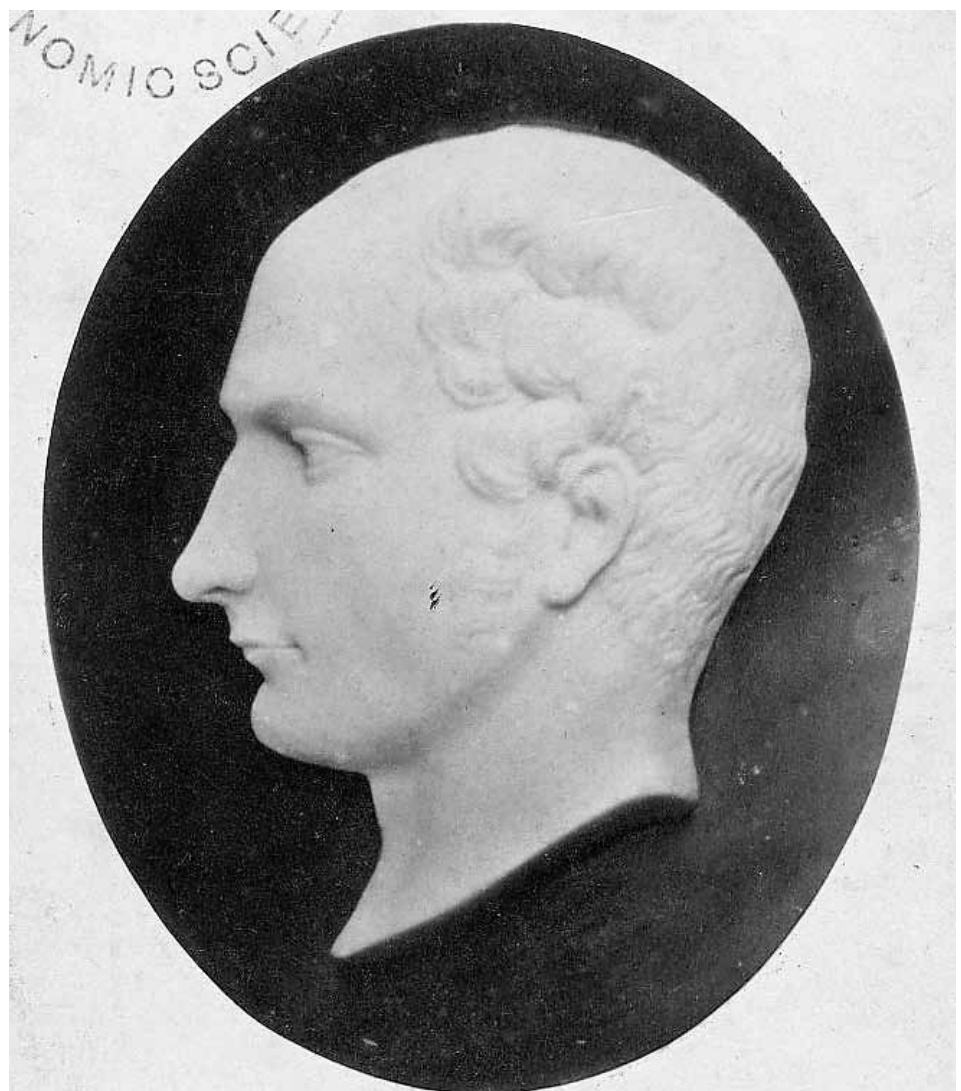


AN ARCHIVIST'S THE PAPERS OF JO

The Mill-Taylor Collection at LSE takes up a mere five shelves of volumes and boxes. It seems a small space for such a major figure – particularly when compared with the fourteen shelves of Passfield papers left by Beatrice and Sidney Webb and the even more extensive fifty-five shelves which make up William Beveridge's voluminous papers. The size of the archive is a reflection of the vicissitudes of the archives in the 136 years since Mill's death. By **Sue Donnelly.**



'S NIGHTMARE JOHN STUART MILL

JOHNS STUART Mill died in Avignon in 1873 of erysipelas, a skin condition endemic to the region, and although there were calls for his body to be interred in Westminster Abbey, he was buried in Avignon in the tomb he had had built for his beloved wife, Harriet Taylor Mill. Following his death his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor, continued to live in Avignon, retaining her stepfather's papers and for thirty years after his death refusing all requests to publish his letters:

I have all my dear step father's letters preserved, looked through from time to time by myself, arranged in order by myself, and left by him in my hands with directions, verbal and written, to deal with them according to my judgement. When the more pressing task of the publication of the mss is completed, I shall, if I live, occupy myself with his correspondence, if I do not live it will be for my literary executors to decide what to do with it.¹

However, as Helen Taylor grew old and frail, her niece, Mary Taylor, the daughter of Harriet Taylor Mill's second son, Algonon, persuaded her aunt to return

Cameo of John Stuart Mill as a young man. (LSE archives, GB97/Mill-Taylor/Box4/57)

to England. Early in 1905 one of Mary's friends, Mary Ann Trimble, who had visited Avignon with Mary Taylor, travelled to France accompanied by a married couple to do:

... the work of three months in three weeks. Half a ton of letters to be sorted, all manner of rubbish to be separated from useful things, books to be dusted and selected from, arrangements to be made for sale, and 18 boxes to be packed.²

On 21–28 May 1905 a book sale was held at Avignon. Some of the books and manuscripts were bought by a local bookseller, Romanille, who sold a volume of manuscripts of minor works to Professor George Herbert Palmer of Harvard. The volume is now MS Eng 1105 in the Houghton Library at Harvard. The dispersal of the Mill-Taylor archive had begun and, although later scholars might strive to bring the papers back together and to create full published editions, the archive used and created by John Stuart Mill was destroyed, never again to be recreated.

After Helen Taylor's death in 1907, the letters were inherited by her niece Mary Taylor. The letters were lent to Hugh S. R. Elliot, with

the intention of preparing them for publication. Elliot was the grandson of the 3rd Earl of Minto. He had studied at Cambridge but left before getting a degree, in order to fight in the Boer War. He left the army in 1902, taking up scientific and philosophical studies and later writing on both Herbert Spencer and Henry Bergson. In 1910 a two-volume edition of the letters appeared, published by Longman with an introduction by Elliot and a note on Mill's life by Mary Taylor.³ Elliott wrote to Lord Courtney, the Liberal peer, in 1910 indicating that the experience had not been an entirely happy one. First of all there were restrictions on which letters could be included:

As to the private letters of Mill to his wife & daughter, we hesitated for a very long time about them; but Miss Taylor, who is a lady of very peculiar ideas and habits, did not wish them to be published. She has it in her mind to bring out another volume in a few years time, consisting exclusively of Mill's letters to his wife, daughter, and sisters; but wants to delay this until the last of Mill's sisters is dead. Whether it will ever be done, I cannot say. She guards the letters very jealously; and it was only after much

pressure and persuasion that I was allowed to see them at all.⁴

It was also clear that Elliot and Mary Taylor had disagreed violently over the role of Harriet Taylor Mill and Helen Taylor in Mill's life, which had led to Mary Taylor adding her own account of Mill's personal life to the volume, as Elliot described in a letter to Leonard Courteney:

As to her published introduction, following mine in the book, it was entirely an afterthought. In the study of the private letters, I formed a very unfavourable opinion both of Mrs Mill and of Miss Helen Taylor. It appeared to me that they were both selfish and somewhat conceited women, and that Mill (who must have been a very poor judge of character) was largely deceived with regard to them. Of course I could not state my views openly in a book which is published by Miss Taylor at her own expense. But in my original introduction, I found it impossible to allude to the women without unconsciously conveying into my language some suggestion of what I thought. To this Miss Mary Taylor took the strongest possible exception. I reconsidered the whole matter, but found myself unable to speak any more favourably of them than I had done. For some days Miss Taylor declined even to see me, and we were completely at a deadlock, but at last it was agreed that I should omit all mention of Mill's private life and that Miss Taylor should herself write a second introduction (for which I took no responsibility) and say what she liked. I did not greatly care for her contribution, but it was a necessary compromise.⁵

The letter also mentions a proposed new edition of the *Autobiography* but there were problems in obtaining access to the manuscript from Mary Taylor. The next edition appeared in 1924 after the first sale of manuscripts.

Mary Taylor appears to have worked on a volume of family letters helped by Elizabeth Lee, sister of Sir Sidney Lee who had written an article on Helen Taylor in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. By

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1918, it seems there was a typescript and Mary Taylor was in negotiation with Longmans, Green & Company through a literary agent, A. P. Watts. But the reasons for the failure to publish were lost with the destruction of the archives of the publishers, agents and Mary Taylor's solicitors in the London blitz. Hayek, in his introduction to the *Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill*, reports that Mary Taylor suffered a nervous breakdown, accompanied by insomnia and illusions. She was sectioned and committed to an institution, Northumberland House, in March 1918. She died in the November.

With the death of Mary Taylor, the family papers passed into the hands of her executors, the National Provincial Bank, who, on the report of Mr P. W. Sergeant, decided to sell most of the material at auction, although the more personal material was felt inappropriate for public sale. The first sale took place on 29 March 1922 with the papers being split into lots. The total return from the sale was £276 17s. – £200 of which was raised by the purchase of a set of seventy-seven letters from Thomas Carlyle to Mill by the Trustees of Carlyle House. Most of the lots were bought by various London booksellers, and many of the manuscripts now in US libraries derive from this sale. A further fourteen lots were sold on 27 June 1927 (the gap between the sales is unexplained), mainly consisting of letters to Mill. The purchasers included Yale University Library and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

The archive was no more; it was scattered around the globe, some items to be preserved and others to be lost forever. Harold Laski bought manuscripts of Mill's early speeches for two guineas, then sold two of the manuscripts to recoup the money, published others, and gave many away to friends and institutions without keeping any record of distribution. Josiah Stamp bought Mill's letters to Theodore Gomperz, the Austrian philosopher. After Stamp was killed in an air raid in 1941, the letters were thought lost until they turned up in Japan in 1989.

The LSE bought its first batch of Mill Taylor papers in 1926 from the London bookseller Ridgill Trout for £25. The purchase included

letters, notebooks, diaries, and texts of articles and speeches. Most of the correspondence belonged to Helen Taylor, including letters relating to her role as Mill's literary executor. The papers were seen as a collection and Geoffrey Allen, in an article on the Manuscript Collections in the British Library of Political and Economic Science published in 1960, described them as having 'no archival unity'.⁶

From 1926 onwards the Library bought Mill-related materials either singly or in groups as they came on the market, although the Library's acquisitions register only begins to indicate regular purchases and gifts from 1943 onwards. Professor Hayek advertised widely for information about Mill letters in the hopes of publishing an edition which finally became *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: their correspondence and subsequent marriage*.⁷ Sadly, by its publication in 1951, Hayek had left LSE and the letters he had collected were given to Francis Mineka at Cornell University.

In 1943 the National Provincial Bank presented the Library with seventy items relating to the family, probably the items deemed inappropriate for public sale in 1922. In the same year, Philippa Fawcett donated forty-two letters between Mill and her father, Henry Fawcett. Presumably concerns about war damage were leading owners to consider the future of their collections. After the war, King's College Cambridge donated the letters bought at the 1927 auction by Lord Keynes, which had passed to King's College on his death in 1946. Lord Keynes had intended to pass the letters to LSE, and King's College generously followed his wishes. The 271 letters included correspondence between Harriet and Helen Taylor and between Mill and Helen Taylor, and letters from the actress Fanny Stirling to Harriet Mill and Helen Taylor.

By 1999 the Library had recorded forty-one separate deposits of Mill papers and correspondence. The late 1940s and 1950s were a particularly active time, with papers being bought from dealers in London and North America. Prices varied enormously. The smallest sum paid was 8s. 6d. for James McCosh's letters concerning his *An Examination of Mr J. S. Mill's Philosophy*, bought from

Eric Malden of Southwold, and the most expensive was £41 paid for thirteen autograph letters in 1949. Although later, in 1969, the Library paid £55 for a letter to Mill from Frederic Hill, the prison inspector and social reformer, included in the purchase of some Kropotkin letters.

The Library's last purchase was in 1999, when it bought seven letters from John Stuart Mill to William Molesworth relating to the London Review. The letters were purchased for £11,000 from the Pencarrow Collection, which was sold at Sotheby's. The bidding on that occasion was slightly lower than expected, perhaps because the Mill items were overshadowed by a newly discovered Beethoven quartet movement and a previously unknown letter by Charlotte Brontë. The purchase was supported generously by the Friends of the National Libraries and V& A Purchase Grant Fund.

Despite its lack of staff devoted solely to working with manuscripts, the Library began work on its first deposits very swiftly. In June 1925, the Library and Research Committee minutes note that work had begun on sorting the '100s of letters and manuscript notes by Mill and Helen Taylor'.⁸ The correspondence included names such as G. O. Trevelyan, Henry Hyndman, George Holyoake and Sir Edwin Chadwick. There were also photographs of Mill, his passport and several university diplomas.

In 1934 the Library's Annual Report announced the completion of the project: the material had been arranged and indexed and the catalogue and index of names was now available to researchers. At the same time, the individual items had been mounted on guard strips and then bound into volumes. Known as guarding and filing, this was a method of ensuring security and was very popular into the 1970s and 1980s; sadly it makes it extremely difficult to copy or scan the collection, and today we have to use a microfilm edition of the archive if readers want to make any copies.

This work remains the core of the current catalogue and access to the collections. By the 1990s, however, it was becoming apparent that, although the catalogue provided a very detailed guide to individual items, it was not very helpful in

providing an overview of the collection. This was rectified in 2000, as part of the AIM25 programme to improve access to archives and manuscripts within university archives in London, with the writing of a detailed collection description giving researchers the background to the collection and an overview of its contents. The full catalogue and its index was published online as part of the online Archives Catalogue in 2008 allowing full searching of people, places, dates and enabling researchers to trace connections between the Mill-Taylor Collection and other archives held at LSE and elsewhere.

During the war the Library was concerned about the possibility of bomb damage to its collections and the depredations of the Air Ministry, who had taken over the LSE building on Houghton Street (apparently all the maps and foreign language dictionaries disappeared). So it arranged for the Mill material to be evacuated to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. In 1943 Professor Hayek, then working on his volume of correspondence between Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, realised that he needed to see some of the volumes which had been sent away. The Rockefeller Foundation was funding the project and encouraged the employment of refugee scholars from Europe. Hayek's research assistant, Ruth Borchardt, was just such a refugee scholar and Hayek was keen to continue the work and make the most of the opportunity. The Library knew that the Mill items were held within cases V and XI, but unfortunately the volumes had been wrapped – unlabelled – in bitumen paper and air sealed. The Library Committee agreed that it was too much to ask the National Library of Wales to go through the crates, so a member of staff was despatched to Aberystwyth to bring them all back.⁹

So why did the LSE become a prime location for Mill papers? The development of the collection has often been linked to the Hayek's involvement with the archive at LSE between 1932 and 1950. Hayek was certainly a member of the Library and Research Committee during the 1930s, but Sam Brittain, in his biography of Hayek in the *Dictionary of National Biography*,

indicates that it was only during the LSE's evacuation to Cambridge that Hayek became seriously interested in the Mill correspondence.

In fact the first acquisition of Mill papers, made six years prior to Hayek's arrival at LSE, was probably inspired more by the then current interest in Mill's role in the development of socialism. The chair of the Library and Research Committee in 1926 was Sidney Webb, who had first had the vision of creating a library for the social sciences in 1896. Over thirty years earlier, in *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (1889), Webb had claimed that:

The publication of John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy* in 1848 marks conveniently the boundary of the old individualistic economics. Every edition of Mill's book became more and more socialistic ...

And that

This is the programme to which a century of industrial revolution has brought the Radical working man. Like John Stuart Mill, though less explicitly, he has turned from mere political Democracy to a complete, though unconscious, Socialism.¹⁰

Also on the committee was LSE Governor, the publisher, Thomas Fisher Unwin, whose was also chair of the political and economic committee of the National Liberal Club, and Treasurer of the Cobden Club, and a likely supporter of the purchase of Mill's papers for the Library. And of course there was Harold Laski, who had joined LSE in 1920 as a lecturer in government and who was an active member of Library Committee during the 1920s. Laski believed there was much to learn from Mill, particularly with regard to the balance between the power of the state and the rights of the individual. The *Grammar of Politics*,¹¹ the first edition of which was published in 1926 by Allen and Unwin, expressed Laski's belief that socialism was the best defence for the individual against the state and when *Liberty in the Modern State*¹² was published in 1930 the *Times* reviewer called it the greatest defence of liberty since John Stuart Mill.

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Beyond the Library and Research Committee, others at LSE also valued the work of Mill. The sociologist, Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse, who had been appointed to the first chair of Sociology at the London School of Economics in 1907, wrote in his 1906 *Liberalism and Other Writings*¹³ that:

In middle life voluntary cooperation appeared to [Mill] the best ... but towards the close he recognized that his change of views was such as, on the whole to rank him with the socialists, and the brief exposition of the Socialist ideal given in his Autobiography remains perhaps the best summary statement of Liberal Socialism that we possess.

Although just how far Mill was actually committed to some form of socialism is clearly open to debate, for the purposes of this article it is clear that in the inter-war years many linked him to the development of socialism, making him an interesting subject to those working at the School.

Nevertheless, the later gifts and purchases of Mill-related correspondence and papers made between 1943 and 1950 were most likely influenced by Hayek's interest in Mill, and by the time Hayek moved on to Chicago in 1950 the collection was of a size to generate its own dynamic for growth, although over the years the opportunities for adding to the archive have diminished. Today the Mill-Taylor Collection comprises

fifty-nine volumes and fifteen boxes of material. The title of the collection reflects its composition, in that the correspondence of John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill and Helen Taylor are all well represented. There are notebooks, drafts of articles, speeches and press cuttings.

So, today, who uses the letters and papers in the Archive's Reading Room? Despite the availability of the immense and encyclopaedic *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* edited by J. M. Robson and the microfilm edition of the papers held at LSE, the papers are regularly requested by researchers in the Archive's Reading Room. The last major piece of work based on the papers was focused on Harriet Taylor Mill, and one of the most popular subjects is the development of nineteenth-century feminism, with requests to see Harriet Taylor's writings and to read Helen Taylor's correspondence. Other enquiries refer to James Mill, links with America and Ireland, political representation and, perhaps most bizarrely, the history of passports.

An archivist's nightmare: papers scattered across the globe, bound in unwieldy volumes and gathered together in a piecemeal way. However, even those who are working happily from the printed editions would do well to spend an afternoon in the Archive – to see the handwriting, touch the pages and feel the connection.

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significant Liberal-related materials including the archives of the Liberal Party and the papers of William Beveridge. This paper was first given at the History Group / LSE / BLPSG seminar on John Stuart Mill in November 2009.

- 1 GB97/Mill-Taylor/53 item 58, Note by Helen Taylor, after death of John Stuart Mill, expressing her wishes with regard to the publication of his correspondence.
- 2 GB97/Mill-Taylor/58 item 4, Mary Taylor's diary.
- 3 *Letters of John Stuart Mill* (London, 1910), edited by H. S. R. Elliot.
- 4 GB97/Letter Collection/3/ff 120–123, Letter from Hugh S. R. Elliot to Leonard Courtney, 1st Baron Penwith.
- 5 GB97/Letter Collection/3/ff 123, Letter from Hugh S. R. Elliot to Leonard Courtney, 1st Baron Penwith.
- 6 Geoffrey Allen, 'Manuscript Collections in the British Library of Political and Economic Science', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 2, no. 2, October 1960.
- 7 Friedrich A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: their correspondence and subsequent marriage* (London, 1951).
- 8 GB97/LSE/10/8 Library and Research Committee minutes, 29 June 1926.
- 9 GB97/LSE/10/10 Library Committee, April 1940.
- 10 Sidney Webb, *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London, 1889).
- 11 Harold Laski, *Grammar of Politics* (London, 1926).
- 12 Harold Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State* (London, 1930).
- 13 L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism and Other Writings* (London, 1906).

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