

KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S AT THE BAY

Editorial note

During a recent most pleasant visit to Mrs Morris in Auckland we were pleased to have been able to encourage her to complete this paper and grace the *Record* by its publication. Mrs Morris with the help of her family has maintained the distinguished Katherine Mansfield collection of her late husband, Mr Guy Morris. As many members will recall it was while talking in the Alexander Turnbull Library on his favourite subject of Katherine Mansfield during the evening of 18 May 1949 that he collapsed and died three days later.

Comparing the work of the New Zealand short story writer, Katherine Mansfield, with that of the Russian, Anton Chekhov, Mr V. S. Pritchett, in a talk in the BBC's service,¹ says: 'Chekhov knows that the mystery of life and death is not something just floating about freely in the air, but has the indispensable connotations of time and place . . . Chekhov always conveys the sense of a country, a place, the sense of unseen characters, the anonymous people who surround even our most private moments. Now, Katherine Mansfield rarely does this . . . If you look again at *At the Bay*, which I think is one of the minor masterpieces of our language, you find yourself asking: "Who are these people? Where do they live? What world do they belong to? They seem to have dropped from the sky . . . Too often we feel that there is nothing behind Katherine Mansfield's stories, and that is a reflection of her own rootlessness".'

In New Zealand most Wellingtonians know a great deal about Katherine Mansfield – her maiden name; the house where she was born; the houses in Karori, Tinakori Road (though that has recently been demolished) and Fitzherbert Terrace where she lived; the Pro-Cathedral of Saint Paul where she attended services.

They can point out the schools where she was educated: Karori, Wellington Girls' High School (now College) and The Fitzherbert Terrace School.

All know that THE BAY means Eastbourne or Day's Bay, and most think of it as Day's Bay, where, in 1907, Mr Harold Beauchamp owned a house.²

They know also that several of Katherine Mansfield's characters are members of her own family, which is certainly the case in *At the Bay*.

Mr and Mrs Stanley Burnell and their family are Mr and Mrs Beauchamp, their son and three of their daughters. Even the names Stanley and Burnell are family names. Pip and Rags are Kathleen Beauchamp's cousins Barrie and Eric Waters. Their father, Jonathan Trout is her uncle, Val Waters, drawn so truly to life that one can almost see him in the flesh and hear his resonant 'velvety' voice. It is interesting to note that Mrs Beauchamp's great-aunt was Mrs Trout.

The woman with whom Beryl bathed, and her handsome husband