



Rare Agatha Christie sound recordings unearthed

Reel-to-reel tapes lay undiscovered for more than 40 years

MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2008 – A collection of previously unknown audio recordings of Agatha Christie recounting her life story has surfaced in Devon.

The collection of 27 reels of tape, comprising 13½ hours of Christie's voice, have been positively identified as the original tapes onto which the author dictated her autobiography.

The recordings were discovered by the author's grandson in a cardboard box in a storeroom at Christie's former home outside Torquay earlier this year. Also discovered alongside the tapes was the Grundig Memorette reel-to-reel tape recorder on which the recordings were made.

The announcement was made today by the Christie Archives Trust on the 118th anniversary of the author's birth and at the start of Agatha Christie Week, the annual celebration of the Queen of Crime and her literary and cultural legacy.

The tapes comprise approximately the final third of the manuscript of the author's 500-page autobiography and are believed to date from the early to mid-1960s. Christie began writing the book in Iraq in April 1950 and completed it some 15 years later in England in October 1965. *Agatha Christie: An Autobiography* was published posthumously in 1977.

The astonishing find, which comprises completely unedited material, goes into far greater detail about some aspects of Christie's life than the finished book, including philosophical musings and reflections on her life and times.

Among the many subjects Christie addresses in the recordings are:

- how she was inspired to create one of her most famous characters, the spinster detective Miss Marple;
- her experience of writing plays such as *The Mousetrap* and *Witness for the Prosecution*;
- her abiding interest in criminology;
- pre-war travels throughout the Middle East; and
- her 1930 honeymoon in Dubrovnik with second husband Max Mallowan

The rarity of the discovery is also compounded by the fact that Agatha Christie positively disliked being interviewed. Only a handful of recordings of the author's voice are known to exist including a 1955 interview for the BBC and a 1974 recording for the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive in which Christie recounts her experiences in a First World War dispensary which gave her a working knowledge of poisons.

The Agatha Christie Estate is currently in the process of digitising and cataloguing the tapes but has yet to decide to what use the recordings should be put.

Mathew Prichard, the author's grandson and Chairman of Agatha Christie Limited, said:

"The one thing you can always credit Agatha Christie with is an unending capacity to surprise. These recordings had lain dormant for more than 40 years and I suppose would continue to have done so had I not decided to engage in a fit of spring cleaning. I am thrilled by this discovery and from a family perspective I am overjoyed to be able to hear my grandmother's voice as if it were yesterday."

Laura Thompson, Agatha Christie's biographer, said:

"This is an extraordinary find. These recordings are of tremendous cultural and historical importance. They will allow us to develop a deeper understanding of Agatha Christie the person and perhaps go some way towards unlocking the key to the question of what drove her to become the most popular novelist in history".

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About Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie (1890-1976) is the world's best-known mystery writer. The Guinness Book of Records lists her as the best-selling fiction author of all time with an estimated two billion copies of her works sold: a billion copies in the English language and another billion in more than 45 foreign languages. It is often said that she is outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.

Agatha Miller was born in Torquay on September 15, 1890. In 1914 she married Colonel Archibald Christie, an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps. The couple had one daughter, Rosalind, before their divorce in 1928. Two years later on a dig in Iraq she met archaeologist Max Mallowan; they married later that same year. In 1971, Christie achieved her country's highest honour when she received the Order of Dame Commander of the British Empire. Agatha Christie died peacefully at home on January 12, 1976 after a short cold.

The Agatha Christie portfolio was acquired by the media company Chorion Ltd in 1998. Its mission is to nurture Christie's literary legacy and introduce the author's work to new audiences. Chorion takes an active role in managing the global Christie publishing programme, film and TV adaptations of her stories and theatrical productions. It has also presided over the introduction of fresh formats including partworks, graphic novels, manga, games, audiobooks and consumer products.