

Victoria, McPherson Library, MS Eng. 2
Acc. 1985-005
Letter of Thomas Jermy to William Paston
England (Norfolk) 31 January 1565

Single sheet of paper 300 x 420mm, folded to make bifolium, writing on one side only. Letter of Thomas Jermy to William Paston (d. 1610), 37 lines in English plus signature, with address and note of sender. Creasing and wear patterns suggest entire sheet was previously folded quite small with address on the outside. Letter and address are in one hand (Thomas Jermy's); note on sender ("Jarmes laste lettre") is possibly in William Paston's hand; initials and date notation of eighteenth-century Norfolk antiquarian Francis Blomefield are at foot of letter. Paper is somewhat stained and damaged, especially along fold lines, but damage has been stabilized by repairs, including grafted modern paper, notwithstanding minor text loss at lower right corner. The letter was donated to University of Victoria in 1985 by Dorothy Sweet. She found it among the belongings of her parents, who had unknowingly inherited it (in chests of drawers with other abandoned papers) when they purchased their Cornwall home in 1953. Ownership before 1953 is unknown, though the letter clearly came into the hands of Francis Blomefield sometime before his death in 1752. Documents related to ownership history are housed with the letter.

A large part of the wider archive of Paston Family Letters (mostly fifteenth-century, but some sixteenth-century) was digitized for open access by the British Library in April 2015. See: <http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2015/04/the-paston-letters-go-live.html>.

Transcription [Based on that done in 1974 by H.L. Douch, Curator of the Royal Cornwall Institution, and Miss Jean M. Kennedy, City and County Archivist of Norwich. Alterations have been made to conform to current transcription conventions and correct minor errors. A copy of the 1974 transcription is housed with the document.]

My dutie humblye remembered it maye please yo(w)r m(aster)shipp to be
advertised / that I am credeblye informed of soundrye susspicus and
Lewde dissposid p(er)sons a greate brotherhood of them / who be cutte
purses (and) notable theves / that ar appoyntid to meate at Lynne
Marte:/ And accompanyd w(i)t(h) ther women / sum of them by well
horsed (and) clenlye.~ / they have packes and ffardells (and) sellith wares
for the better colloringe of ther Lewde (and) fellonyous Lyff:/ ther names
I seande vnto you herinclosid in a paper / I woulde to god my busynes
wer at suche ende / as I myght be there / w(hi)ch if I wer / I would
\\not// dowght / but to be well horssid (and) haue sum escheate / amonge them
the meatest man that I can wishe to Learne owte ther companyons
is one Bygnall of watto[/n] who if he wer trustye / as I dowght
hym./ dothe knowe the most p(ar)te of them (and) coulde Lerne the rest owte
The order of theis cutpurses / is / that when they \\have/ Cutt a pursse /

streyght \they/ conveye the same to sum on of ther Companye who is a peddeler: (and) never to make further Searche but \to/ the peddelers packe or the botom of his pedde or hamp(er):/ for ther is it to be hadde / if ye myght by secrett meane Lerne to knowe ther companyons (and) the Rowte / and by sum meanes to trayne them owte of the Town of Lynne after the marte:/ and so to flese them / for it wer no doinge there to get enye advantage w(i)t(h)in the Towne of Lynne.~ / There be also iiiij^{er} Notable theves appoynced to be at this marte / who be well horsid whose Names I do also seande vnto you (and) the mann(er) of ther Apparrell:/ if it be yo(w)r Luck to / hitt of them:/ be bolde to steye them for they \be/ to well knowen for Arr(a)unte Theves:/ if ye hadde sum Spyes resortinge to the Comon ends or alehouses abowght Lynne xx^{ti} myles ye shoulde not fayle to hit of them./ And they that shall dele herin maye not be knowen to be app(er)teyninge to yo(w)r mastershippe.~ / I receyvid this mornynge yo(w)r m(aster)shipps l(ett)re./ as also my s(er)v(a)unt(es) l(ett)re:/ so as I am advertised of yo(w)r pleaso(u)r of suche thing(es) as ye like to haue done \here/ w(hi)ch shalbe accomplisshid god willinge:/ And ase I shall make m(aster) Clemente p(ri)vye of yo(w)r l(ett)re accordinge to yo(w)r comandem(en)te / Thus havinge further to trowble yo(w)r m(aster)shippe w(i)t(h) theis my rude (and) hastye l(ett)res./ w(hi)ch I t[[hin]]cke ye shalle hardelye Reade and wurse understand./ besechinge almyghtie god Longe to p(re)serve yo(w)r m(aster)shippe and seande you increase of muche worshipp / scryblid f[[rom]] London this Last of January 1565./

yo(w)r s(er)v(a)unte to [[command]]
Thomas Jerm[[y]]

31 Jan(uar)y 1565

8 Eliz(abeth).

+ FB

[address and notation of sender]

the right worshipfyll and
[[s]]pecialle good M(aster) / Master
[[W]]ill(ia)m paston esquierer heigh
Sheriff of Norff(olk) (and) Suff(olk).

Jarmes laste le(tt)re /

Additional Materials

The following materials are housed along with two copies of H.L. Douch's 1974 transcription (one handwritten, the other typed with some corrections).

1. Notes appended to the typed version of Douch's transcription:

This is a copy of a transcription made by Mr. H.L. Douch, Curator of the Royal Cornwall Institution, River Street, Truro, Cornwall, except that it includes one or two amendments at the suggestion of Miss Jean M. Kennedy, B.A., City and County Archivist, Norwich. (May, 1974)

The initials at the end of the letter signify that this letter was scrutinised by Francis Blomefield, "the 18th century historian of Norfolk, who had the pick of the Paston papers before they were dispersed, so the letter must have passed through his hands." (Kennedy, 1974). Miss Kennedy contributed the following comments:

Sir William Paston of Paston was sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1565-6. He was head of the family of which earlier members wrote the well-known Paston letters. The Paston muniments were dispersed after the failure of the family in the early 18th century ... Sir William figures in the Dictionary of National Biography; his dates were 1528-1610, he succeeded his father in 1554 and was the founder of the Paston Grammar School at North Walsham, where he has a magnificent tomb. Jermyn is more difficult to identify especially as the name is not uncommon in East Anglia. The last word of the letter before the signature ought to be 'command'. (This word has been entirely torn off).

Miss Kennedy based the foregoing comments on the transcription sent to her and requested to see the document. This was xeroxed to be added to the collection of the County Record Office, Norwich. The Office also kindly laminated the document and returned it to the sender. In her second letter, Miss Kennedy revised her opinion on Thomas Jermyn, ...

according to Paston's note 'Jarmes last letter' on the back of the document, the writer would seem to have been called Jermy rather than Jermyn. He was probably Thomas Jermy of Marlingford, son of Robert Jermy of Norwich who died about 1533.

Note: The Paston letters referred to by Miss Kennedy, written in the 15th century, have been used as a source of information on social life at the time of the Wars of the Roses and for other periods.

Acquisition of the letter by the author of these notes is a mystery. The document turned up among papers left at the death of her mother in 1973. The fact that it had not been shown before was a mystery and a search was made to find a link to the letter for the family. The search proved interesting, but the conclusion was reached that it had been acquired by the previous owner of the last house lived in by the deceased lady. This man had left other items purchased at market stalls of auction sales. Whilst of no great

monetary value, the document provides a link to an energetic and observant man trying to improve the standards of law and order in the eighth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

The decision to deposit this document in Special Collections at the University of Victoria was made because the document was lying unnoticed in a lawyer's filing cabinet and it was felt that it would be of greater value in British Columbia than in Britain.

2. Letter from Jean Kennedy to Dorothy Sweet (3 May 1974):

Dear Mrs. Sweet,

Your letter of the 28th of April to the Recorder of Norwich has been given to me.

The letter of which you kindly enclose transcripts is of great interest. Sir William Paston of Paston was sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk in 1565-6. He was the head of the family of which earlier members wrote the well-known Paston letters. The Paston muniments were dispersed after the failure of the family on the early 18th century so it is difficult to say how this letter can have come into your Mother's hands. Sir William figures in the Dictionary of National Biography; his dates were 1528-1610, he succeeded his father in 1554 and was the founder of the Paston Grammar School at North Walsham, where he has a magnificent tomb. Jermyn is more difficult to identify especially as the name is not uncommon in East Anglia. The last word of the letter before the signature ought to be 'command'.

I would be very grateful if you could send the letter here so that we could have a look at [sic] it and xerox copy it. The picture of Lynn Mart (still held) is a lively one, quite apart from the Paston interest.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Kennedy [signature]

County Archivist.

3. Letter from Jean Kennedy to Dorothy Sweet (17 May 1974)

Dear Mrs. Sweet,

Many thanks for your letter and for sending the Paston letter which we have xerox copied.

I thought it would be more satisfactory if I asked our Manuscript Repairer to tackle it, rather than trying to advise you as to repair methods. Perhaps you will accept this in lieu of my refunding your postage.

I notice that this letter bears the initials of Francis Blomefield, the 18th century historian of Norfolk, who had the pick of the Paston papers before they were dispersed, so the letter must have passed through his hands.

I enclose your transcripts. Incidentally, according to Paston's note 'James laste letter' on the back of the document, the writer would seem to have been called Jermy rather than Jermyn. He was probably Thomas Jermy of Marlingford, son of Robert Jermy of Norwich who died about 1533.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Kennedy [signature]

County Archivist.

4. Letter from Dorothy Sweet to Chris Petter, University of Victoria Special Collections Librarian (21 May 1985, handwritten):

Dear Mr. Petter,

It is with great pleasure that I invite Special Collections to accept the enclosed document. It is a letter written by Thomas JERMY (agent of the law), to William Paston, High Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, and it is dated 31st January 1565. Thus it is 420 years old and deserves to become the property of a University where, surely, someone, someday, will gain from it as much inspiration as I did.

With it, I enclose a copy of a transcription made for me which is, of course, open to the first-challenger. I add notes on the letter which may be helpful to someone. As a teacher of history at secondary school level for over thirty years I saw the value of "something old, something real." Thus I have appended notes on the possible ways in which the document can be used as an instrument of enlightenment — one hopes not of boredom.

One xerox copy of the letter was made in 1974 to add to the collection of Paston letters in the Archives in Norwich, England. May I suggest that you restrict further xerox copies to 2 or 3 for the time being, one for me and one which can be made available for general use — assuming such copies are worth-while from the technical point of view. Naturally, the original becomes property of the Library to do with as you wish. It is a small memento of the many valuable hours I have spent in this wonderful Library.

Yours Sincerely,
Dorothy Sweet.

4. Educational notes by Dorothy Sweet (as mentioned in 21 May 1985 letter, housed in photocopy though originally in Sweet's handwriting):

Educational and instructional uses of the letter written by Thomas Jermy to Sir William Paston in 1565.

The donor of letter, Mrs. Dorothy A. Sweet, taught History in secondary school in Cornwall, England, for over thirty years and used this letter as a primary source once it had come into her possession in 1973. By that time, the Jackdaw series of documents to illuminate periods of history frequently formed the basis for class & individual study. This letter "grew" in usefulness, shedding light on the period when it was written and also posing questions as to its current discovery. Relevance in education can be catalogued under several headings.

I. Educational importance: II. Investigations.

I. Educational importance: the letter is of interest to Historians of the Elizabethan period; the Shakespearian period [William was 8 months old when the letter was written]; Contemporary Elizabethan and present-day drama; social history; history of administration of law and order; history of role of Sheriff & of 'police'; history of law & administration of justice; of crime and criminals (does anything ever change?). Language and writing: Caligraphy; use of word endings; spelling: Linguistics; use of expressions (e.g. 'well-horssid' may be equivalent to 'a good automobile!'); transcription techniques (use of word 'escheator' etc); use of Dictionary; use of gazeteers to identify Lynn (Kings Lynn) and Norfolk; letter writing and the obsequious modes of address used.

Geographical locations and topography: antiquarian, historical and hagiographical aspects of early descriptions of locations: the importance of the Pastons in the shaping of the countryside.

Genealogical research (volumes such as BURKE'S PEERAGE, COMMONERS, EXTINCT PEERAGE, & others in Victoria Public Library) on PASTONS, and others.

II. Investigations: i) Personal searches ii) Vicarious searches.

1) Personal. Mrs. Sweet had the incentive of the search to find out: How the letter came to be in her Mother's papers; Was there any family connection? Why she had not been shown it by her Mother?

Line of enquiry:

a) My sisters were not aware of its existence. My mother was not particularly interested in such artifacts. It appeared that someone had been invited to transcribe it; a few notes were enclosed in pencil, but no full transcription had resulted. My mother would not have understood the full transcription—would have been deterred by difficult words and spellings.

My father, who died suddenly in 1956, would have appreciated it and would have mentioned it, but I was living at a distance. I decided that he had seen it and had the attempted transcription done for him, but his sudden death prevented me from seeing it. See below for how it came into his possession, probably two years before his death.

b) My Mother survived my father by over 17 years, the last 9 years spent close to my home in Cornwall. Before her last illness 1970-73, she had worked hard to leave her

papers in order, discarding much and packaging the rest into one small case. Why she did not show it to me will never be determined now. [A question for Behavioural Sciences delving into Mother-Daughter relationships]. Her mind would have been on more relevant topics.

c) The search for a family connection can be dealt with under Vicarious searches. I concluded that there was no family connection in the past with Pastons Jermy, Blomefield or any other person connected with the letter. The letter was probably left behind by the previous owner of the house bought by my parents in 1953 from the widow of the original builder. Two chests of drawers had been purchased with the house and the linings of these proved to be first editions of British 19th C. newspapers. Other odd items were in the drawers and it is likely that the small (modern) envelope into which the letter had been put in its original folds (see address side of letter) was tucked into a drawer. This is the most likely reason. Such documents are not classed as rare by antique document dealers and, in fact, may well have been purchased for a few pence on a market stall for the parchment or paper content.

ii) Vicarious searches:

a) Students of enquiring mind may well be interested in a follow-up of the document using books found in both a University Library and a Central Public Reference Library. I undertook this in search of possible family links at the local Branch Library (Britain). The main source was the Dictionary of National Biography, which happened to be an 1893 edition—an advantage in this case. Some results are appended, but, altogether some good stories were uncovered: a diet for Wilkie Collins or “Sherlock Holmes”. Thus these would make plots for dramas for modern audiences, or background for novels. Vicarious history but readily digested by a student with some interest in British history.

b) Some biographies noted are:

Frances BLOMEFIELD, 1705-1752 (died of smallpox)—wrote Topography of Norfolk: collected manuscripts, died in debt, estate administered by two creditors. His colleague “Honest Tom Martin” appropriated manuscripts. Blomefield’s neat +F.B. is a mark of his work (see letter).

The Paston Letters were discovered by Blomefield in 1735 in the muniment room of late Earl Yarmouth. He discovered “innumerable letters of good consequences in history” (his words). He stole them, but, when in a fever, allowed Tom to take them.

Thomas MARTIN, 1697-1771, born Thetford, Suffolk, became a lawyer and antiquary; was jovial but always in debt. From time to time items were sold to settle his debts. He wrote two volumes of notes on Churches & these were sold.

John IVES, 1751-1775, born at Great Yarmouth, created Suffolk Herald Extraordinary by the Earl of Suffolk, but died in mid-twenties. Became acquainted with Thomas Martin but himself wrote & published local history of great worth and a copy of the Baptisms and Burials in Yarmouth. The preface was dedicated to Henry SWINDEN.

In 1773 John Ives eloped with Sarah Wade & they were married in Lambeth, Surrey (London). He died of consumption (T.B. of lungs) in 1776 and his papers, including some of Thomas Martin’s & Francis Blomefield’s were sold at auction. [The interest in this for me was that my Mother’s eldest sister was Mrs. Ives, having married Noel Ives, a Baptist minister from the East End of London but no connection with John Ives is sought.]

Henry SWINDEN (1716-1772) a school-master and land surveyor of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, was the intimate friend of John Ives. Mention is made of Ives’ History of

Yarmouth, 1772, as being of great worth and containing some scarce information. Perhaps this was contributed by SWINDEN.

Isaac JERMY, 1789-1848, was the earliest of JERMYS in the collection, but was born a PRESTON & took the name Jermy on inheriting Stanfield Hall, nr. Wymandham, Norfolk, in 1837. Meanwhile he had trained as a lawyer at Lincoln's Inn (London) and was called to the bar in 1814, serving the Norfolk circuit. He served as Steward & later, Recorder for Norwich. He married twice & had three children.

Excitement must have been intense when Isaac JERMY's claim to the Hall was contested by LARNER, who took possession and was evicted by the military in 1838. LARNER was imprisoned. Ten years later in 1848, a tenant farmer on the estate, RUSH, broke into the Hall, shot both Jermy and his son (also Isaac JERMY) and wounded the son's wife & housemaid. Rush was hanged on 14th April, 1849. His grand-daughter inherited the Hall.

c) Use of gazeteers, a study of the famous North Sea port of (King's) Lynn—association with King John?—and a study of the Fenlands: Walter Scott's "Hereward the Wake", and many other research projects could evolve around the Topography. Chas. Dickens' David Copperfield contains 19th C. descriptions of Great Yarmouth.

d) Vicarious history: one cannot apologise when such exciting data emerges from following a trail such as this.

5. Letter from D.W. Haliwell, University Librarian, to Dorothy Sweet (6 June 1985):

Dear Mrs. Sweet,

We are indebted to you not only for the much appreciated gift of the 1565 letter by Thomas Jermy to William Paston but for your kind words about the UVic Library.

Sincerely yours,

D.W. [signature]

D.W. Haliwell
University Librarian.

DWH: jj
cc: C. Petter

Transcriptions and description by Brenna Hussey, as part of coursework for a manuscript studies class with Dr. Adrienne Williams Boyarin (ENGL), April 2015.

Transcription practice follows Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, 2007), pp. 75-77.

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