



Living Letters

Correspondence
then and now

Living letters

This exhibition highlights correspondence's enduring importance, drawing on examples from the medieval period to the present day.



↑ Frontispiece illustration from John Carroll Wilson, *The Gentleman's new fashionable letter-writer, or, Art of familiar and polite correspondence* (London, 1837). Briggs Collection Pamphlet LT210. BJ/G4

Letters have long been – and remain – key vehicles of communication. Powerful evidence of their continued relevance can be found in *The Letters Page* (published by the University of Nottingham's School of English), which is celebrating its tenth anniversary.

Living Letters is inspired in part by the once dominant tradition of chronicling an eminent individual's life and achievements by publishing their correspondence. Such accounts were often highly selective, with letter texts censored according to the social proprieties of the day. This exhibition also critiques that 'life and letters' model by drawing on a significantly wider range of uncensored letters by men, women and children, by the famous and the forgotten. These take many forms, from very long letters to postcards, and cover a wide range of subjects, from global events to the everyday. By so doing, they illustrate how writing and receiving letters has long been deeply woven into the fabric of human existence.

Letters chronicle all stages and aspects of human life – from birth to death – and capture the personal and the professional. Whether used to educate, explain, advocate, make a public statement or for therapeutic purposes, correspondence is powerful in its ability to reach out, connect with and impact on the lives of others. Yet, as this exhibition also shows, letters are deeply vulnerable, fragile objects whose very preservation is liable to the vicissitudes of time, fashion and chance.

This exhibition has been jointly curated by University of Nottingham Libraries, Manuscripts and Special Collections, and Professor Lynda Pratt, University of Nottingham School of English.



Letter from Mary Howitt to her sister Anna Botham, 15 November 1822. Howitt Collection, Ht/1/1/11

Crossed writing used half the amount of expensive paper and saved postal costs. This letter was also folded and sealed with a wax seal as was customary before envelopes were in common use.



↑ The Letters Page website, www.theletterspage.ac.uk



↑ Holiday postcard sent from Blackpool, 1940. Manuscript Collections, MS 192/138