

HIGHLIGHTS:

UNESCO Memory of the World: 2021 Inscription

Jane Wild

Archifacts statement – October 2021

The Memory of the World programme was established by UNESCO in 1992. The objectives are to raise awareness of the significance of unique documentary heritage and to support preservation and access to these collections. The Aotearoa New Zealand register was initiated in 2010 by the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO and now features 46 inscriptions.

Inscription 46 is for the Ursula Bethell Collection at the Macmillan Brown Collection, University of Canterbury. Jane Wild, Chair of the UNESCO Memory of the World Aotearoa New Zealand committee, notes that the posters published in *Archifacts* support the programme's objectives around visibility. The inscription process during lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 continues to provide challenges with conferences and other opportunities for promotion constrained by Covid-19 lockdowns. It is helpful to share the posters for each inscription, which link back to the refreshed Aotearoa New Zealand Memory of the World website: <https://unescomow.nz/>

We warmly invite archives and libraries across Aotearoa to contribute to building our unique documentary heritage register.

Nominations for the 2022 register close on 31 May 2022 and Expressions of Interest can be sent up to 31 March 2022.

UNESCO Memory of the World
Aotearoa New Zealand

2021

Much the most complete & clear writing that has been done in this country.

Ursula Bethell Collection

Bethell was a pivotal figure in the Christchurch arts community, and among her friends were many of the major artistic and literary figures of the day. Her correspondents include Charles Brasch, D'Arcy Cresswell, Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, and Monte Holcroft.

"The significance of Mary Ursula Bethell in the development of New Zealand poetry, and New Zealand letters more broadly, cannot be overestimated. Her poetry, which she only began to write in any serious way when she finally settled in New Zealand at the age of fifty, reflected a keen awareness of contemporary trends in modernist literature, nourished on wide reading in English and French work. Her interests extended beyond poetry: she was a painter of no little ability, an integral part of the local art community, and a correspondent par excellence. Indeed, the writing of letters became her 'work', and she wrote frequently to a wide range of correspondents, about poetry and literature, about the arts more broadly, and about theology and spirituality." Professor Peter Whiteford.

The collection spans the years 1890 to 1945, a period of rapid transformation in New Zealand's cultural history. Bethell was writing during the decades when two world wars, and economic and social change brought about a developing sense of national identity in New Zealand. Her writing reflects and amplifies this, yet does not fall back on nationalistic tropes. Her poems show how the environment and conditions of New Zealand impeded the complete imitation of English poetry, and led to the adaptation of a locally distinct style.

Archive Location

Macmillan Brown Library
University of Canterbury
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha

P.S. You should
 this will have
 to go in a
 very pleasant
 way...
 They seem
 to be
 to go
 to them.
 MARSII, Ngāio
 27 Villy Road
 Cashmere Hills
 April 21st
 Dear Miss Bethell
 It was nice of you to
 write so heartily about my
 broadcast. I was so nervous &
 quish over it, thinking of all
 those authors angrily listening to me
 & thinking "Check! Check!" or else
 "Infirm of purpose; or else "But what
 about me?". In the original notes
 I ventured to talk about your "Garden"
 saying that it was much the most
 complete & clear writing that had been
 done in this country. But this being
 short of the subject, the N.Z. novel, I
 was obliged to leave it out.
 May I come with 'Ultima Thule' when
 you return? I'll sing up in a fortnight
 or so. With very many thanks
 Yours sincerely
 Ngāio Marsh

Letter from Ngāio Marsh to Ursula Bethell. MB558-124252.



National Committee of New Zealand
 Te Kaitiaki o Aotearoa me Ngāi Māhara o iā Ao
 Memory of the World

Inscribed onto the UNESCO Memory of the
World Aotearoa New Zealand Register in 2021

Discover more at
unescomow.nz