

Shetland Archives

Finding Aid - Papers of William J. Tait, poet (1918-1992). (D30)

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Shetland Archives

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Papers of William J. Tait, poet (1918-1992).

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Summary information

Repository:	Shetland Archives
Title:	Papers of William J. Tait, poet (1918-1992).
Reference code:	D30
Physical description:	3 boxes

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

William J. Tait was born in Mid Yell in 1918, the son of Jemima Williamson and Robert W. Tait, a teacher. He attended Anderson Educational Institute, where he became top pupil in Shetland for his year, and went on to Edinburgh University where he studied English. During his time in Lerwick, Tait became interested in left-wing politics and, after moving to Edinburgh, joined the Communist Party. During his university years he became ill with pleurisy, a condition which eventually led to pulmonary tuberculosis and a spell of recuperation in Shetland. One of his earliest poems, 'The interruption' was written about these experiences. After graduating Tait became a teacher, taking a job in West Calder before returning to the Anderson Educational Institute as English master. While living back in Shetland he, along with others of a similar political bent, was instrumental in the revival of the Shetland Labour Party in 1943. In 1947 many of the same people came together to found the New Shetlander, a journal to which Tait contributed until his death. Many of the poems he first published in the journal were collected in his only book *A Day Between Weathers* (1980). It remains one of the key volumes in Shetland's literature. His papers also include a number of plays, and the largely unpublished translations of French poetry which Tait worked on throughout his career. His versions of the medieval French poet Villon are unique in Shetland's writing. Tait left Shetland once more in 1949 and, during the next thirty years, taught English in colleges and schools in Brixton, Colchester, Coventry, Birmingham and Dundee. During these years he also visited Edinburgh frequently, where he associated with many of the leading Scottish writers of the twentieth century such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Sidney Goodsir Smith.

In the 1980s Tait returned to Shetland to live in his mother's house in Mid Yell. In his final years he rejoined the editorial committee of the *New Shetlander* and was an enthusiastic and sometimes devastating performer at the Althing debating society. He died on 1 August 1992.

Notes

Other notes

- **Publication status:** Published

Access points

- Literature (subject)

Series descriptions

Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
D30/1	Item - Typescript by William J. Tait, 'Versions of Villon and other translations, mainly into Shetland-Scots'. <i>Scope and content:</i> Containing: (1) 'Les regrets' and other excerpts from Le Testament of Francois Villon'; (2) 'Three translations from Villon's shorter poems', and (3) 'Other translations, mainly of poems in French'.	Undated	36 pages
D30/2	Item - Carbon copy (incomplete) of D30/1.	Undated	31 pages
D30/3	Item - Earlier typescript version of part of part 1 of D.30/1.	Undated	15 pages
D30/4	Item - Carbon copy of another (later?) version of D30/3.	Undated	14 Pages
D30/5	Item - Typed translation by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 169-200 ('Villon regrets his youth').	29 January 1983	1 item
D30/6	Item - Translation (incomplete) by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 1996-2023 ('Final ballade').	Undated	1 item
D30/7	Item - Translation (incomplete) by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 942-69 ('Balade a s'amyé').	Undated	1 item
D30/8	Item - Translation by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 1784-95 ('Song').	30 May 1986	1 item
D30/9	Item - Translation by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 1884-1903 ('Inscription for his tomb').	4 June 1986	1 item
D30/10	Item - Translation (final verse) by William J. Tait of Villon, Le Testament, ii, 1996-2023.	8 June 1986.	1 item
D30/11	Item - Typed and carbon translations (some incomplete) by William J. Tait of poems by Tristan Corbière.	Undated	5 items
D30/12	Item - Script by William J. Tait of preface for tape-recording of his Villon translations.	Undated	1 item

D30/13	Item - Photocopies of letter of testimonial by Dafydd Evans, emeritus professor of Romance philology, University of London, 3 May 1986, concerning William J. Tait's Villon translations. <i>Creator:</i> Evans, Dafydd	3 May 1986	19 copies
D30/14	Item - Typed letter of testimonial by Peter France, professor of French, University of Edinburgh, 16 November 1986, concerning William J. Tait's Villon translations. <i>Creator:</i> France, Peter	16 November 1986	1 item
D30/15	Item - Letter by Murdo Macdonald, Polygon, Edinburgh, to Bill [Tait], 4 March 1987, intimating that Polygon will not print the latter's Villon translations. <i>Creator:</i> Macdonald, Murdo (Polygon books)	4 March 1987	1 item

Series D30/16: Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.

Date: 1937-1986 (creation)

Publication status:

Published

File / item list

Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
D30/16/1	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	1937-1945	36 items
D30/16/2	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	1946-1966	30 items
D30/16/3	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	1969-1977	
D30/16/4	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	1978-1986	15 items

Series D30/17: Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.

Date: Undated (creation)

Physical description: 41 items

Publication status:

Published

File / item list			
Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
D30/17/1	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	Undated	36 items
D30/17/2	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	Undated	36 items
D30/17/3	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	Undated	40 items
D30/17/4	Item - Typed versions and drafts, some amended, of poems by William J. Tait.	Undated	23 items
<p>Series D30/18: Typed versions and drafts of poems by William J. Tait apparently.</p> <p><u>Date</u>: 1937-1945 (creation)</p> <p><u>Physical description</u>: 44 items</p> <p><u>Publication status</u>:</p> <p>Published</p>			
<p>Series D30/19: Incomplete versions and drafts of poems by William J. Tait mainly undated.</p> <p><u>Date</u>: Mainly undated (creation)</p> <p><u>Physical description</u>: 44 items</p> <p><u>Publication status</u>:</p> <p>Published</p>			
D30/20	Item - Typescript of poems by William J. Tait 1970s and undated.	1970s	18 pages
D30/21	Item - Notes concerning and drafts of William J. Tait, 'A Hogmanay sermon'.	1964-1965	5 items
D30/22	Item - Typescript of William J. Tait, 'Lux in tenebris', with translation into English.	Undated	1 item
D30/23	Item - Typed translation into English and paraphrase of William J. Tait, 'By-pass'.	Undated	3 items
D30/24	Item - Fragments of translations into English by William J. Tait of his Shetland dialect verse.	Undated	1 item
D30/25	Item - Translation into English by William J. Tait of his Shetland dialect translation of Villon, Le Testament, lines 169-451.	Undated	5 items
D30/26	Item - Notes concerning, typescript of and fragmentary typescript translation into English by William J. Tait of his 'A day atween waddirs'.	Undated	4 items

D30/27	Item - Zetland Education Authority history jotter of Celia Peterson, Anderson Institute, containing drafts by William J. Tait of 'A day atween wadders', etc., late 1940s.	1940s	1 item
D30/28	Item - Zetland Education Authority English jotter of Fred A.M. Tait, undated, containing notes by William J. Tait from Jakob Jakobsen's dictionary of Shetland Norn, etc.	Late 1940s	1 item
D30/29	Item - Manuscript and typescript errata by William J. Tait for his A Day between Weathers, Edinburgh 1980.	1980	13 items
D30/30	Item - Lists by William J. Tait of his poems, perhaps in connexion with A Day between Weathers, Edinburgh 1980.	1980	10 items
D30/31	Item - Duplicated typescript of article, 'Forfatteren William J. Tait: en literaturs tilblivelse' (original in Social-Demokraten [Denmark], 26 November 1949).	26 November 1949	1 item
D30/32	Item - Manuscript of William J. Tait, 'Tocatta' (short story). <i>Scope and content:</i> Undated but circa 1950.	Circa 1950	1 item
D30/33	Item - Typescript of William J. Tait, 'The skin of his part' (short story). <i>Scope and content:</i> Undated but circa 1950.	Circa 1950	1 item
D30/34	Item - Typescript of William J. Tait, 'Blaze of noon' (three-act play). <i>Scope and content:</i> Undated but circa 1950.	Circa 1950	1 item
D30/35	Item - Manuscript 'possible new opening' for 'Blaze of noon' (see previous item).	Undated	1 item
D30/36	Item - Typescript of incomplete one-act play (title missing), apparently by William J. Tait.	Undated	1 item
D30/37	Item - Fragment of typescript play, perhaps by William J. Tait.	Undated	1 item
D30/38	Item - Typescript of one-act play, 'O fayre Cresseyde!', apparently by William J. Tait.	Undated	1 item
D30/39	Item - Typescript of 'epilogue' for untitled play, perhaps by William J. Tait.	Undated	1 item
D30/40	Item - Fragments of typescript plays, perhaps by William J. Tait.	Undated	14 items

D30/41	Item - Duplicated typescript tribute by William J. Tait for T.A. Robertson, [published in Lallans].	Undated	1 item
D30/42	Item - Typed essay by William J. Tait on Robert Fergusson's poem 'Braid claith'.	Undated	1 item
D30/43	Item - Testimonial by C.M. Grieve [= 'Hugh MacDiarmid'], Glasgow, for William J. Tait. <i>Creator:</i> Grieve, Christopher Murray <i>Scope and content:</i> With letter by Grieve to William J. Tait, same date.	3 May 1949	2 items
D30/44	Item - Testimonial by Robert Kemp, Edinburgh, for William J. Tait. <i>Creator:</i> Kemp, Robert	13 May 1949	1 item
D30/45	Item - Scottish Arts Council, Writers' Register. <i>Creator:</i> Scottish Arts Council	Undated	1 item
D30/46	Item - Typescript of play by T.A. Robertson and R.J. Wishart, 'Da filgee's sang', with annotations in handwriting of T.A. Robertson. <i>Creator:</i> Robertson, T.A. <i>Scope and content:</i> Undated possibly late 1940s.	1940s	1 item
D30/47	Item - Duplicated typescript (incomplete) of play by Jenny Gilbertson, 'Busta House'. <i>Creator:</i> Gilbertson, Jenny	1955	1 item
D30/48	Item - Duplicated typescript for recital of Shetland poetry.	1950	1 item
D30/49	Item - Typescript of poems by 'R.G.M.'. <i>Creator:</i> R.G.M.	Undated	1 item
D30/50	Item - Poem (holograph?) by Derek Bowman, 'Mistletoe-berry'. <i>Creator:</i> Bowman, Derek	6 December 1974	1 item
Series D30/51: Papers of R.W. Tait (1891-1954). <u>Creator:</u> Tait, R.W.			

<u>Date:</u> 1891-1954 (creation)			
<u>Publication status:</u>			
Published			
File / item list			
Reference code	Title	Dates	Physical description
D30/51/1	Item - Typescript of Robert W. Tait, 'Wisdom's folly: a Shetland sketch in two acts'.	Undated	1 item
D30/51/2	Item - Notebook containing Robert W. Tait, 'The empire's story in verse and song' (unfinished).	Undated	1 item
D30/51/3	Item - Robert W. Tait, 'Private orders' (one-act play).	Undated	1 item
D30/51/4	Item - Robert W. Tait, 'Wautty's wireless' (one-act play, apparently incomplete).	Undated	1 item
D30/51/5	Item - Robert W. Tait, 'Recollections of auld Yül' (lecture read to Shetland Folk Society).	6 January 1953	1 item
D30/51/6	Item - Typescript of Robert W. Tait, 'Youth, fifty years ago'. <i>Scope and content:</i> Undated but circa 1947.	Circa 1947	1 item
D30/51/7	Item - Incomplete typescript of short story (unsigned).	Undated	1 item
D30/51/8	Item - Typescript of Robert W. Tait, 'The Shetland flora'.	Undated	1 item
D30/51/9	Item - Notebook with transcripts of Robert W. Tait's 'Rhymes and songs'.	1906-1912	1 item
D30/51/10	Item - Poems by Robert W. Tait. <i>Scope and content:</i> 1912-16 and some undated.	1912-1916	10 items
D30/51/11	Item - Unsigned poem, 'The gipper's lament'.	Undated	1 item
D30/51/12	Item - Printed programme, fourth annual Yule gathering of Edinburgh and District Shetland Association (Robert W. Tait guest of the evening).	6 January 1932	1 item
D30/51/13	Item - Letters by Robert W. Tait to William J. Tait. <i>Scope and content:</i> Family matters, humorous anecdotes, etc.	1954	12 items

