

Acc.13559  
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## **Inventory**

**Acc.13559**

**Reverend James Watson**

National Library of Scotland  
Manuscripts Division  
George IV Bridge  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1EW  
Tel: 0131-623 3876  
Fax: 0131-623 3866  
E-mail: [manuscripts@nls.uk](mailto:manuscripts@nls.uk)

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## **Papers, 1894-1942, of Rev James Watson, missionary with the Baptist Missionary Society, China.**

Papers of Reverend James Watson (1878-1954), Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), originally from Wishaw, Lanarkshire. The papers consist mostly of Watson's correspondence relating to his service in China from 1906 to the 1930s, but especially concerning his experiences during the siege of Xi'an, Shaanxi province, April-November 1926. The collection also contains other papers relating to Watson and his family.

The main family personalities covered by the papers are James Watson, his wife Evelyn (née Evelyn Minnie Russell), their parents, and their children John, Helen, Wreford (who went on to be a noted geographer at the University of Edinburgh), Margaret and Andrew. Some other relatives appear in the papers as correspondents or mentioned in letters.

A number of leading BMS missionaries in Xi'an and elsewhere also appear as correspondents or mentioned in letters, including A.G. Shorrocks, John Shields, Clement Stockley, E.L. Phillips, Frederick Russell (also brother of Evelyn), William Mudd, and Jennie Beckingsale.

The mission stations, schools and hospital in Xi'an, and other mission stations in the surrounding countryside of Shaanxi province, were one of two major centres of BMS activity in China, the other being in Shandong province. The Shaanxi work began in 1890, and the BMS workers were caught up in both the Boxer Rebellion of 1900-01 (during which around 40 BMS missionaries and their families were killed in Shaanxi) and the 1911 Revolution.

James Watson himself studied at the East London Missionary Training Institute in London, 1901-1905, before joining the BMS and being sent to Shaanxi in 1906. He worked at the village of Sui Te Chow, and in Xi'an itself, where by 1926 he was the Principal of the Secondary School, the local BMS Secretary and a leading member of the missionary community.

It was in China that he met Evelyn Russell, who had been there with BMS since 1903, and they married in 1908. They spent most of their married life in and around Xi'an, except for a period in the late 1920s-early 1930s when Evelyn lived in Edinburgh while their children were at senior school. Evelyn died in Xi'an in 1936. James Watson married again in 1951.

The papers closely complement another NLS Manuscripts collection, Acc.9663, the diaries and other papers of Ruth Tait. She was another Scottish-born BMS missionary, who also served in Xi'an as a medical missionary before and during the siege in 1926.

The Baptist Missionary Society Archives are held at the Angus Library & Archive in Oxford. These are likely to contain biographical and other material relevant to Watson and the BMS work in Shaanxi.

More background on the work of the BMS in China can be found in Williamson, H.R., *British Baptists in China, 1845-1952* (Carey Kingsgate Press: London, 1957), and Stanley, Brian, *The history of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792-1992*, (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1992).

The papers also provide a fascinating eyewitness perspective on contemporary Chinese politics and conflict. Xi'an was besieged in 1926 by the forces of Liu Zhenhua (known in

1926 as Liu Chen Hua), a supporter of Wu Pei Fu, a leading warlord in the provinces of Hubei and Henan, east of Shaanxi. The defenders were led by Generals Yang Hucheng and Li Yunlong. They were sympathetic to the cause of the Kuomintang, under Chiang Kai Shek, who had launched from their base in South China the so-called 'Northern Expedition' in summer 1926, in an attempt to defeat the northern warlords and unify all China under one government. The siege was helpful to the Kuomintang operations, as it kept warlord troops tied up for many months.

Some background can be found in one chapter of Mi Zanchen, *The life of General Yang Hucheng* (Joint Publishing Co.: Hong Kong, 1981). However, there is very little other literature in English on the siege, and thus James Watson's accounts (alongside those of Ruth Tait in Acc.9663) offer a unique insight into these events.

Some letters also appear to refer to the difficult period during the 1911 Chinese Revolution.

#### *Note on Chinese place names*

The names used for Chinese cities, provinces etc at the time of these papers are different from their modern names. The most commonly mentioned places in the papers, and their modern equivalents, are :

Sian or Sianfu or Hsianfu	- now Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province
Shensi province	- now Shaanxi province
Shansi province	- now Shanxi province
Hankow	- now part of Wuhan city

The modern names are used throughout this inventory, which was created by volunteer Graham Thompson, March 2015.

*Bought, 2014.*

The papers have been arranged into the following series:

<b>1-4</b>	<b>Family correspondence</b>
<b>5-6</b>	<b>Baptist Missionary Society correspondence</b>
<b>7-9</b>	<b>Papers relating to siege at Xi'an</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Photographs</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Bible &amp; additional papers</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Wreford Watson</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Account of visit to Chengdu</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Silk maps</b>

#### **1-4 Family correspondence, 1894-1942**

- 1 5 letters of Evelyn Watson to James, 1933-1934 and undated.
- 2 15 letters to James and/or Evelyn from his parents, John and Ellen Watson, 1910-1912. Additional letters found within item 11.
- 3 18 letters to Minnie from her parents, Mr and Mrs Russell, 1903-1906, and undated.
- 4 10 letters from other Watson family members, 1894-1942, and associated papers.

#### **5-6 Baptist Missionary Society correspondence, 1904-1936**

- 5 8 letters and other papers addressed to Watson from the BMS Secretary relating to his employment, 1904-1934.
- 6 12 letters between Baptist missionaries in China, 1903-1926.

#### **7-9 Papers relating to siege at Xi'an, 1926**

- 7 Correspondence relating to the siege of Xi'an, 1926.

A bundle of around 70 letters and other material, many from James Watson before, during and after the siege of Xi'an (17 April - 28 November 1926), to his wife Evelyn Watson, who was then staying with their four youngest children at Kuling in Jiangxi province. There are also some letters to and from other correspondents including missionaries outside the city, either other members of the local BMS community or others who had come to negotiate the release of foreigners from Xi'an.

The covering sheet says "siege letters – personal and important". Many of the ones relating to the siege appear to be his own file copies. Most are typed.

Watson describes events during the siege in some detail, including accounts of fighting and shellfire, the difficult conditions for the Chinese civilian population and assistance offered by the missionaries, the personalities of the various Chinese generals and the behaviour of their soldiers, missionary attempts to broker peace between the two sides, negotiations for the evacuation of missionaries (a party of women and children left Xi'an on 11 October 1926), as well as family and personal matters. Together with the contents of folders 8 and 9, and collectively provide a very comprehensive account of the siege from his perspective.

There are around 30 letters between James Watson and his wife, children and other family, around 40 other letters and other items between missionaries in Xi'an and the surrounding area, and a note by James Watson on the 'four stages or periods' of the siege.

8 Extracts from Watson's letters to his wife during the siege of Xi'an, 1926.

A bundle of 34 pages of typed pages, covering the period 8 June - 9 October 1926. The cover sheet is marked 'Extracts from the letters of James Watson written to Mrs Watson during the siege of Sianfu 1926 – pg 29 missing'. Note that page 29 is not in fact missing.

It is believed the letters from which this was typed were brought out by the BMS ladies when they were evacuated Xi'an on 11 October 1926. Evelyn Watson's letter of 22 November 1926 to James Watson states she is having extracts from his letters typed up, so this must be the result.

There are entries of varying lengths for 8-12, 15, 21, 23-27 June ; 2-8, 10-25, 29-31 July ; 2-4, 8, 10-16, 18-20, 22, 24-29, 31 August ; 1-3, 6-14, 16-18, 20-25, 27, 29-30 September ; and 1-7, 9 October.

Watson describes many aspects of the siege, including fighting and shellfire, aircraft from the attackers dropping propaganda leaflets, a long, detailed account of his meeting with the besieging General Liu in late August, the increasingly desperate condition of refugees and the local population, food price inflation, lack of food and eventually starvation, and much more.

9 Newspaper cuttings relating to the siege of Xian, 1926.

## 10 Photographs, undated

10 A small group of 10 black and white photographs, some relating to the missionary 'hill station at Kuling, near the city of Jiujiang, Jiangxi province. Others appear to show groups of missionaries in and around Xi'an.

## 11 Bible and miscellaneous papers

11 Watson's Bible, inscribed on endpaper as 'Presented to Mr James Watson as a token of esteem, from the members of the Wishaw Baptist Church Male Choir, on the occasion of his leaving for the Foreign Mission Field, September 1901.'

Numerous papers were inserted in the Bible, and have been removed and placed in a separate folder. These include correspondence, photographs, press cuttings, and assorted notes on religious matters.

## 12 Papers relating to Wreford Watson, 1926

12 Papers relating to the schooling of Wreford Watson, James and Evelyn's son, 1923-1926. This includes a group of eight school reports at Redcroft School, Kuling, from and three letters from 1925 about Wreford's schooling.

**13 Account of a visit to Chengdu, 1986**

13 Account of the visit by Thomas Torrance to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and to Weichou and Chiang villages in Wenchuan County, the Upper Min Valley, Sichuan, October 4-18, 1986.

Thomas Torrance (1913-2007) was born and brought up in Chengdu, and later became a leading Scottish theologian, serving as Professor of Christian Dogmatics at New College, the University of Edinburgh. He is believed to have been a childhood friend of Wreford Watson, James Watson's son.

**14 2 silk maps**

14 Two copies of an aviation 'escape map' of southern China and Indo-China, probably dating from WW2, but of areas unconnected with James Watson's service.