

This is a project that started on a pool table in the Fredeman basement. Since this was before the widespread use of computers in literary scholarship, the initial task was to cut up the only compilation of Rossetti letters to that time, the Doughty-Wahl edition. Dick knew that Doughty-Wahl was deficient in many ways—missing letters, incomplete letters, editorial errors, and so on—but it seemed to be the best place to start. So before computer scholarship, “cut” and “paste” meant literally that—cutting letters out of DW and pasting them onto sheets of paper. While I was carrying out that task, Dick was away scouring the world for new letters to include in the edition. Computers eventually made great advances, greatly easing the labour of literary scholarship, and the material we accumulated could much more easily be handled and edited in digital mode.

Even before undertaking this major scholarly project, Dick gathered many encomiums for his academic work: several well-received books and scores of scholarly articles and reviews. He

had an international reputation and was dubbed “the foremost scholar of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.” He was called “one of Canada’s pre-eminent Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite scholars” and earned the sobriquet “the Father of North American Pre-Raphaelite Studies.” He was said to be the most internationally distinguished scholar in UBC’s English department.

Without a doubt, however, *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* was the capstone of his scholarly career. Just one fact alone will indicate the scope and importance of this new edition: it added 2,000 letters to the Doughty-Wahl edition that had never before been published. As one scholar described Fredeman’s magnum opus, this impressive work of scholarship stands as “a monumental testament to his outstanding scholarship.”

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Surprising and Delightful Connections

UBC graduate student JUSTIN O’HEARN makes an unexpected discovery in the Colbeck collection.

NORMAN COLBECK was known for his affinity for collecting the finest editions as well as those inscribed by the original authors. Examining Colbeck’s extensive editions of poet G.K. (Gilbert Keith) Chesterton (1874–1936), I found a number of works inscribed to one Anne Kidd, sometimes accompanied by original drawings done by the author. Looking through the extended collection, we found more volumes inscribed to Kidd and other members of her family by not only Chesterton, but also his brother Cecil and the extended Chesterton family.

Colbeck himself noted that a copy of G.K.

Chesterton’s *Greybeards at Play* (1900) in the collection was “an intimate presentation copy to Mrs. Robert Kidd, who, as Annie Firmin, was the playmate of [Chesterton’s] boyhood days in Sheffield Terrace.” Looking into the matter further, I discovered that this particular Mrs. Robert Kidd, *née* Firmin, moved from London to Vancouver with her husband and founded Overwitea Foods in New Westminster in 1915. In the years after Anne’s move to Vancouver, she remained a friend of Chesterton’s as well as his younger brother Cecil, their respective spouses and their mother, whom Anne referred to as “Aunt Marie.” Anne would



G.K. Chesterton with friends in a photograph from the Kidd materials within the Colbeck collection.

go on to become the president of Overwaitea Foods after her husband's death in 1932, retiring in 1962 at the age of 93. She died five years later.

Anne Kidd is not the only Vancouver connection to the Chestertons, however: her two children, Molly and Desmond Kidd, and Anne's younger sister, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Firmin, have volumes in the Colbeck collection inscribed to them by the Chestertons. Among the 23 editions inscribed by the Chestertons to Anne and her family are a number of first editions of G.K. Chesterton's own works as well as collections of poetry by Yeats, an edition of H.G. Wells, and various political and satirical books.

HEARTFELT INSCRIPTIONS

An edition of G.K. Chesterton's *Ballad of the White Horse* (1911) in Colbeck gave me pause because, in addition to a heartfelt inscription to Anne, it includes an original drawing by the author that he captioned as "King Alfred wondering whether to have his cake or eat it." Chesterton maintained a strong affection for Anne, who, according to Chesterton's friend and biographer Maisie Ward, was the "girl chosen by Gilbert's mother" when they were children to be the future Mrs. Chesterton, even though neither Anne nor Chesterton himself ever expressed romantic feelings for one another.

Anne and her sister Lizzie were, in Chesterton's own words, a fundamental part of his early life and had "more to do with enlivening [his] early years than most." Chesterton remarks fondly on playing in the garden "under the care of a girl with ropes of golden hair." He wrote that Mrs. Chesterton would exclaim to Annie, "'You are an angel'; which [Chesterton] was disposed to accept without metaphor."

While Anne, or Annie as Chesterton more familiarly referred to her, kept up her friendship with the poet, her younger sister Elizabeth "Lizzie" Firmin also had an ongoing relationship with the Chestertons, and there are a number of editions inscribed to her from both G.K. and Cecil. Some of the inscribed editions to Lizzie were Christmas gifts from Cecil. The Colbeck collection contains no fewer than four of Cecil's Christmas books to Lizzie from the late 1890s to the early 1900s. The editions in the Kidd materials from Cecil range from political tracts like *The Party System* (1911), co-authored with Hillaire Belloc, to Victorian poetry and periodicals. Most are inscribed to Lizzie along with the salutation "with best love, Cecil." The most remarkable edition is E.T. Reed's *Mr. Punch's Animal Land* (1898), in which Cecil has filled an entire page with whimsical drawings of characters he dubbed "The Lizz" and "The

Cecichest,” mimicking the style of Reed’s own caricatures contained within. Cecil Chesterton, though lesser known than his brother, was an active journalist and political commentator who died in hospital in France in 1918 from nephritis. Cecil had insisted on staying at his battle post until the Armistice, even though he was very ill.

The collection even includes an inscribed edition from G.K. to Anne’s daughter Honor “Molly” Kidd. In a 1909 edition of *Fairy Tales from Hans Christian Anderson*, Chesterton wrote, “To Honor Kidd Commonly called Molly from G.K. Chesterton,” along with slightly edited quotes from Lord Beaconsfield—Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli—“I bring you Peace with Molly” and Shakespeare’s *Henry v*, “But if it be a sin to covet Molly / I am the most offending soul alive.” Anne’s son, Desmond, is also represented in the collection, with a copy of Chesterton’s *Club of Queer Trades* (1905) inscribed, “Love to Desmond & his mother from F.G.C [Frances Chesterton and] G.C.” The childhood affections of Chesterton towards the Firmin sisters clearly carried over to the next generation.

A LIFETIME OF AFFECTION

In 1930–31, G.K. Chesterton and his wife Frances visited North America on a lecture tour with their secretary and future literary executrix, Dorothy Collins. Chesterton lectured across the United States, making his way west and up the coast. The couple crossed into Canada to give a lecture in Vancouver on March 10, 1931. While in Vancouver, the Chestertons were welcomed by Anne Kidd and stayed in her home for the duration of their time in the city. Anne recounted that Chesterton paid no mind to his appearance during the trip and “never cared what he wore,” so that “Dorothy Collins had to give him the once-over before he

went lecturing” to ensure he was presentable.

Chesterton, in a letter to Anne’s daughter Molly just two years before his death, expressed his deepest fondness for Anne. He wrote that Molly reminded him immensely of her mother and lamented “it would take pages to tell you all I feel” about Anne; he continued by insisting that Molly need not imitate her mother but she

would “not be far wrong if you imitate her in anything,” thus summarizing a lifetime of affection with just a few simple lines.

The most poignant Chesterton edition from the Kidd collection within Colbeck is an inscribed copy of his autobiography. Frances Chesterton inscribed it rather than G.K. for it was released in 1936, after G.K.’s death.

Frances writes in the front leaves of the volume, “To his dear ones in Vancouver this is sent with love from Frances Nov. 1936.” A short, simple expression of the lifelong friendly affection between the Chesterton and Firmin/Kidd families.

The Kidd materials within the Colbeck collection offer a perspective on the Kidd family beyond what they are generally known for in Vancouver and the rest of Canada. That Anne Kidd, her children, and her sister maintained a relationship with a childhood friend who just so happened to be a famous and influential author allows us to see the Kidd family as more than business tycoons who helped shape Canada’s grocery industry. Norman Colbeck’s books yielded this otherwise little-known Vancouver literary connection, and it is but one of the stories waiting to be told through this masterful collection.

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 ~ Justin O’Hearn is a PhD candidate at UBC and curatorial assistant for the exhibition *An Unmatched Devotion*.



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G.K. Chesterton at his home in London, in a photo from the Kidd materials within the Colbeck collection.