

RESEARCH GUIDE TO THE PAPERS OF THE CHAMBERLAIN SISTERS, BEATRICE, IDA, HILDA, AND ETHEL

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Research guide to the papers of the Chamberlain sisters, Beatrice, Ida, Hilda, and Ethel

Introduction

The papers of the Chamberlain sisters contain correspondence and personal writings and ephemera of Joseph Chamberlain's daughters as well as some material relating to other members of the Chamberlain family.

The correspondence and other papers are important sources for the study of the sisters' own lives and experiences. They reveal their own thoughts and feelings and provide a means for them to be studied in their own right, not just through the lens of their role as supporters of their father and brothers

There are papers in this collection which are not represented in other Chamberlain collections held at the Cadbury Research Library which fill gaps in the family story. At the same time, there are overlaps with the other Chamberlain collections, especially when sequences of correspondence are split between collections or where travel diaries written by different siblings survive for the same trip

The majority of the collection dates from the 1890s to the 1930s, but there is also correspondence and papers of Ida Chamberlain that dates from the early 1940s, and correspondence and papers of Hilda Chamberlain that dates from the 1950s and early 1960s. In addition, the collection includes some papers and correspondence of Joseph Chamberlain dating from the 1850s to the 1880s

This guide is not intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the content of the collection but to signpost material useful for particular research topics and to highlight links with related material in other Chamberlain collections

See the catalogue of the collection online [Chamberlain sisters catalogue](#)



Beatrice Chamberlain



Ida Chamberlain



Hilda Chamberlain



Ethel Chamberlain

Using the correspondence to research family relationships

The correspondence in the collection provides an insight into family relationships as well as into aspects of the sisters' public, social, and emotional lives. Of particular interest are:

Ida and Hilda's letters to Beatrice in 1897-1898 and 1910-1911 when Beatrice was travelling in the USA, [BC/A/1/2](#) and [BC/A/3/3](#). These letters are rich in detail about the sisters' lives in Birmingham and London and Beatrice's activities in America, and emphasise their close relationship

Beatrice's letters to Neville 1891-1893 when he was living on Andros [BC/A/2/1](#). See [NC1/13/2/1-119](#) for letters to Neville 1893-1897. These letters demonstrate Beatrice's role in supporting Neville's emotional health at a time when he was isolated from his family and contain detailed information about family life in Birmingham and London, giving him a link to home

Neville's letters to Beatrice [BC/A/2/2](#), particularly those written 1897-1898 when he was living in Birmingham and involved with Hoskins & Sons, and 1910-1911 when he became engaged and married to Anne De Vere Cole. These letters demonstrate the role that Beatrice played in Neville's life as someone to confide in about his feelings and worries

Ida and Hilda's letters to Mary Endicott Chamberlain, later Carnegie 1889-1943 [BC/B/2](#), particularly letters from Ida only 1908-1943. Ida wrote to Mary about her public work and about family and social life, but also confided in her about her personal feelings of grief at the loss of Ethel and Beatrice, about her father, Joseph Chamberlain and his illness and death, and about her brother Neville and his final illness and death. In addition, the letters are a useful source of information for Ida's experiences living through the early years of the Second World War in Odiham, Hampshire

Hilda's letters to Dorothy Lloyd, nee Chamberlain 1940-1957 [BC/B/8](#), and to Hilda Mary Richard 1952-1963 [BC/B/9](#). Both these sets of correspondence document Hilda's later life living alone in Odiham after Ida's death in 1943, and express her feelings for and concern about her nieces. The letters to Dorothy, in particular, can be used as a continuation of the weekly letters that Ida and Hilda wrote to Dorothy's father, Neville, [NC18/2](#), though they have a different focus. They provide the same kind of useful record of daily life, including details about the experience of living through the Second World War and its aftermath, but also provide a deeper insight into Hilda's feelings about the loss of Neville and Ida, her thoughts about growing older, and her reflections about the changing world in the post-war period and the early years of the Cold War

Using the travel diaries

The collection contains a substantial series of travel journals kept by Ida Chamberlain between 1889 and 1942, and another, smaller, series of notebooks which Hilda Chamberlain used as travel journals from 1885 to 1952. These journals contain a detailed record of the sisters' travels both in Britain and on mainland Europe, as well as visits to Egypt between

1889 and 1906 and again in 1938. Ethel Chamberlain also kept a travel journal recording details of trips to mainland Europe including to Constantinople [Istanbul] in the 1890s, and one of Ida's travel journals contains an account of her visit to the USA in 1898.

The journals are a useful source of information for the study of middle-class travel and tourism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and for the development of tourism in particular locations and resorts when the sisters returned to the same places. Many of the diaries contain details about sightseeing, topography and landscape, hotel accommodation and public transport, and local food and customs. There is a particular focus on spa treatments in resorts in France, Switzerland, and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s which Ida and Hilda took, sometimes with other family members.

Some of the correspondence in the collection can also be used to study travel, particularly correspondence of Beatrice when she was in the USA in 1897-1898 [BC/A/1/1](#) and 1910-1911 [BC/A/3/2](#) and correspondence of Joseph Chamberlain to his children when he was travelling in Austria, Italy, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Germany, and Scotland in the 1870s, [BC/A/3/1](#), and Greece, Constantinople [Istanbul], and the USA in the 1880s, [BC/B/1](#)

As many of the holidays described in the journals were taken with other members of the Chamberlain family, it is possible to compare and contrast accounts of the same holiday by different writers, and there are overlaps with some of Neville Chamberlain's travel diaries [NC2](#)

Travel with an account by more than one member of the Chamberlain family:

1880s-1900

Paris 1889: Ida [BC/D/2/7/1](#), Neville [NC2/2](#)

Egypt 1889-1890: Ida [BC/D/2/7/1](#), Neville [NC2/1](#)

Pyrenees and Spain 1895: Ida [BC/D/2/7/2](#), Neville [NC2/2](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/3](#)

Italy 1899: Ida [BC/D/2/7/4](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/4](#), Neville [NC2/3](#)

1900-1914

Cornwall 1900: Hilda [BC/D/3/9/3](#), Beatrice [BC/D/3/9/5](#)

Egypt 1901: Hilda [BC/D/3/9/6](#), Beatrice [BC/D/3/9/5](#)

Northumbria and Scotland 1901: Ida [BC/D/2/7/3](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/3](#)

Wiltshire and Salisbury Plain 1901: Ida [BC/D/2/7/3](#), Neville [NC2/2](#)

Normandy 1902: Ida [BC/D/2/7/4](#), Neville [NC2/3](#)

Italy 1903: Ida [BC/D/2/7/5](#), Neville [NC2/4](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/7](#)

Devon 1906: Ida [BC/D/2/7/6](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/7](#)

Italy and Dalmatian coast 1909: Ida [BC/D/2/7/8](#), Neville [NC2/5](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/8](#)

1920s-1930s

Evian les Bains 1920: [Ida BC/D/2/7/10](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/9](#)

Italy 1921: Ida [BC/D/2/7/11](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/10](#)

Normandy 1922: Ida [BC/D/2/7/11](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/10](#)

Rome and Paris 1925: Ida [BC/D/2/7/9](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/11](#)

Holland and Belgium 1925: Ida [BC/D/2/7/12](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/11](#)

Italy 1934: Ida [BC/D/2/7/16](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/12](#)

Egypt 1938: Ida [BC/D/2/7/19](#), Hilda [BC/D/3/9/9](#)

Memory writing and collecting

The collection is rich in memory writing in the form of unpublished draft memoirs and recollections of the lives of members of the Chamberlain family. This kind of material is not represented in the other Chamberlain collections held at the Cadbury Research Library and it is particularly useful for the study of memory and remembrance, for the study of grief and loss, and for an understanding of the ways in which Hilda in particular, as the last surviving child of Joseph Chamberlain, acted as guardian of the family's reputations.

Hilda wrote about the lives and achievements of her father and of her brothers, Austen and Neville in the 1950s [BC/D/3/1](#), including for a BBC radio broadcast [BC/D/3/3](#) and [BC/D/3/4](#)

She also wrote down her memories of her father, Joseph, in 1916, [BC/D/3/5](#)

Ida wrote about her memories of her half-sister, Beatrice, after her death in 1918, [BC/D/3/2](#) and also a note about her Aunt Mary, sister of Joseph Chamberlain, after conversations she had with her about her adolescence, [BC/D/2/2](#)

Both Hilda and her sister Ida were concerned to protect the memory and reputation of their brother, Neville, who died in 1940. Hilda wrote a memoir for Neville's children [BC/D/3/6](#), and in 1941 Ida wrote down her recollections of her brother from their early childhood onwards, [BC/D/2/5](#)

This account also contains Ida's memories of their mother, Florence Chamberlain, who died while her children were very young, and there is a separate account that Ida wrote of her early childhood, much earlier in her life, which also contains early childhood memories, [BC/D/2/4](#)

The children of Joseph Chamberlain's marriage to Florence were deeply affected by her death and by their father's difficulty in talking about her. Florence is largely absent from the Chamberlain collections, but there is a rare example of Joseph Chamberlain's writing about her in the form of a memoir for their children shortly after her death in 1875, [BC/D/1/3](#)

Florence's own voice survives in a rare letter to Beatrice in which she described the visit of the Prince of Wales [later Edward VII] to Birmingham in 1874, [BC/A/3/1](#)

The family also had to deal with the loss of Joseph Chamberlain's youngest child, Ethel, in 1905. Correspondence relating to her illness and death at [BC/C/1](#) expresses the feelings of grief and loss of different family members

Mary Endicott Chamberlain acted as a guardian of Ethel's memory for her daughter, Hilda Mary, born in 1901. There is evidence that Mary kept papers and photographs for her, including photographs of her mother [BC/D/4/6](#) and [BC/E/3](#), as well as possibly a set of postcards sent to her as a young child by other family members, [BC/E/1](#)

The collection contains a number of sets of press cuttings about family members, including articles reporting on aspects of the political careers of Joseph, Austen, and Neville Chamberlain, and obituaries of Beatrice, Austen, Ida, and Mary Endicott Chamberlain, later Carnegie

Other material

Items which do not survive in other Chamberlain collections include letters from Joseph Chamberlain to his children when they were away at school or when he was travelling, including letters to Beatrice in the 1870s and 1880s, [BC/A/3/1](#) and letters to Ida and Hilda in the 1880s, [BC/B/1](#)

The earliest material in the collection is ephemera relating to domestic theatrical performances organised by Joseph Chamberlain in the 1850s and 1860s, [BC/D/1/4](#)

There is also a sketchbook kept by Ida during her travels, [BC/D/2/10](#) and press cuttings containing reviews of the illustrated book 'Common Objects of the Riviera' which was compiled by Ida and Hilda on the wild flowers and plants they saw, sketched, and gathered during family holidays in Cannes, and published in 1913, [BC/D/2/11](#)