

# Guide to the Vita Sackville-West Papers Relating to Violet Trefusis

GEN MSS 428



by Kathryn Rawdon

December 1998

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** GEN MSS 428

**CREATOR:** Sackville-West, V. (Victoria), 1892-1962

**TITLE:** Vita Sackville-West papers relating to Violet Trefusis

**DATES:** 1905-1926

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 2.4 linear feet (7 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** Materials in English and French, with some Italian.

**SUMMARY:** Collection contains correspondence, writings and additional materials. Correspondence includes letters written by Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West during the 1910's and 1920's concerning their relationship, Trefusis's feelings towards Sackville-West, and the affair's effects on Trefusis's relationship with her husband, Denys Trefusis, her relationship with her mother, Alice Keppel, and Sackville-West's relationship with her husband, Harold Nicolson. Also included are letters by Trefusis to her friend Pat Dansey, and letters from Pat Dansey to Vita Sackville-West. Writings consist of poems and other writings by Trefusis and Sackville-West, and a diary by Trefusis dated May 1905. Additional materials contain two photographs of Vita Sackville-West and a metal bullet of unknown origin.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.sackvill>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.sackvill>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box  
f.      folder

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of and purchased from Nigel Nicolson, 1982 and 1986.

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 7: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

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### Conditions Governing Use

The Vita Sackville-West Papers Relating to Violet Trefusis are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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### Preferred Citation

Vita Sackville-West Papers Relating to Violet Trefusis. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

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## VITA SACKVILLE-WEST (1892-1962) AND VIOLET TREFUSIS (1894-1972)

Vita Sackville-West and Violet Trefusis (née Keppel) met at a party in the winter of 1905, when Violet was ten and Vita twelve. From the beginning, their relationship was intense, and the constant travels of both families created the necessity of an ongoing and voluminous correspondence (Vita's early letters to Violet were burned by Violet's husband, Denys Trefusis, on their honeymoon).

The friendship became a love affair in 1918, well after Vita's marriage to Harold Nicolson in 1913. Violet herself married Major Denys Trefusis in 1919. Throughout the years 1918 to 1921, the correspondence continued. Violet, who was unhappy in her marriage, often begged Vita to run away with her. They did "elope" briefly to Paris in 1920, but Vita, whose marriage was a happy one, allowed herself to be "rescued" by her husband.

After another trip abroad with Violet in January 1921, Vita chose life with her husband and two sons over life with Violet. Denys Trefusis agreed not to divorce Violet, and she eventually went to live with him in Paris. Violet was forbidden to have any contact with Vita, although letters were exchanged through their mutual confidant, Pat Dansey (who herself became one of Vita's lovers). Slowly, the correspondence came to an end, and aside from a brief meeting at a party in 1924, the two women did not see each other again until 1940, when Violet fled France for England during World War II.

For more detailed biographical information about Violet Trefusis, see the register for the Violet Trefusis Papers (GEN MSS 427).

## Scope and Contents

The Vita Sackville-West Papers Relating to Violet Trefusis document the relationship between Violet Trefusis and Vita Sackville-West. The Papers contain correspondence, writings, photographs and other materials, and have been arranged into three series: *Correspondence*, *Writings*, and *Additional Materials*.

[Series I, \*Correspondence\*](#) (1910-1925), consists primarily of letters from Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West written during the 1910's and 1920's. The letters illustrate the intensity of Trefusis's involvement in the affair, and describe their time together, their attempts at "escape" or elopement, and the effect of the relationship on Trefusis's life, her marriage to Denys Trefusis, her relationship with her mother, Alice Keppel, and Sackville-West's relationship with her husband, Harold Nicolson. Many of these letters have been published in *Violet to Vita: The Letters of Violet Trefusis to Vita Sackville-West, 1910-21*, edited by Mitchell A. Leaska and John Phillips (London: Methuen, 1989). Also included in this series are letters from Trefusis to her friend Pat Dansey, letters to Trefusis from Dansey and others, and many letters from Dansey to Vita Sackville-West regarding Trefusis's and Sackville-West's relationship.

[Series II, \*Writings\*](#) (1905-1921), contains holograph poems and other unidentified writings written by Trefusis and Sackville-West, and one diary kept by Trefusis in May of 1905.

[Series III, \*Additional Materials\*](#) (1926), contains two photographs of Vita Sackville-West, and a metal bullet of unknown origin.

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## Collection Contents

### Series I: Correspondence, 1910-1925

2.1 linear feet (5 boxes)

#### VIOLET TREFUSIS CORRESPONDENCE

Letters from Violet Trefusis  
To Vita Sackville-West

b. 1, f. 1-20	<a href="#">Letters</a> Includes: letter from Sidney Russell Cooke to VT, 8 November 1918	1910-18
b. 2, f. 21-23	<a href="#">Letters</a>	[1918?]
b. 2, f. 24-39	<a href="#">Letters</a>	1919
b. 3, f. 40-46	Letters	[1919?]
b. 3, f. 47-57	Letters Includes: Note from Denys Trefusis to VT [February 1920?], which VT sent to VSW	1920 Jan-Apr
b. 4, f. 58-75	Letters	1920 May-Oct
b. 5, f. 76-81	Letters	1920 Nov-Dec
b. 5, f. 82-84	Letters	1921-24
	To Others	
b. 5, f. 85-86	Dansey, Pat	1921
	Letters to Violet Trefusis	
b. 5, f. 87	Dansey, Pat	[1920?] Mar 15
b. 5, f. 88	Whitworth, Maurice	1919
b. 5, f. 89	Telegram from unidentified [possibly VSW?]	1920 Mar 11
	THIRD PARTY CORRESPONDENCE	
b. 5, f. 90-91	Dansey, Pat to Vita Sackville-West	1918-25
b. 5, f. 92	Sackville-West, Vita to unidentified	[n.y.] Nov 4

**Series II: Writings, 1905-1921***0.1 linear feet (.5 box)*

## WRITINGS BY VIOLET TREFUSIS

b. 6, f. 93	"Chapter 7," holograph in VT's hand	[1921 Jul?]
b. 6, f. 94	Diary	1905 May
b. 6, f. 95	Unidentified typescript [by VT?]	[1921 May 2]
b. 6, f. 96	Unidentified typescript [by VT?]	n.d.

## WRITINGS BY VITA SACKVILE-WEST

b. 6, f. 97	"Carcassonne," holograph poem in VSW's hand	n.d.
b. 6, f. 98	Unidentified holograph poem [Sonnet by Alice Meynell?], in VSW's hand	[1920 Feb?]
b. 6, f. 99	<a href="#">Unidentified holograph in VSW's hand</a>	1919 Jun 12

### Series III: Additional Material, 1926

0.1 linear feet (.5 box)

#### PHOTOGRAPHS

b. 6, f. 100	<a href="#">2 photographs of VSW</a>	ca. 1926, n.d.
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#### OTHER

b. 6, f. 101	Metal bullet	n.d.
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## **Restricted Fragile**

*0.1 linear feet (1 box)*

*Restricted Fragile* materials may only be consulted with permission of the appropriate curator.  
Photographic prints for reference use have been substituted in the main files

b. 7, f. 102

Box 6, folder 101

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

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## **Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### **Subjects**

Authors, English -- 20th Century  
Lesbian authors  
Lesbians

### **Occupations**

Authors

### **Names**

Dansey, Pat  
Keppel, Alice, 1869-1947  
Nicolson, Harold, 1886-1968  
Sackville-West, V. (Victoria), 1892-1962  
Trefusis, Denys  
Trefusis, Violet, 1894-1972