

ONE BRITISH ARCHIVE

One British Archive: Stocked Stacks in the Great Plains: British and Irish Collections at the University of Kansas's Kenneth Spencer Research Library

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Abstract

This article discusses the University of Kansas's Kenneth Spencer Research Library as an unexpectedly rich resource for British and Irish studies. The library's location in Lawrence, Kansas, at a distance from the coastal research corridors, means that its collections tend to be underexplored, despite their significance. Spencer Library's strength in eighteenth-century British imprints is complemented by extensive manuscript holdings. Among these are several centuries of estate papers for Britain's prominent North family, and manuscripts documenting the Asiento (agreement) and England's trade in supplying captive Africans to Spanish colonies in the Americas in the papers of Arthur Moore. Particularly noteworthy is the library of writer, civil servant, and Irish nationalist P. S. O'Hegarty, which offers scholars an unparalleled resource for Anglo-Irish relations and Irish history, culture, and politics. O'Hegarty's collecting of scarce and ephemeral material, on the one hand, and books with significant provenance, on the other, makes his library a valuable resource for researchers even in an age of digitized text.

When those who have never been to Kansas imagine it, they may think of the *Wizard of Oz* or Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*; historians might think of Bleeding Kansas or the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and still others of flat fields of waving wheat. Accordingly, it may surprise researchers to discover that the Kenneth Spencer Research Library on the University of Kansas (KU) campus holds British and Irish collections whose richness may save them a trip across the Atlantic. The library's location in Lawrence, Kansas, puts it at a distance from the well-traveled research corridors of the East and West coasts. This means that its collections are not as well-known to scholars as by merit they should be, but therein also lies opportunity: there is still much material that is underexplored, awaiting researchers to draw it out (Figure 1).

By the time KU's Special Collections department was established in 1953, the library knew that it could not catch up to, nor did it have the funds to compete with, institutions on the East Coast in collecting, for example, Early American materials. Thus, librarians cultivated collecting areas in which they could get a good return on investment and where opportunity permitted them to build research-level collections at relatively low



Figure 1. Reading room at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library. All photographs by the author.

cost. For British imprints, this translated into a focus on the eighteenth century.¹ Spencer Library's strong overall holdings for the period are supplemented by several discrete collections devoted to publication formats or individuals. Its named 18th Century Pamphlets Collections comprise over 6,000 specimens organized into four principal categories: sermons and religion; politics and economics; drama; and poetry. Their pages touch on most of the lively and contentious topics of the era, from the War of Spanish Succession to works by and about religious dissenters to British reactions to the French and American revolutions. As a former librarian once wrote, "every conceivable subject and nearly every 18th century figure of any note was discussed in a pamphlet, or more commonly in a series of pamphlets."²

By turns, Spencer Library's Bond Collection documents the development of the British periodical press during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. With its foundation in the private collection built by Richmond P. and Marjorie N. Bond, these newspapers and periodicals capture the concerns and tenor of the age, from news foreign and domestic, to satirical depictions of theatre-going audiences in Drury Lane, to the vivid and quotidian minutia of advertisements, whether for a London course of lectures on midwifery or for the return of a little black mare "Lately lost out of Pasture."³ In addition to extensive holdings for *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, and publications associated with (or in imitation of)

¹ Due to a known cataloging issue, a large percentage of Spencer Library's eighteenth-century British holdings are not currently reported in WorldCat. The library intends to remedy this omission in the coming years, but in the interim, most holdings are still discoverable through KU's online catalog at lib.ku.edu.

² Alexandra Mason, *A Guide to the Collections* (Department of Special Collections, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, 1987), 10.

³ For satire of theater audiences, see "The Theatrical Oglers," *The Convivial Magazine, and Polite Intelligencer*, November 1775, 51–52 [52 mispaginated as 56]. For an advertisement for midwifery lectures, see *The Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 10 December 1791, 1. For the lost mare advertisement, see *The Norwich Gazette*, 2–9 November 1728, 3.



Figure 2. Bound issues of *The Convivial Magazine, and Polite Intelligencer* and *The Lady's Curiosity: Or, Weekly Apollo* from Spencer Library's Bond Collection.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, the Bond Collection includes scarce titles, such as *The Lady's Curiosity* and *The Convivial Magazine* (Figure 2). London newspapers are complemented by a small but significant number of provincial papers like the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, *Northampton Mercury*, *Norwich Gazette*, and *Jopson's Coventry Mercury*. Though some of these titles are represented by only an issue or two, that copy may be the sole institutional holding for a given issue in the USA and sometimes beyond. Rounding out Spencer Library's eighteenth-century British imprints are collections that take figures as their focus. These include the Realey Collection of Sir Robert Walpole; the Horn Collection of contemporary poems on John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough; and the largest collection (after that of the British Library) of works brought out by the controversial and prolific publisher Edmund Curll (d. 1747).

Spencer Library's holdings for British history and culture, of course, extend to other centuries and include manuscript collections. A particularly rich vein of manuscript material was acquired in the summer of 1969 from the UK booksellers Hofmann & Freeman. It included, for example, small collections related to Norfolk Recusants (1591), Fleet Prison for debtors (ca. 1630–37), and the Russia Company (1696–98), as well as letters of the Bolton Company, importers and exporters for Madeira (1695–1711), and records connected with the East India Company (1701–1858) and the Levant Company (1710–20, 1730–32). The acquisition also furnished manuscripts on government, from a commonplace book recording parliamentary debates and speeches (1627–28), to drafts of declared accounts brought before the Exchequer Audit Office (1730–49), to a collection of official copies of Court of Chancery decrees (1733–83). However, the most notable yields of that 1969 trip were three large groups of family and estate papers comprising more than 7,000 items: the North Family Papers (MS 240A), the Kaye Family Papers (MS 240B), and a Miscellany of Deeds and Manorial, Estate, Probate and Family Documents (MS 239).

The better-known collection of papers of the North family resides at the Bodleian Library and includes manuscripts from the family's principal seat, Wroxton Abbey in Oxfordshire. Spencer Library's North Family Papers (1250–1856) originate primarily from their seat in



Figure 3. File of writs from the North Family Papers on display in Spencer Library's North Gallery.

Kirtling, Cambridgeshire, and though more heavily weighted toward estate documents, still deliver much of interest. There are, for example, files of legal writs signed by Francis North (1637–85) from the period during which he was chief justice of common pleas. Several files are still on a gut or wire thread, thus offering not only evidence of the content of the writs themselves, but of the organizational methods of the period. Indeed, one file hangs on display in the glass-enclosed stacks of the North Gallery, named for its north-facing windows rather than the North family (Figure 3). When visiting classes are prompted to speculate what this odd object might be, guesses have ranged from an avant-garde art installation, to a hornet's nest, to a bundle of garbage. Alongside the collection's many deeds and estate documents, there are also court rolls, primarily for areas where the Norths held lands. These documents provide fascinating glimpses into the lives and economic conditions of tenants and other ordinary individuals for whom few other records survive.

The papers of Arthur Moore (d. 1730) also share a North family provenance.⁴ Moore served at various points as an agent for the Duchy of Albemarle estates, as a long-standing member of Parliament representing Greater Grimsby in Lincolnshire, and in high-level positions with the East India Company and South Sea Company. Those researching the harrowing history of the transatlantic slave trade will find in Moore's papers extensive material related to the Treaty of Utrecht and the resulting Asiento (agreement), whereby the British acquired for a period a monopoly on supplying captive Africans to Spanish colonies in the Americas through the South Sea Company. Such documents include a 1712 draft of the Asiento that varies from the published version (Figures 4–5), drafts of a report on the state

⁴ The papers of Arthur Moore passed to his son William and then, upon William's death in 1746, to William's executor, Francis North (1704–90), 1st Earl of Guilford. Spencer Library acquired the bulk of the collection in the mid-1970s from the bookseller Hofmann & Freeman, though some manuscripts arrived with the original 1969 purchase of the North Family Papers.

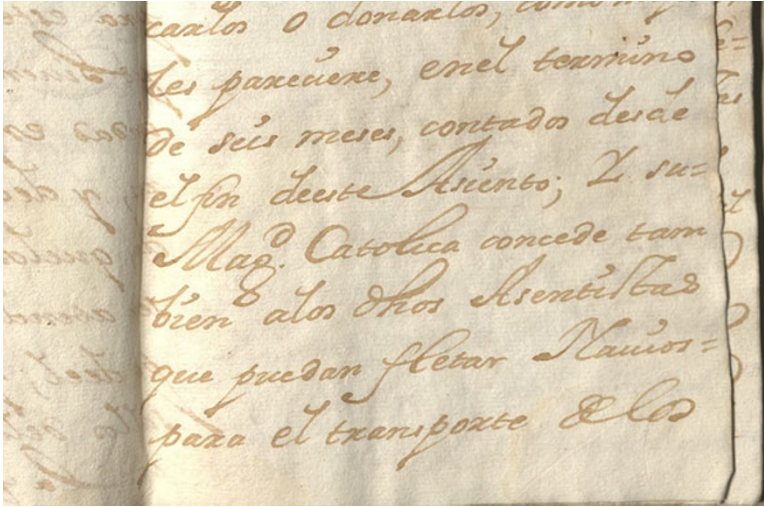


Figure 4. Detail from a Spanish Asiento draft, ca. December 1712, in the Arthur Moore Collection.

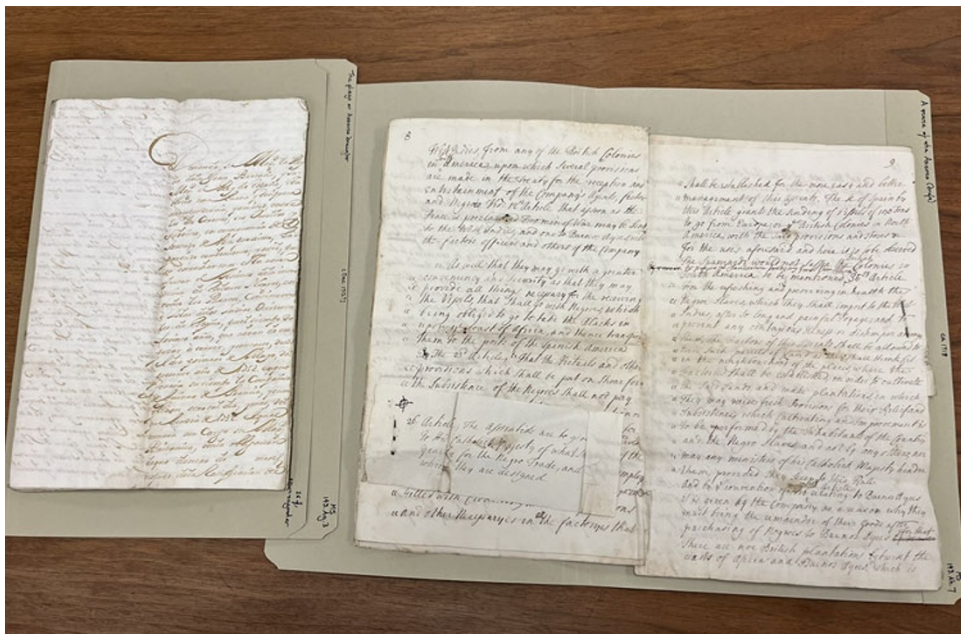


Figure 5. Spanish Asiento draft, ca. December 1712 (left), with draft of a report on the state of the Asiento, ca. 1718, (right) from the Arthur Moore Collection.

of the Asiento ca. 1718, and correspondence on diplomatic and financial matters associated with the Asiento and South Sea Company affairs.

However, it is perhaps in the area of Irish history and Anglo-Irish relations that Spencer Library offers scholars its most extraordinary resource. The library of P. S. O'Hegarty (1879–1955), an Irish nationalist, civil servant, historian, and bibliophile, contains over

25,000 items. The collection reflects the range of O'Hegarty's interests (from French literature to juvenile fiction), but its core strength lies in its books, manuscripts, and ephemera documenting Irish literature, history, and politics from the seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. A one-time member of the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and a contributor to many of the separatist periodicals of the 1910s, O'Hegarty was particularly well-positioned to collect and assess not only books, but also scarce pamphlets, periodicals, and broadsides offering insight into the complexities of Anglo-Irish politics.

In the dedicatory preface to his 1952 study *A History of Ireland under the Union, 1801–1922*, O'Hegarty wrote, “No people that does not know its past can build wisely.”⁵ His writings in that volume and in other works, like *The Victory of Sinn Féin* (1924), advance his participant perspective on Irish history. O'Hegarty's simultaneous amassing of what F. S. Bourke once judged as “the largest private library in Ireland to-day” stands as an alternative but related attempt to “know” the Irish past.⁶ KU forged its relationship with O'Hegarty just before his death by purchasing in 1955 his startlingly comprehensive collection of the poet W. B. Yeats. In the years that followed, KU worked with his widow Wilhelmina and the bookseller Pickering & Chatto to acquire his larger library. It arrived at the university on 26 March 1959 in a shipment weighing 11 tons.

The research value of O'Hegarty's collection lies not only in its individual publications, but also in their bibliographic and material contexts. You see this, for example, in a sammelband collecting materials in opposition to the union of England, Ireland, and Scotland. Bound together are a full run of the periodical *The Anti-Union* (1798–99) with additional, more ephemeral items, such as hand-colored satirical cartoons, clippings, and broadsides (Figure 6). O'Hegarty's penchant for collecting volumes with interesting provenance yields further fruit for researchers. On the topic of the opposition to the Act of Union of 1800, O'Hegarty's library contains, for example, a bound run of *The Constitution: or, Anti-Union Evening Post* (1799–1800) that belonged to Thomas Matthew Ray (1801–1881), secretary for the Repeal Association. At Ray's urging, one of its issues was inscribed by the party's founder Daniel O'Connell, known during his lifetime as “the Liberator” for his work on Catholic Emancipation. O'Connell's note appears by an anti-Union pronouncement of the magistrates and freeholders of County Meath and reads, “My sentiments still, 26th April 1840 D. O'C.”⁷ O'Connell's inscription at the outset of Repeal Association activities and Ray's solicitation of it highlight the often intentional and self-conscious continuities Irish activists drew between historical threads of the opposition to British rule. Among the additional items with O'Connell associations are two volumes of pamphlets on religion and politics, including several of O'Connell's own writings, which the politician collected and had bound. One contains a particularly scarce pamphlet, ca. 1840, of letters of the vakeels of the Raja of Satara to the directors of the East India Company and the Board of Control. It bears a presentation inscription to O'Connell from one of its authors, Meer Afzall Alee (Figure 7).⁸ Provenance of this type offers a particularly concrete site for exploring

⁵ P. S. O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union, 1801–1922* (Methuen & Co., 1952), [vii].

⁶ Note from F.S. Bourke, of the Bibliographical Society of Ireland, as part of a memorial piece on P. S. O'Hegarty: “P. S. O'Hegarty—Appreciations,” *The Irish Book Lover* 32, no. 5 (July 1956): [96]–99, at 99.

⁷ Ray also included his own manuscript testimonial at the bottom of the same page detailing the context of and repeating O'Connell's inscription: “The Liberator wrote the above words hereon [...] in the Committee Rooms at the Corn Exchange in my presence + at my request Thos. Matw. Ray.” See O'Hegarty copy of *The Constitution: or, Anti-Union Evening Post*, 14 January 1800, 3, call number H87, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, KU. O'Hegarty wrote of this volume in P. S. O'Hegarty, “Some Association Books of Irish Interest,” *The Irish Book Lover* 30 (1948): 74–78, at 74.

⁸ The pamphlet—*Letters with Accompaniments, from Eswunt Row Raja Sirkey, Bhugwunt Row Wittul and Meer Afzall Alee, Vakeels of his Highness the Rajah of Satara, to the Honorable the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and the*



Figure 6. Hand-colored caricature “Union between England, Ireland, & Scotland,” ca. 1800, in a sammelband from the library of P. S. O’Hegarty, which contains a run of *The Anti-Union* (1798–99) and anti-Union cartoons, broadsides, and clippings.

the historical and philosophic intersections between the movements for Irish and Indian self-rule.

O’Hegarty’s collecting reminds us at every turn of why, in an age of digitized text, the library of a skilled collector remains worthy of consultation. Not only did he collect broadly and deeply in his areas of interest, including the rare and ephemeral (especially with respect to political pamphlets and broadsides), but for more widely held works he often sought out copies whose research value and interest were enhanced by their connections to significant

Right Honorable the President of the Board of Control (John Wilson, [1840?])—is inscribed on the title page, “Daniel O’Connell Esq. M. P. with the Wakeel Meer Azfal Allis compliments,” call number O’Hegarty C3968, Item 12, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, KU.

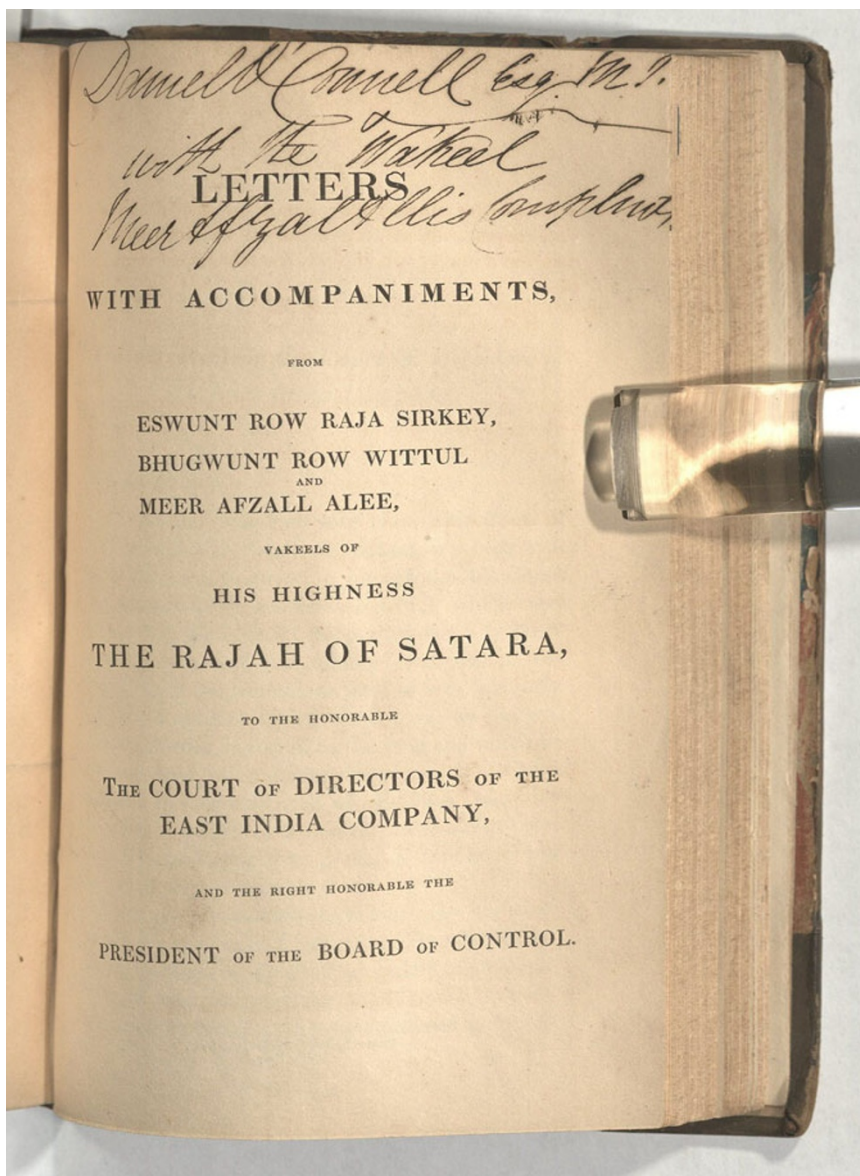


Figure 7. Presentation copy of a pamphlet to Daniel O'Connell from one of its authors, Meer Afzal Alee (spelled in the manuscript inscription as Meer Afzal Ali) in a sammelband of pamphlets from the P. S. O'Hegarty Collection.

figures, as seen above. Some such volumes declare their utility readily, such as the copy of the (ultimately suppressed) Fenian journal *The Irish People*, in which editor and revolutionary John O'Leary marked articles with the initials of their authors. Indeed, O'Hegarty himself made use of these attributions in a chapter on the Fenian movement in *A History of Ireland Under the Union*.⁹ What other association copies convey—in the formulation of

⁹ O'Hegarty includes at the end of his chapter "The Fenian Movement—The Irish People—1863–5" a note that reads, "The Identification of the writers of the articles quoted in this chapter, from *The Irish People*, is based on a file in the writer's possession, which formerly belonged to [fellow Fenian] C. G. Doran, and in which the initials of

bibliographer G. Thomas Tanselle—is “dependent on the knowledge and perspicacity of the persons who examine them.”¹⁰ Collectively, the thousands of association copies and volumes with notable provenance in O’Hegarty’s collection illuminate the associational matrices of Irish and Anglo-Irish literary and political life. There is hardly a prominent Irish figure from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century who is not tied, by provenance, to one or more of the volumes in his library.

With O’Hegarty’s collection came a smaller cache of manuscripts, including individual letters, either collected by or sent to O’Hegarty, from writers like Seán O’Faoláin, arriving tucked loosely into his copies of their books. Other manuscripts were more substantial: diaries and account books documenting everyday life as well as manuscripts bearing on major historical events. The scrapbook compiled by Nannie O’Hagan, of Boyne Cottage, contains transcriptions of thirty-three letters from her husband, Hugh O’Hagan, sent between 8 August 1854 and 30 June 1855, during his Crimean War service as a surgeon aboard the *HMS Firebrand*. The autograph album of Paul Cusack, an Irish Volunteer from Granard in County Longford, records inscriptions and patriotic sentiments of fellow inmates at the internment camp in Frongoch, Wales, where he and many others were transported in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising. On facing pages of Cusack’s album, one finds inscriptions by two ill-fated future Lord Mayors of Cork, Tomás MacCurtain and Terence MacSwiney. In 1920, MacSwiney would die on hunger strike in London’s Brixton Prison following his arrest for sedition, but here he contributes lines of verse, “A Memory of Home and Ireland,” that he invites Cusack to set to music.

Some manuscripts even help tell the story of their transmission, as in a small group of materials by the Northern Irish poet, writer, and editor Alice Milligan (1866–1953). O’Hegarty was temperamentally drawn to the anti-sectarianism of Milligan’s nationalism—a perspective he shared—and on several occasions singled her out for praise, citing her as the best poet of the Irish-Ireland thread of the Revival.¹¹ Letters in the collection reveal that O’Hegarty’s collecting lent material support not only to Milligan but to her political undertakings following the Easter Rising. “I am selling Mss + curios to help with National work, + didn’t want to be hampered for want of funds—” she explains, “for example I have sent + wish to send more books for Irish study to Prisoners deported to England”¹² (Figure 8). O’Hegarty’s aid reverberated in unanticipated ways, for it helped to preserve these books, manuscripts, and ephemera as part of the larger cultural record of his library. At the time, neither Milligan nor O’Hegarty might have imagined that such materials would one day be open for research in Lawrence, Kansas.

Though circuitous paths have brought these British and Irish collections to the University of Kansas, they stand here as a potent resource, calling out for greater study. Spencer Library’s goal is to make such collections available to all—scholars, students, and members of the public—who visit the reading room or send in a query. Scholars are also encouraged to apply for Spencer Library’s competitive travel award program, open to those living beyond a 100-mile radius of Lawrence, Kansas, <https://spencer.lib.ku.edu/using-the-library/travel-awards>.

the authors of various articles had been inserted by John O’Leary.” O’Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union*, 444.

¹⁰ G. Thomas Tanselle, “Introduction,” in *Other People’s Books: Association Copies and the Stories They Tell* (Caxton Club, 2011), 7–19, at 14.

¹¹ See O’Hegarty, “Some Association Books of Irish Interest,” 77. He again praises Milligan and fellow poet Edna Carberry in O’Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union*, 631.

¹² Letter from Alice Milligan to “Dear Sir” [P. S. O’Hegarty], undated [1916–1917], MS P542A:4, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, KU.

I am selling MSS & curios
to help with National
work, & don't want to
be hampered for want
of funds - for example
I have sent & wish to
send more books for
Irish study to prisoners
detained in England.
Kindly help.
A.M.

Figure 8. Detail of a letter from Alice Milligan to "Dear Sir" [P. S. O'Hegarty], ca. 1916–17, from the Milligan manuscripts that came with the library of P. S. O'Hegarty.

Elspeth Healey is an Associate Librarian at the University of Kansas's Kenneth Spencer Research Library, where she curates the library's post-1700 holdings in Special Collections, including its extensive British and Irish collections. Her teaching and research interests include the history of the book, teaching with primary sources, and modernist literary community. She welcomes questions about Spencer Library's collections at ehaley@ku.edu.