

Guide to the Norton Nicholls Correspondence

LWL MSS 27



by Sandra Markham

December 2021

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Lewis Walpole Library
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CALL NUMBER: LWL MSS 27

CREATOR: Nicholls, Norton, 1741?-1809

TITLE: Norton Nicholls correspondence

DATES: 1753-1808

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 0.63 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English; French; Latin

SUMMARY: The Norton Nicholls Correspondence collection contains letters the British clergyman received from friends and acquaintances, and letters he wrote to a close friend, the poet Thomas Gray, and to his mother Jane Floyer Nicholls. Also present is Nicholls's short "Prayer to be use before inoculation" and two letters from Sir Horace Mann to unidentified recipients.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/lwl.mss.027>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/lwl.mss.027>.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

W. S. Lewis purchased the collection from Myers & Co. in July 1943. Bequest of Wilmarth Sheldon Lewis (Yale 1918), 1979.

Custodial History

Prior to November 2021 the material in LWL MSS 27 had been interfiled in the Lewis Walpole Library Manuscript Miscellany (LWL MSS MISC).

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Norton Nicholls Correspondence is the physical property of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the W. S. Lewis Librarian/Executive Director.

Preferred Citation

Norton Nicholls Correspondence. The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

The typed transcripts in the collection were photocopied on acid-free paper in December 2021, and the original transcripts were discarded. All information in the transcripts should be verified by comparing it to the manuscript letters present.

Related Materials

Associated material: Norton Nicholls Papers (Osborn c467). Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Norton Nicholls (1742-1809)

Norton Nicholls was born in Lisbon on February 24, 1742, the only surviving child of Jane Floyer Nicholls (died 1800) and Norton Nicholls, who had married in London in 1741. Jane Nicholls was the daughter of Charles Floyer (died 1731) and Jane Turner Floyer (died 1759), the daughter of Nathaniel Turner; both the Turner and Floyer families were involved with the East India Company.

The family returned to London by 1745, but the elder Nicholls became bankrupt and abandoned his family, leaving only a small annuity for his wife. With the financial assistance of Jane Nicholls's brother Charles Floyer, an East India merchant, Norton Nicholls was educated at Enfield School, Eton, and Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge. He received his LL.B. in 1766. When Charles Floyer passed away in September of that year, Nicholls lost his financial support, and turned to a suggestion from his good friend and poet Thomas Gray to prepare for the clergy. He was ordained as a deacon in London on February 15, 1767, and as a priest on February 24, 1767. Through the assistance of another relative, William Turner (died 1790), Nicholls received an appointment as the rector of Lound and Bradwell in Suffolk, where he served from 1767 until his death. There was no parish rectory, so Nicholls and his mother moved to Blundeston House in Blundeston, the next parish. Nicholls lived most of his life at the house, and died there on November 22, 1809. He is buried in the St. Mary Magdalene churchyard in Richmond, Greater London, with his mother and their Turner and Floyer ancestors.

Scope and Contents

The Norton Nicholls Correspondence is comprised of letters the British clergyman received from friends and acquaintances, and letters he wrote to a close friend, the poet Thomas Gray, and to his mother Jane Floyer Nicholls. Also present is an autograph manuscript prayer by Nicholls, and two letters written by Sir Horace Mann to unknown recipients. Most of the letters are accompanied by typed transcriptions made by library staff after the collection was received in 1943.

Series I holds forty-four letters to Nicholls from twenty-one people including the naturalists T. A. Knight and Jacob Samuel Wyttenbach, the poet Catherine Maria Fanshawe, and friends such as Carlo Firmian, Thomas Minifie, and John Wheler.

Series II, Letters from Nicholls, is the bulk of the collection and contains ten letters he wrote to Thomas Gray, and more than one hundred letters that he sent to his mother during his or her travels.

Series III, Other Papers, holds four items: an undated autograph manuscript prayer by Nicholls "to be used before inoculation"; two autograph letters, signed, written by Sir Horace Mann from Florence, Italy, to unknown recipients; and a partial "Alphabetical Index" to Nicholls's correspondence that is unrelated to the material in this collection.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. Letters to Nicholls, 1772-1808. II. Letters from Nicholls, 1753-1799. III. Other Papers, 1754-1758.

Collection Contents

Series I: Letters to Nicholls, 1772–1808

0.21 linear feet (1 box)

Series I contains letters sent to Nicholls by a variety of friends and acquaintances, dating from the time of his Grand Tour through the year before his death. Most of the letters are single missives but a few folders contain groups of letters ranging from more than a dozen sent by the Earl of Sheffield and his wife and daughter, to ten letters from John Wheler, a fellow clergyman with whom Nicholls had crossed paths at Cambridge and thence maintained a lifelong friendship. Nicholls met two of the correspondents, John Minifie and Carlo Firmian, while he was traveling in Europe. Firmian, the Austrian minister at Milan, wrote in French, and of the three letters present from the Swiss naturalist Jacob Samuel Wyttenbach one is in French and two are in Latin.

Series I is arranged alphabetically by author.

b. 1, f. 1	Bathurst, Henry, 1744–1837	1807 August 29
b. 1, f. 2	Berners, Charles	1781 February 8
b. 1, f. 3	Byres, James, 1734–1817	1773 February 20
b. 1, f. 4	Erskine, John Francis, Earl of Mar, 1741–1825 A small newspaper clipping about the Alloa House fire, annotated "1800" in an unknown hand, is laid in.	1800 September 21
b. 1, f. 5	Fanshawe, Catherine Maria, 1765–1834	[1806] May 15, undated
b. 1, f. 6	Firmian, Carlo, 1718–1782	1772
b. 1, f. 7	Fitzwilliam, William Wentworth Fitzwilliam, Earl, 1748–1833	1783, 1803
b. 1, f. 8	Hesketh, Harriet, Lady, 1733–1807	1772 July 11
b. 1, f. 9	Jerningham, William, 1736–1809, and Frances Dillon Jerningham, 1747–1825 The first two pages are in the hand of Sir William, and the third page is in the hand of Lady Jerningham.	1779 November 19
b. 1, f. 10	Knight, T. A. (Thomas Andrew), 1759–1838 All four letters from the British horticulturalist and botanist are incomplete, either missing their first or last pages. In addition, there is a single leaf from a letter which has neither a first nor last pages and does not appear to be part of the letters present.	1800–1805
b. 1, f. 11	Lindsay, Charlotte, Lady, –1849	undated
b. 1, f. 12	Lisburne, Wilmot Vaughan, Earl of, 1730–1800	1776 August 18
b. 1, f. 13	Minifie, John	1778, 1779
b. 1, f. 14	Sheffield, Abigail Way Baker-Holroyd, Baroness, –1793	1785–1793
b. 1, f. 15	Sheffield, John Holroyd, Earl of, 1735–1821 Letters of December 27, 1793, and April 25, 1796, have manuscript additions from his daughter Maria Josepha Stanley.	1793–1799

b. 1, f. 16	Stanley, Maria Josepha Stanley, Baroness, 1771–1863	1793–1797
b. 1, f. 17	Starhemberg, Comtesse de	1772, 1774
b. 1, f. 18	Wheler, John, 1734–1818	1772–1796
b. 1, f. 19	Wodehouse, John Wodehouse, Baron, 1741–1834	1808 October 26
b. 1, f. 20	Wyttenbach, Jacob Samuel, 1748–1830	1772–1774

Series II: Letters from Nicholls, 1753–1799*0.42 linear feet (1 box)*

Series II, Letters from Nicholls, forms the bulk of the collection, consisting of ten letters Nicholls wrote to Thomas Gray, and more than one hundred letters that he sent to his mother. The Gray letters discuss books and horticulture, with little gossip or news of others. The letters to his mother are expectedly more personal, and span from his school days at Enfield, Eton, and Cambridge through the year before her death. Though Nicholls lived with his mother at Blundeston after 1767, they were often apart as he regularly traveled to London, around England and Scotland, and to Europe, and she spent periods of time with Floyer and Turner relatives in Richmond. The quantity of letters here and the over four hundred more at Beinecke Library (Osborn c467) virtually create a diary covering several months in his life.

Nicholl's letters are chatty, intimate, and descriptive, chronicling his transportation experiences, activities such as dinners and concerts, and his opinion of the country houses and personalities he encountered. Gardens were of special interest, and he comments on those he saw. Of greater interest, though, were the countless social events he enjoyed describing for his mother, such as two days of grand "magnificences" at the Bishopsbourne home of Sir Horace Mann (nephew of the diplomat), a neighbor of Thomas Barrett at Lee Priory, Kent, with whom Nicholls spent a month in July 1782, or the March 1790 gathering he attended at Lady Amherst's with Horace Walpole, Frances Boscawen, Hannah More, Agnes Berry, and Elizabeth Montagu, right after which he went to supper at Hester Thrale Piozzi's home where Gaspare Pacchierotti, Emma Hamilton, and Hester Piozzi all sang.

There are two letters written during his 1770 journey through the Midlands with Thomas Gray, and many written during his own 1771–1772 tour of France, Switzerland, and—in particular—Italy, where he wrote from Milan, Florence, Siena, Rome, Naples, and Venice. Traveling in the United Kingdom, Nicholls reported out from Revesby Abbey near Boston in Lincolnshire, during a three-week stay with botanist Sir Joseph Banks in October 1788, and sent letters several days in 1774 and 1780 from Alloa House, the home of John Erskine, Earl of Mar in Clackmannanshire, Scotland; in a five-page letter filed in Series I, Erskine narrates in full the tragic fire that destroyed his house and its contents in 1800. Nicholls was a frequent guest of John Holroyd, Earl of Sheffield, and his wife Abigail at Sheffield Place in Sussex (in 1785, 1787, 1790, and 1793); a dozen letters to Nicholls from the couple, and three from their daughter Maria Josepha Stanley, can be found in Series I.

Series II is arranged under two headings: To Thomas Gray, and To Jane Floyer Nicholls.

b. 2, f. 1	To Thomas Gray Also present is a manuscript copy (in a nineteenth-century hand) of a letter from Gray to Nicholls, dated June 24, 1769.	1768–1771
To Jane Floyer Nicholls		
b. 2, f. 2	Letters Letter of August 28, 1754, contains a note from J. Allen, likely the schoolmaster.	1753–1766
b. 2, f. 3	Letters	1767–1771
b. 2, f. 4	Letters	1772–1774
b. 2, f. 5	Letters In the letter of March 8, 1780, a quarter of the page was written by Lady Findlater and half of a page was written by Lady Gordon.	1780–1781
b. 2, f. 6	Letters	1782

To Jane Floyer Nicholls (continued)

b. 2, f. 7	Letters	1785–1787
b. 2, f. 8	Letters	1789
b. 2, f. 9	Letters	1790–1794
b. 2, f. 10	Letters The letter of March 8, 1797, contains one paragraph about Horace Walpole's will.	1797, 1799
b. 2, f. 11	Letters	undated

Series III: Other Papers, 1754–1758*3 Folders*

The series holds four items: an undated autograph manuscript prayer by Nicholls “to be used before inoculation”; two autograph letters, signed, written by Sir Horace Mann (1701–1786) from Florence, Italy; and a partial “Alphabetical Index” to Nicholls’s correspondence that is not related to the material in this collection.

Series III is arranged under three headings: Prayer by Nicholls; Horace Mann Letters; and Alphabetical Index.

	Prayer by Nicholls	
b. 2, f. 12	“A prayer to be used before inoculation”	undated
b. 2, f. 13	Horace Mann Letters The Mann letters were listed in the dealer description along with the names of other authors in the collection, with no further comment. The recipients are unidentified. Wilmarth Lewis thought that the first letter, dated June 14, 1754, was possibly written to George Bubb Dodington, Baron Melcombe (1691–1762), as he is in Mann’s list of letters written at this time.	1754, 1758
b. 2, f. 14	“Alphabetical Index” A manuscript “Alphabetical Index” listing correspondents from Thomas Gray through Mr. Minifie was with the collection. Most—but not all—of the entries match the correspondence in the Norton Nicholls Papers (Osborn c467) in the James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.	undated

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.

Subjects

Clergy -- England
Country life -- Great Britain
Gardening -- England
Grand tours (Education)
Mothers and sons

Geographic Names

Great Britain -- Description and travel
Great Britain -- Description and travel -- Early works to 1800
Italy -- Description and travel -- Early works to 1800

Names

Erskine, John Francis, Earl of Mar, 1741-1825
Firmian, Carlo, 1718-1782
Gray, Thomas, 1716-1771
Knight, T. A. (Thomas Andrew), 1759-1838
Mann, Horace, Sir, 1701-1786
Minifie, John
Nicholls, Jane Floyer, -1800
Nicholls, Norton, 1741?-1809
Sheffield, Abigail Way Baker-Holroyd, Baroness, -1793
Sheffield, John Holroyd, Earl of, 1735-1821
Wheler, John, 1734-1818
Wytttenbach, Jacob Samuel, 1748-1830

Families

Nichols family