

YEATS'S GRAVE

Sir, — In view of the publication last week in England of a book that refers to the grave of W. B. Yeats in Drumcliffe Cemetery, we wish on behalf of the Yeats family to make certain matters clear:

1. The suggestion that our father was buried in a paupers' grave in Roquebrune is of course totally untrue. The friends who attended the burial (were they still alive) could have testified to this, as do the documents and receipts relating to the funeral that are in our possession.

2. Our mother, Mrs George Yeats, in making the arrangements for the funeral in Roquebrune, made it clear to all concerned that she intended later on to return the body of W. B. Yeats to Ireland. With this in mind she negotiated with various shipping lines, but matters dragged on due to legal and technical problems, so that ultimately it was necessary to leave matters over until after the war.

3. Mrs Yeats arranged with the French authorities to acquire a 10-year grave plot for her husband at Roquebrune. We should stress that she was an extremely able and efficient woman, speaking excellent French. She had for many years organised the business affairs of W. B. Yeats and was, in fact, the last person who would make any mistake on a matter of such crucial importance.

4. It appears that at some stage the body was moved. On hearing of this our mother at once got in touch with the French government authorities. Thenceforth she was kept informed by them of events at Roquebrune, and was therefore in a position to satisfy

herself that there would be no problems associated with the transfer of the body back to Ireland.

5. In preparation for the ultimate transfer to Ireland, the remains were exhumed in March, 1948, and placed in a Chapel of Rest. Careful measurements were made of the remains (Yeats had a particularly massive bone structure), and the task of certification was made easier by the fact that, due to a long-term hernia problem, our father wore a truss.

6. The exhumation took place in full conformity with the rigorous French laws on these matters, and in the presence of the Mayor of Roquebrune, senior police officials, a medical expert, the Superintendent of Graves, and other persons of expert and official standing. The presence of these officials and experts was designed to ensure in accordance with law that the identity of the remains should be established beyond all possibility of error.

7. In September, 1948, the body of William Butler Yeats was brought home to Sligo and interred in the cemetery at Drumcliffe.

We regret that 40 years later it should be necessary for us to issue this statement about delicate matters that should normally be private family affairs. We hope it will not be necessary for us to contribute further to this discussions. There is, indeed, nothing to discuss since we are satisfied beyond doubt that our father's body is indeed buried in Drumcliffe Cemetery. — Yours, etc.,

ANNE YEATS,
MICHAEL YEATS,
Dalkey, Co. Dublin.
