

# Guide to the Sir Charles Blagden Papers

OSB MSS 51



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# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	4
Conditions Governing Use .....	4
Preferred Citation .....	4
Processing Information .....	4
Sir Charles Blagden (1748-1820) .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
Series I: Travel Records and Observations, 1772-1788 .....	6
Series II: Scientific and Personal Papers, 1616-1861 .....	7
Series III: Correspondence, 1785-1799, undated .....	9
Series IV: Documents Related to the Royal Society of London, 1780-1792 .....	10
Selected Search Terms .....	11

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** OSB MSS 51

**CREATOR:** Blagden, Charles, Sir, 1748-1820

**TITLE:** Sir Charles Blagden papers

**DATES:** 1616–1861

**BULK DATES:** 1770–1800

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 3.34 linear feet (8 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** In English, with a small amount of French and Latin.

**SUMMARY:** The Sir Charles Blagden Papers contain scientific and travel notes, correspondence, and printed material documenting aspects of the life and scientific work of Sir Charles Blagden. These include observations on travel in England and on the continent in the 1780s; memoranda on scientific experiments and observations, including notes by Lavoisier; letters to his brother, John Blagden Hale; and proof sheets of Philosophical Transactions for 1789.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.blagden>

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## Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.blagden>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Bequest of James Marshall Osborn, 1976.

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## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

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## Conditions Governing Use

The Sir Charles Blagden Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

Sir Charles Blagden Papers. James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

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## Processing Information

This collection was arranged and partially cataloged by library staff in the 1970s. That arrangement has been preserved, and the folder titles appearing in the contents list below are those provided by the staff at that time. Information included in the Description of Papers note and Collection Contents section is drawn from a dealer description and from individual catalog cards.

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## Sir Charles Blagden (1748-1820)

Sir Charles Blagden was born in Gloucestershire, England in 1748. He received his M.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1768. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1772, where he met and became friends with Joseph Banks. After serving as a surgeon in the British Army during the American revolution, Blagden returned to London, where by early 1783 he had become an assistant to the eccentric scientist Henry Cavendish. Blagden assisted Cavendish until 1789, and Cavendish provided him with a life annuity; he later bequeathed Blagden 15,000 pounds.

Blagden was elected one of the secretaries of the Royal Society in 1784, and remained loyal to its president Joseph Banks throughout the many controversies of the following decade. He visited continental Europe annually until the French Revolution and was elected a corresponding member of the Académie des Sciences in 1789; his friends included Antoine Lavoisier, Georges Cuvier, and Claude Louis Berthollet.

Blagden was involved in the "water controversy" that began in 1783. This was a dispute among Lavoisier, Cavendish, and James Watt over who was the first to discover that water is a compound; as Cavendish's assistant and secretary of the Royal Society, Blagden played a central role in the still-unsettled contest. The most important of Blagden's own discoveries was published in 1788. His demonstration that the freezing point of a solution decreases in direct proportion to the concentration of the solution is known as "Blagden's law."

Although Blagden courted Lavoisier's widow and Count Rumsford's daughter, among others, he remained unmarried. He died of apoplexy at the home of his friend Berthollet, near Paris, in March of 1820, and was buried in the cemetery of Père Lachaise.

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## Scope and Contents

The Sir Charles Blagden Papers contain scientific and travel notes, correspondence, and printed material documenting aspects of the life and scientific work of Sir Charles Blagden. These include observations on travel in England and on the continent in the 1780s; memoranda on scientific experiments and

observations, including notes by Lavoisier; letters to his brother, John Blagden Hale; and proof sheets of *Philosophical Transactions* for 1789.

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## Arrangement

Organized into four series. I. Travel Records and Observations, 1772-1788. II. Scientific and Personal Papers, 1616-1861. III. Correspondence, 1785-1799. IV. Documents Related to the Royal Society of London, 1780-1792.

## Collection Contents

### Series I: Travel Records and Observations, 1772-1788

0.42 linear feet (1 box)

Series I includes observations by Blagden on travels in England and on the continent during the 1780s, as well as notes given by Lavoisier and Guyot to Blagden, as well as several folders of extracts from various travel narratives.

Blagden's notes on travel are roughly chronologically arranged, followed by several folders of extracts from various travel narratives.

b. 1	<a href="#">Blagden, Sir Charles; records of his travels</a> 6 Folders	1783-1787, undated
b. 1	<a href="#">Blagden, Sir Charles; papers on his visit to France</a>	1787 September-1787 October
b. 1	Lavoisier, A.L.; sketches of hills near Paris	1788 July 10
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; Alpine visits	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; notes on Lapland, Iceland	undated
b. 1	<a href="#">Guyot; mineralogy between Paris and Fountainebleau</a>	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; misc. geographical notes	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; extracts from Brydone travels	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; extracts from Burnaby's travels through North America	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; extracts from Hawkins' voyages	undated
b. 1	Niebuhr, Karsten; Beschreibung von Arabien, extracts made by Sir C. Blagden	1772

**Series II: Scientific and Personal Papers, 1616-1861***1.67 linear feet (4 boxes)*

The scientific papers include memoranda and correspondence concerning observations of meteors and fireballs; notes on experiments in freezing, including attempts to supercool water; and lightning conductors. Personal papers include financial papers; notes on reading and extracts from jestbooks; memoranda; and a few printed items owned by Blagden.

A group of scientific notes is followed by a group of personal papers, but the series is otherwise unarranged.

b. 1

b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; meteors and fireballs <i>6 Folders</i>	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; experiments on freezing	[circa 1788]
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; calendar of birds, fish and wildlife (at Sheepshead?)	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; notes on earthquakes in Scotland	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; observations on the temperature of wells	1788
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; a study of old inks	undated
b. 1	Lightning conductors	1782
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; alum works at Land's End and near Mulgrave	1775 August
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous scientific papers	undated
b. 1	Blagden, Sir Charles; discovery of the vault of King Edward IV at Windsor	undated
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous notes	1786-1787
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous notes	1789
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous notes	1791
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous memoranda	1818-1819
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; "memorandums at the Academy"	1818 June - 1818 August
b. 3	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous memoranda <i>5 Folders</i>	undated
b. 4	Papers read at the Royal Society; lists of titles	undated
b. 4	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous literary and other memoranda	undated
b. 4	Blagden, Sir Charles; books, publications, literary references	undated
b. 4	Blagden, Sir Charles; his collection of tales, jests and witticisms	undated
b. 4	Verses	1786
b. 4	Blagden, Sir Charles; money, bills, receipts, etc.	[1780s]

b. 4	Dix and Co., John (Bristol); invoices to R.B. Hale for glass	1861
b. 5	Blagden, Sir Charles; Vocabulary	undated
b. 5	Aristoxenes et al.; Treatises on Music	1616
b. 5	The Royal Society; Membership	1789
b. 5	Mannheim; proposed meteorology in 5 vols.	1787 May
b. 5	Cavendish Society; report for 1850	1850
b. 5	Bassett, Joseph Davie; proposal for a bill on boundaries of county divisions	[circa 1820]
b. 5	Royal Society; <i>Philosophical Transactions</i> vol LXXIX p. 156	undated
b. 5	Tanteo, Embrenio	undated
b. 5	Legal notes	undated
b. 5	Legal notes; incomplete and fragmentary	undated
b. 5	Blagden, Sir Charles; wrappers and seals	undated



**Series III: Correspondence, 1785-1799, undated***12 Folders*

The letters contain information on Blagden's travels, scientific research, and friends, as well as discussion of family financial matters and family news.

Chronologically arranged.

b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; miscellaneous correspondence, ephemeral or unidentified	undated
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 6 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1785
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 17 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1786
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 21 Als to J. Blagden Hale	1787
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 25 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1789
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 19 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1790
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 13 A:S to J. Blagden Hale	1791
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 14 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1792-1793
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 14 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1794
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 8 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1795
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 5 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1796
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; 8 ALS to J. Blagden Hale	1797, 1799

## Series IV: Documents Related to the Royal Society of London, 1780-1792

0.83 linear feet (2 boxes) + 8 folders

Series IV includes offprints of some of Blagden's articles; proof sheets for the 1789 *Philosophical Transactions*; and manuscript copies of lectures.

Material is unarranged.

b. 6

b. 6	Diplomata et Statuta Regalis Societatis Londini	undated
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; "Experiments on the Effect of Various Substances in Lowering the Point of Congelation in Water;" "Supplementary Report on the Best Method of Proportioning the Excise upon Spiritous Liquors"	1788, 1792
b. 6	Blagden, Sir Charles; offprints of printed papers	undated
b. 6	Proofs of Illustrations-- <i>Philosophical Transactions</i>	1789
b. 6	Gloucestershire	undated
b. 6	<i>Philosophical Transactions</i> ; proofs incomplete 3 Folders	1789
b. 7	Berthollet, M.; <i>Elements de l'art de la teinture</i>	1791
b. 7	<i>Journal de Geneve</i>	1788 November 22 - 1789 March 21
b. 7	<i>Philosophical Transactions</i> ; proofs with authors' corrections	1789
b. 7	Charts and maps 2 Folders	1780, undated
b. 8	Blagden, Sir Charles; Black's Lectures, Group 1	undated
b. 8	<a href="#">Blagden, Sir Charles; Black's Lectures, Group 2</a> 2 Folders	undated
b. 8	Blagden, Sir Charles; Black's Lectures, Group 3 3 Folders	undated

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## Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

### Preferred Titles

*Philosophical transactions of the Royal Society  
of London. Series B, Biological sciences*

### Subjects

Science -- Great Britain  
Science -- Societies, etc.  
Scientists -- Great Britain

### Geographic Names

France -- Description and travel  
Great Britain -- Description and travel  
Great Britain -- Intellectual life -- 18th century

### Names

Banks, Joseph, 1743-1820  
Blagden, Charles, Sir, 1748-1820  
Hale, John Blagden  
Hale, Richard Blagden  
Lavoisier, Antoine Laurent, 1743-1794  
Roy, William, 1726-1790

### Corporate Body

Royal Society (Great Britain)