containing notes on the literature and on lectures and papers, apparently taken during a visit to U.S.A. in 1945. Pages are numbered 1-80 and most of the notebook is filled. Entries include:
- Notes on 'Radiation Chemistry [From Report by N. Miller Montreal]' (p. 1ff).
- 'Notes on Lecture given by Dr. G.T. Seaborg at the Chalk River Laboratory on 19.12.45.' (p. 37ff).
- Notes on 'Organisation of Research' (p. 47ff).
- Notes on 'ZEEP - Zero Energy Experimental Pile' (p. 51ff).

SECTION C

NOTES, DRAFTS, LECTURES, CORRESPONDENCE C.1 - C.12

See also A.8.

- C.1 'Colour and Atomic Constitution from the point of view of the Lewis Langmuir Theory of the arrangement of electrons in atoms and molecules by R.G.W. Norrish B.A. Emmanuel College.'
- 24pp. ms. draft, 1 March 1922. The preface explains that the paper is intended as an expansion of a short article published in Chemical News, 124, January 1922 (Norrish's first published paper).
- C.2 7pp. ms. notes on predissociation, c.1930. These are the 'private jottings' referred to by Dainton and Thrush (Memoir, pp.386, 388) which document the thoughts behind some of Norrish's classical photochemical work in the nineteen thirties.
- C.3 'Science Teaching in School and University.'
- 9 pp. typescript of lecture given to the Cambridge Junior Branch of the Association of Scientific Workers, 6 May 1943. Some loose ms. notes which were originally kept with the lecture have been transferred to C.4.
- C.4 Bundle of ms. notes, originally kept with C.3. Consists of 2 paginated sequences (1-3, 1-26) for lecture on the position of women in science, n.d. but perhaps 1950s.
- C.5 Folder labelled 'Lecture on Cambridge and Physical Chemical [sic] Laboratory 1953, 1956' containing ms. and typescript notes and drafts on various aspects of the history of physical chemistry in Cambridge for students attending Summer Schools at the Physical Chemistry Laboratory.
- See also C.6.
- C.6 30pp. typescript lecture on history of Cambridge University and the Physical Chemistry Laboratory, originally contained in the folder at C.5.

Notes, drafts, lectures, correspondence

- C.7 Envelope labelled 'Letters of H. O. Jones, T. Andrewes'. These are dated 1908 (3 letters) and 1900 respectively and were presumably kept by Norrish because of their interest for the history of Cambridge Chemistry. The letter from Andrewes (to G. D. Liveing) documents the presentation of a spectroscope to the Cambridge University Chemical Laboratory. The letters from H. O. Jones (to Heycock) contain several references to the building of a new laboratory.
- The envelope also contains a letter in German, 1932, from R. Willstätter to M. Lowry.
- C.8 Folder labelled 'The Future of Chemistry in Cambridge' containing memoranda and correspondence by Norrish and others, 1962-64, on the proposed development of the Department of Physical Chemistry after Norrish's retirement in 1965.
- Some printed matter is also included in the folder.
- C.9-C.11 Contents of folder labelled 'Fireballs' containing notes, drafts and correspondence re proposed letter to the New Scientist, 1967.
- C.9 Ms. and typescript drafts of letter, headed 'Fire-balls and "Flying Saucers"' and dated January 1967.
- C.10 Comments by colleagues on Norrish's draft letter. Includes a letter from Sir William Pope, 1935, which appears to have been put into the folder in error, and a letter from the Editor of the New Scientist, February 1966.
- C.11 Miscellaneous ms. notes and calculations (not all in Norrish's hand). In original folder.
- C.12 Folder labelled 'Russia, Yugoslavia RGWN' containing a letter from Norrish to Dainton describing his visit to Belgrade for the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Serbian Chemical Society with ms. and typescript of his address to the Society, 26 September 1972.

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