

## Elements of *fonds* level description for the Donald Wiseman Papers

### Identity statement and context

#### Official Reference code

GB 3411 WISEMAN

#### Title

Donald John Wiseman (Professor of Assyriology)

#### Dates of Creation

[late 19<sup>th</sup> century]–2010 (predominantly 1940-1990)

#### Level of Description

Fonds (that is, the following is a description of the Wiseman archive *as a whole*)

#### Extent and Medium

[To be confirmed]

#### Name of creator(s)

Donald John Wiseman

#### Administrative/biographical history

Donald John Wiseman was born on 25 October 1918, at Rose Villa, Walderton, Stoughton Road, Emsworth, District Westbourne. He died on 2 February 2010.

He was educated at Dulwich College and at Kings College, London. Following the war he also studied at Wadham College, Oxford, where he was a Heap Exhibitioner in Oriental Languages.

Wiseman achieved the rank of Group Captain in the RAF during World War Two, being involved with RAF Intelligence and stationed first in the UK and later in North Africa and Italy. In the UK he was Personal Assistant to Air Vice Marshall Keith Park (from March 1940) and in this role he frequently conversed with Churchill as the latter rang to enquire about the current situation. When posted at the Air Ministry in August 1942, he was involved in Operation Torch (planning for an Allied landing in North Africa). In October 1942 he left London for Gibraltar, via Glasgow! In November 1942 he arrived in Algiers, from Gibraltar. In late 1943 Wiseman transferred from North Africa to Italy, now with MATAF (Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force, under Commander in Chief General Harold Alexander). By January 1944 the MATAF HQ has moved to a location near Naples. In March 1944, whilst on leave, Wiseman visited The Holy Land. In June 1944 Wiseman transferred to Rome and was awarded the OBE for services to MATAF intelligence. Towards the end of 1944, Wiseman's HQ made its final move, this time to Florence. In late April and early May 1945, Wiseman was involved with arrangements for the German surrender and met with high-ranking German officers including German Air Force General Ritter Von Pohl. In August 1945 Wiseman was awarded the USA Bronze Star medal for services to Allied Operations.

In October 1945 Wiseman commenced a degree in Hebrew and Akkadian (Assyrian and Babylonian) at Wadham College, Oxford. He studied Hebrew under Professor Godfrey Driver. From 1947 to 1948 he was President of the OICCU [Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union] Executive.

Following his studies in Oxford he was appointed in late May 1948 to the role of Assistant Keeper at the British Museum Department of Egyptian and Assyrian (later Western Asiatic) Antiquities. Wiseman worked

on cuneiform tablets excavated by Leonard Woolley at Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh) before and after the war. He married Mary Catherine Ruoff on 18 September 1948 and they had three daughters. He was epigrapher at several Nimrud seasons (1950, 1951, 1953 and 1963). The Nimrud excavations of the 1950s were under Max Mallowan who was married to the famous crime novelist Agatha Christie. In 1953, Wiseman published 'The Alalakh tablets'. Wiseman taught Assyriology at the University of Cambridge for the Academic Year 1954 to 1955, following the sudden death of the Assyriology Lecturer. One of his students was T. C. Mitchell, later to become Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum and a member of the Tyndale Fellowship Biblical Archaeology study group. In 1955 Wiseman was made Assistant Keeper in the newly formed Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities at the British Museum. In 1956 Wiseman announced the discovery (mentioned in *The Times* on 23 February 1956) of four tablets of the Babylonian Chronicle, which describe (for the first time known outside the Bible) the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 598 to 597 BC.

In October 1961 Wiseman was appointed to the Chair of Assyriology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. In 1962, he provided 152 entries (about 70,000 words) for *The New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas. (Wiseman also contributed to the second edition in 1982). Wiseman joined the 13<sup>th</sup> season at Nimrud in March 1963, now under Mr J. J. Orchard. From March to May 1966, Wiseman served as epigrapher for British School of Archaeology in Iraq excavations at Tell al-Rimah. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy on July 6 1966. In the summer of 1970, Wiseman undertook a Lecture Tour in Australia. He also visited New Zealand, where he was delighted to be shown around Auckland by Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park (whose Personal Assistant Wiseman had been in the early years of the war). In 1974 he wrote two entries ('Ashurbanipal' and 'Tiglath-Pileser III') for the 15<sup>th</sup> Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In 1974 Wiseman was contacted by the Foreign Office regarding having His Imperial Highness [HIH] Prince Takahito Mikasa of Japan as a special student at SOAS. The Prince undertook a visiting Professorship at SOAS from April to August 1975. In July 1978, Wiseman was at the first Regent College, Vancouver Summer School. In 1979 he was in Iraq again, at the invitation of the Iraqi Government to their International Symposium on Babylon. Wiseman proposed a new location for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. In the summer of 1981, Wiseman taught a course on *Old Testament history and archaeology: recent discoveries and interpretations* at Regent College, Vancouver. He also lectured at the 1982 Regent College Summer School. From 1 October 1981, Wiseman took on the role of Head of the Department of the Near and Middle East, of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. In March 1982 Wiseman was elected to the Fellowship of King's College London, an honour about which he was especially pleased. In the summer of 1982, Wiseman took early retirement from his role at SOAS, aged 64. The title of 'Emeritus Professor of Assyriology' was conferred upon Wiseman by the University of London in 1982.

In 1983 Wiseman was the British Academy Schweich Lecturer, on *Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon*. Wiseman and his wife Mary visited Japan in late August and September 1983, as guests of HIH Prince Mikasa. In the summer of 1984, Wiseman lectured on '*Archaeology and history: the book of Kings*' at the Regent College Vancouver summer school. In March 1989 Wiseman took a group of neighbours to a Billy Graham Mission and five were converted!

In 1991 Wiseman led a party on a tour of Israel. He made similar trips in 1992, 1993 and 1994. On 23 June 1992, he attended a 'Pre-War Graduation' at the Royal Festival Hall [Wiseman graduated from King's College London just before the outbreak of the Second World War]. Wiseman and his wife celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary with 36 family members in September 1998. In October 1998 Wiseman saw Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* at last as an 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday treat (having been invited on several previous occasions, including by Agatha herself).

Various organisations and institutions played an important role in Wiseman's life. A selection of these are described briefly and in alphabetical order here: Wiseman and his family had a long association with the

**Brethren church** (Open Brethren Assemblies) and with the **Crusader Union** (now *Urban Saints*). Wiseman attended Crusader classes from a young age, eventually becoming a leader himself. He credits one of the Crusader leaders with encouraging him to commit his life to Christ as a young boy. Wiseman's father Percy was President of the Crusader Union in 1948. Wiseman was elected a Fellow of the **British Academy** in July 1966 and served as Vice-President from 1976 to 1977. Wiseman had a long association with the **British School of Archaeology in Iraq**, first joining the Council in 1955 and eventually becoming President in 1993. He was one-time editor of the *Iraq* journal. Wiseman was also a Trustee of the **British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem**. Wiseman was on the Council of **IVF/UCCF [Inter-Varsity Fellowship/Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship]** and was a member of the **IVP** (Inter-Varsity Press) long-range planning committee. Wiseman was closely involved with the **New International Version** of the Bible over several decades, from 1966 when Youngve Kindberg first shared his vision for this new translation of the Bible with Wiseman, up to the early 1990s. Wiseman translated 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles and was Chair of the Anglicisation Committee. Writing to Wiseman in 1986, James R. Powell (President of the International Bible Society) attributed the positive response to the NIV in the UK to Wiseman's endorsement and enthusiasm. Wiseman participated in many **Rencontre Assyriologiques** meetings, from 1952 to 1982. The latter meeting was held in London and led by Wiseman, before his retirement. Wiseman had a long association with **Scripture Gift Mission**, becoming a member of the Council in 1961 and Chairman in 1978, a post he held until 1994. His father and father-in-law (both called Percy) had also been Scripture Gift Mission Council Members. Wiseman wrote Bible study notes (for example, on Haggai and Zechariah in 1961) for the **Scripture Union**. He was President of the **Society for Old Testament Study** (SOTS) for 1980. Wiseman was elected a Fellow of the **Society of Antiquaries** in 1959. Wiseman was closely involved with **Tyndale House and Tyndale Fellowship** from their earliest years, from chairing an Old Testament Study Group in the summer of 1951 to serving as Chair of the Tyndale House Council from 1957 to 1986. He was General Editor of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series from its inception in 1967 and wrote the commentaries for 1 and 2 Kings for this series. Wiseman completed 50 years of service on the Tyndale House Council and his ashes, along with those of his wife, are interred in the Tyndale House garden.

### [Archival history](#)

The Donald Wiseman collection was in the possession of Donald Wiseman (and presumably, with respect to material in the hand of his father, in the possession initially of Percy Wiseman before being transferred to the possession of Donald Wiseman) until his death in February 2010. At some point after this, probably in 2010, the Wiseman archival collection arrived at Tyndale House with the permission of Donald Wiseman's daughters

### [Content and Structure](#)

#### [Scope and content](#)

The Donald Wiseman collection comprises personal and institutional papers, correspondence, photographs and a range of offprints and other publications. The papers and photographs relate to Donald Wiseman's wartime activities with RAF Intelligence, employment at the British Museum and participation in Nimrud excavations, Professorship of Assyriology at SOAS, participation in the production of the New International Version of the Bible, involvement with the management of Tyndale House, Cambridge and many other activities. A small collection of papers, comprising handwritten notes and journal offprints, relates to the research conducted by Donald Wiseman's father, Percy Wiseman

#### [Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information](#)

All records have been retained except for duplicates (for example, of Journal offprints), which have been discarded

## Accruals

Accruals may occur at irregular and infrequent intervals

## System of arrangement

The collection is currently stored mainly in the original boxes and arranged by acquisition number. No indication of original order was available at the time of initial cataloguing. In due course it is envisaged that the collection will be arranged according to the major spheres of activity of Professor Donald Wiseman and housed in archival standard boxes

## Conditions of Access and Use

### Conditions governing access

Access is by appointment only. Please address enquiries to the Library team [library@tyndalehouse.com](mailto:library@tyndalehouse.com).

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## Language/scripts of material

The Wiseman archive collection material is predominantly in English, but also includes frequent examples of cuneiform texts (usually transliterated into Latin script and often translated into English) representing various ancient near-eastern languages. Hebrew script is also present. Some journal offprints and items of correspondence are in German and French.

## Physical characteristics/technical requirements

Due to the fragility of some items, these are only accessible in the presence of the Archivist, who will handle the fragile documents on behalf of the archive user

## Finding aids

To access the catalogue of the Wiseman archive and related information on individuals mentioned within the collection, please contact the Library team [library@tyndalehouse.com](mailto:library@tyndalehouse.com).

## Allied Materials

### Related units of description

Some material from the Wiseman archive collection relating to Nimrud excavations and originally transferred to Tyndale House is now held by the British Museum (The Department of the Middle East)

## Publication note

Donald Wiseman self-published an autobiography based on some items within the Wiseman archive collection. This is Wiseman, D. J. (2003) *Life above and below: memoirs*. Tadworth: Self-published.

## Description Control

### Archivist's note

The description of the Donald Wiseman collection was prepared by Dr Alison Stacey

## Rules or conventions

This description follows guidelines provided by Aberystwyth University Department of Information Management, Libraries and Archives, based on *ISAD(G)* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000

## Date(s) of description

The cataloguing of the Wiseman Archive is ongoing. This description was completed in June 2020