**Philip Larkin**

**Guide to records**

**Coventry Archives** is located in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry, CV1 5QP. Admission to both the Reading Room and Research Room is free. Documents and books can be consulted without charge, but a charge is made for photocopying or the taking of digital images. Visitors are required to make an appointment to view original documents in the Research Room. Material in the Reading Room is available without the need of an appointment.

**Opening hours:** The Coventry Archives Reading and Research Rooms are open, 10.30 am – 3.30pm, Wednesdays – Fridays; the Reading Room is open on alternate Saturdays, 10.30 am – 3.30pm. Please refer to the Coventry collections online catalogue at <http://coventrycollections.org/> or further details, or telephone on 02476 237583.

**Introduction**

Philip Larkin (1922 – 1985) was an English poet and librarian who Andrew Motion describes as ‘a person who had profound and unforgettable things to say about common experience’. He was born on the 9th of August 1922 in Coventry, the second child of Sydney and Eva Larkin. Sydney was City Treasurer from 1922-1944.

Philip attended Henry VIII school between 1930 and 1940, and our collections hold the school’s ‘Punishment Book’ from this time, with Larkin’s name appearing on several occasions. He contributed to the school magazine ‘The Coventrian’, where he was also an editor for a time. He was generally quite dismissive of his childhood in Coventry, describing it as ‘unspent’ and ‘boring’. In a poem written about visiting home, ‘I Remember, I Remember’, he ends with the ambivalent line: ‘I suppose it’s not the place’s fault’. This inspired a longer prose piece that was published in the *Umbrella* magazine, held in our collections.

Having failed an army medical exam due to his poor eyesight, Larkin was free to attend St John’s College, Oxford. He graduated in 1943 with a First Class degree in English Literature. His first poem was published during this time - ‘Ultimatum’- for the *Listener* magazine. He lived at home with his parents for a while after graduating, before taking his first position as a librarian at Wellington, Shropshire.

In 1946, he became Assistant Librarian at University College of Leicester, also publishing his first novel *Jill* in this year. His second and final novel, *A Girl in Winter*, was published in 1947. He moved to Belfast to become sub-librarian at Queen’s University in 1950, and it was here that he had several poems printed, and others published by the Fantasy and Marvell Press. His first collection of poetry, *The Less Deceived*, was published in 1955, the same year that Larkin became Librarian at University of Hull – a position he would retain until his death.

Larkin began to gain a serious reputation for poetry after *The Less Deceived*, and just under a decade later, his second collection *Whitsun Weddings* was published to high acclaim. The following year, he was awarded the Queen’s Gold Medal for Poetry. His poetic style was associated with ‘The Movement’, a group of British writers following traditional techniques that prioritised clarity and precision, rather than experimentation. He is praised by critics for his straightforward yet profound manner and ability to vividly capture post-war England.

During 1961-71, Larkin provided monthly jazz reviews for the *Daily Telegraph*, which were collected and published in 1970 as *All What Jazz*. His last poetry collection, *High Windows*, was published in 1974. He received several awards for his work, including a CBE, a Companion of Literature in 1978, and Professorship at the University of Hull in 1982. He was offered the title of Poet Laureate in 1984, to succeed Sir John Betjeman, but declined due to the unwanted public profile this would result in. Even so, he was commonly referred to as ‘England’s *other* Poet Laureate’ for the remainder of his life.

In 1985, Larkin was admitted to hospital for a throat illness that resulted in his oesophagus being removed. He died on the 2nd December 1985, at 63 years old. He has been commemorated for his life and work, particularly in Coventry and Hull, where the Philip Larkin society ran a series of guided walks around city landmarks associated with the poet. Examples of such walks can be found in our pamphlet collection. In the early 2000s, the publication of *Letters to Monica* and Andrew Motion’s *A Writer’s Life* biography revealed controversial details of Larkin’s personal life, including affairs and racist views. We hold a range of biographies and critical pieces to question and explore whether the man can be separated from the work.

**Archive material**

PA972/19/1 - Punishment Book for King Henry VIII School, in which Larkin’s name appears

PA708/70, Correspondence with Mr Philip Larkin re his father, Sidney Larkin, former City Treasurer of Coventry, 1964-1974

PA1939/8 - "Umbrella" - magazine of the Umbrella Club Vol 1 Number 3, includes article by Philip Larkin on his early life in Coventry: ‘Not the Place’s Fault’

CCH/1/2/48 - Includes proposed public art to commemorate Larkin (2000-2006)

**Local study material**

Larkin’s Works – all JN013L324:

*Jill: A Novel* (London: Fortune Press, 1946)

*A Girl in Winter: A Novel* (London: Faber, 1947)

Larkin Reading *The Less Deceived* (Hessle: Marvell Press, 1958)

*The Less Deceived: Poems* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1960)

*The Whitsun Weddings: Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1964)

Larkin Reading/Commenting on *The Whitsun Weddings* (Hessle: Marvell Press, 1965)

*All What Jazz: A Record Diary*, *1961-68* (London: Faber, 1970)

*High Windows* (London: Faber, 1974)

*Required Writing, Miscellaneous Pieces*, *1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983)

*Collected Poems* (London: Marvell Press & Faber, 1988)

*Selected Letters, 1940-1985*, selected by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber, 1992)

**Pamphlets**

JN 920 – Dark Night Creeps In – A Collection of the Schoolboy Writings of Philip Larkin, Compiled by Don Lee. *The Coventrian*, 1933

JN013L234 – Philip Larkin: His Life and Work. An Exhibition Held in the Brynmor Jones Library of the University of Hull, June – July 1986

JN920 – Larkin’s Quiet Burial, by Martin Amis in *The Guardian*, 21 August 1993 (on his literary reputation)

JN920 – My Fault, Their Fault: Philip Larkin’s Boyhood, *The Sunday Review* (Independent), 14.3.1993

JN920 – Miscellaneous Material Relating to Philip Larkin, including: interview between Larkin and *Coventrian* Editor Paul Fernandez-Montes (1979), and two essays by Roy Burgess

JN920 – Philip Larkin’s Coventry: A 75th Anniversary Walk, the Philip Larkin Society, 1997

JN920 – Philip Larkin’s Coventry, The Coventrian (guided walk), 2009

JN920 – ‘It’s a Family Affair’, (researching Larkin’s family), *Coventry Telegraph*, 26/6/2010

JN920 – Extracts from “Philip Larkin: letters to Monica”, eg *The Daily Telegraph* Review, 2nd October 2010, pp.4-9: ‘Larkin in Love: Lewd, intimate, cruel, yet full of wit and tenderness – the unseen letters that reveal the secrets of his 40-year affair’

JN920 – Review of ‘Letters to Monica’ by Philip Larkin, in *The Guardian*, 23/10/2010

JN920 – Philip Larkin: Letter-Writer – an Exhibition. Philip Larkin society, the University of Hull

**Biographies**

JN920L324 – *Philip Larkin*, by David Timms (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1973)

JN013L324 – *Philip Larkin: A Biography*, 1933-1976, by B.C Bloomfield (London: Faber, 1979)

JN920L324 – *Larkin At Sixty*, edited by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber, 1982) - contributions from 16 writers and 3 poets for Larkin’s 60th birthday

JN013L324 – *An Enormous Yes: In Memoriam*, edited by Harry Chambers (Calstock: Peterloo Poets, 1986)

JN013L324 – *Larkin*, by Roger Day (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1987)

JN920L324 – *Philip Larkin, 1922-85: A Tribute* by George Hartley (London: Marvell Press, 1988)

JN013L324 – *Philip Larkin and His Contemporaries: An Air of Authenticity*, by Salem K. Hassan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988)

JN920L324 – *Philip Larkin, the Marvell Press and Me*, by Jean Hartley (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989)

JN920L324 – *Philip Larkin: The Man and His Work*, edited by Dale Salwak (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989)

JN920L324 – *Philip Larkin: Writer* by James Booth (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992)

JN013L324 – *Philip Larkin*, by Stephen Regan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992)

JN013L324 – *Philip Larkin: A Writer’s Life* by Andrew Motion (London: Faber, 1993)

**Criticism**

JN013L324 – *Critical Essays on Philip Larkin: The Poems* (Harlow: Longman, 1989)

JN013L324 – *Philip Larkin: His Life’s Work*, by Janice Rossen (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989)

JN920L324 – My Proper Ground: A Study of the Work of Philip Larkin and its Development, by A T Tolley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

JN013L324 – Macmillan Master Guides: The Less Deceived and the Whitsun Weddings, by Andrew Swarbrick (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991)