

'Paper Visits': The Post-Restoration Letter  
As Seen Through the Verney Family Archive

The Verneys were an upper-gentry, Buckinghamshire family with a passionate interest in letters. The family amassed one of the largest continuous archives for seventeenth and eighteenth-century England. Over 100,000 items spanning twelve generations include more than 30,000 personal letters from the 1630s to the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The preservation of the archive, however, was no accident. Each generation taught the next to docket, catalogue, and protect letters, because they knew their importance.<sup>2</sup> Part of the Verneys' strength lay in their silent, beribboned documents. Indeed, Verney history was passed on to each generation through letters. In the process, the family self-consciously used their documents to construct individual, dynastic, and social identities.

The Verneys' post-Restoration letters were influenced by a convergence of historical factors: the expansion of literacy and communications, the quest for self-expression and privacy, pressures upon the fragmented patriarchal family, and the importance of London and party patronage. The rise of a polite, literate culture that emphasised manners was of critical importance. The way the Verneys wrote, discussed, and used their letters confirms that letter-writing was an historically-specific practice with both constraining and liberating effects. Epistolary form and content led to self-exploration, but it also forced obedience to a social code. This duality enabled letters to meet a mix of personal, family, and social needs. It also produced a tension between freedom and constraint of which the Verneys were aware. Their comments about this tension show how real persons resolved debates about naturalness and formality in letters.<sup>3</sup> Thus, this essay sheds light on cultural and literary issues, as well as the Verneys' polite social code.

The Verney archive also confirms that a culture of letters evolved after the Restoration. Letter writing flowered in this period, as it did in classical and Renaissance ages. By the late-seventeenth century, letters permeated periodicals, newsletters, essays, and romances,<sup>4</sup> while epistolary works were written long before Richardson's Pamela. 'A letter to a friend' was a vehicle for anything in print, while the first newspapers were batches of letters. As French letter collections flooded the London market, English publishers issued imitations.<sup>5</sup> Robert Day estimates that 'something like one million volumes containing epistolary fiction were offered to the public between 1660-1740'.<sup>6</sup> The Verneys owned many publications containing letters, including Roman classics, Voiture's works, and letter-writing manuals.<sup>7</sup> They also read the first periodical with letters to the editor, the Athenian Mercury, and then passed it on to friends.<sup>8</sup>

The Verney correspondence clearly demonstrates that letters were becoming more important in both qualitative and quantitative ways. No longer reserved for diplomatic, scholarly, and mercantile use, more people were just 'scribbling'.<sup>9</sup> By 1720, the literacy rate was about forty-five per cent for men and

twenty-five per cent for women. For London women, however, it was nearer forty-eight per cent.<sup>10</sup> The Verney archive reflects these trends, for daughters' letters show recent schooling, and there are few marks instead of signatures on deeds. Yeomen and merchants write with ease,<sup>11</sup> while the family uses language with grace and skill. It is not surprising that the epistolary novel rose to prominence following this period. This study provides scholars with an historical interpretation of this genre.

The Verneys had lived in Buckinghamshire since the thirteenth century. By 1620, Sir Edmund Verney, a royalist courtier (1590-1642), made Claydon House his home. He died serving the king during the Civil War and left his parliamentarian son Sir Ralph (1613-96) in debt. At this point, Sir Ralph fled to France with his two sons Edmund (Mun) and John. There they learned letter-writing skills from Monsieur Claudius Mauger, who later authored epistolary manuals in London. Thus, we can look at the works of both sons and their tutor at various stages of life.<sup>12</sup>

In 1653, Sir Ralph returned to England and spent the rest of his life rebuilding the family estate. He sought moderation in politics and religion and abhorred 'court compliment'. Yet Sir Ralph knew the importance of sociability. 'Tis a happiness to keep a fair correspondence with all your neighbours',<sup>13</sup> he wrote, and longed for harmony within his own family. Like the Pastons, Sir Ralph 'set more by his writings and evidences than he did by any of his moveable goods'.<sup>14</sup> It was he who started the tradition of preserving family letters for he 'regard[ed] every scrap of written paper as sacred'.<sup>15</sup> Sir Ralph's criteria for preservation were broad, and rather than destroy a document, he cut holes over confidential items.<sup>16</sup> His domination over the letters expressed his belief in the patriarchal family as the center of society and a microcosm of the state.

Sir Ralph's own writings were short, reserved, and avoided flattery.<sup>17</sup> Restraint also marked the letters of his second son John (1640-1717). John inherited Sir Ralph's estate and baronetcy in 1696 after the death of his elder brother Mun and Mun's two grown sons. John had served twelve years in Aleppo as a Levant Company trader, followed by twenty-two years as a London overseas merchant. But in the fluid environment of the 1690s, he transformed himself into a country squire. By 1703, he had become a Viscount and in 1710, he entered Parliament as a Tory.<sup>18</sup>

John's life was shaped by writing and reading and he spent hours upon his letters. Cousin Pen Stewkeley noted this trait, chiding: '...you do not love to sit without a book or a pen in your hand'.<sup>19</sup> John's careful penmanship and balanced page lay-out reflected an obsession with order. Sir Ralph had taught him to docket letters, but John took new steps to regulate the collection. He reread letters, identified unnamed people, and updated the lives of those cited in the margins.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, he compiled a directory of English baronets.<sup>21</sup> A passion for order, writing, and genealogy, thus, converged in his letters.

Like John Quincy Adams' son who forsook 'the vile family habit of preserving letters', John's son Ralph showed little interest in letter-writing.<sup>22</sup> Not

so, however, the large, extended family of kin, inlaws, and friends, who loved to write letters. Nephew Ralph Palmer was a good example for 'when... writing', he admitted, 'my pen is never weary'.<sup>23</sup> Dependents wrote respectfully to the family head. Yet they expressed themselves openly, reflecting a growing autonomy in social relations.

The Verneys' correspondents were a diverse throng in terms of age, rank, religion, and occupation. The family wrote to and received letters from nobility, gentry, professionals, merchants, bankers, artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, and servants. When they are indexed by computer, the letters unveil a dynamic blueprint of the Verneys' social and political networks.<sup>24</sup> Women and the middling-sort wrote a great many items, while Londoners dominated the correspondence, revealing the growing importance of the capital. Because of the letters' range and number, they have been called 'truly representative of their age'. They indicate that a 'received standard English' was spoken by people of quality, similar to that of Restoration plays. Unlike literary works, the letters show varied degrees of familiar unstudied diction.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, the archive tells a valuable story about the past. We see that family history is a slow, developing narrative created as each letter is added to the archive.<sup>26</sup> More chapters are appended to the story over time, as mail is opened and answered. The letters reveal generational continuities, along with changing values and hidden passions that are lost in quantitative records. Because the documents are organized around the family head, one gets multi-dimensional views of topics. The reader gradually grasps the rhythms of daily life. Attitudes to politics, children, illness, fate, and death reveal the evolution of ideas and behaviour.

The Verney letters also show personalities and relationships through spacing, address, style, and penmanship.<sup>27</sup> Characters are uncovered further by decoding unspoken anxieties and interests. Thus, Aunt Adams' constant references to her friends' maids revealed her own fears of losing her servants. She often bought food for John, because she loved to eat. In contrast, Aunt Gardiner sent information, which betrayed her passion for gossip. These examples of decoding show that individuals constructed their own characters. 'Should you doubt that you exist, you have only to write a letter', noted Joyce Carol Oates. 'A personality will immediately define itself in the act of writing'.<sup>28</sup> Yet scholars have questioned Oates' assumption of 'truth telling' and stressed the constructed character of personal accounts.<sup>29</sup> The Verney archive confirms that letter writing was a self-conscious art and allows us to observe the social code underpinning letter-writing conventions.

In order to uncover these norms, let us enter the Verneys' muniment room and observe epistolary form and practice. Other family collections including the Wentworth, Hatton, Leeds and Godolphin, Egmont, Blenheim, Coke, Portland, LeNeve, and Trumbull Papers have been systematically examined for the following criteria: paper, handwriting, spelling, outside address and title, stamps, docketing practices, franks, inside spacing and layout, margins, salutation, forms of address, closure and signature, use of a language

of courtesy, and references to letter writing. Quotations from these documents which are strikingly similar to the Verneys' may be found in the notes.<sup>30</sup>

Normally, paper was coarse with untrimmed edges. Hand-writing was bold and clear. Writers left one side blank, apparently for social effect, but they turned the page sideways and crammed farewells into the margin.<sup>31</sup> The family head or secretary, made file copies or saved drafts studded with corrections. Then the paper was folded, sealed and addressed. Finally, each copy was docketed according to date, name, and topic.<sup>32</sup>

The Verneys and other families wrote three types of personal letters: informal to intimates, sociable to friends and acquaintances, and contrived or artificial for patronage purposes.<sup>33</sup> Writers were trained to use formulaic clichés in all sorts of letters, including requests for money and thank-you notes.<sup>34</sup> They normally sent friends 'humble services', wished them 'joy' at births, and encouraged them to be ready for their maker at death.<sup>35</sup> Even familiar letters had a planned format. In 1685, Lady Mary Stanhope was instructed to reread letters, list headings to answer, and preselect compliments.<sup>36</sup> The Verneys were generally more informal, but even daily reports from son to father had a conventional structure. After an inquiry about health, John confirmed receipt of the last letter, repeated its directions, and reported tasks completed. Next, he wrote about financial and legal matters, gossip and social events, domestic and foreign politics.<sup>37</sup> The Verneys were informed about these topics at a sophisticated level.<sup>38</sup> Letters were short and to the point, for the family wrote as worldly practitioners, not intellectuals or theologians. Only men used Latin quotations, but London women were often more informed about politics and society.

Health, money, and favours were mentioned most often; next came worries about safety, travel, politics, and relationships; then joys were shared about births, deaths, and marriages. Not surprisingly, letter writing was constantly discussed.<sup>39</sup> Yet sometimes it was unsafe to write. In 1686, Sir Ralph's nephew John Stewkeley warned him: 'Tis dangerous writing news...but...you shall certainly have all I may safely write'. Often it was suggested 'your name not be set to your letter'. The Verneys disciplined their pens and decoded hidden meanings. Yet some things were easier to write than say. Aunt Gardiner hated to beg for money in person and would 'rather let my pen ask it'.<sup>40</sup>

The proper way to write a letter was prescribed through education. In France, John had learned politeness by constructing letters to reflect the recipient's age, gender, and rank. As an aid, Mun owned Le Secretaire a la mode and de la Cour. Both boys were forced to write regularly to family members, who sternly evaluated their progress.<sup>41</sup> When John returned to England, Sir Ralph trained him to write two returns for every one received. John's Levant travels taught him the value of family letters, for he received none for two and a half years due to problems with the mail.<sup>42</sup>

Upon John's return, a schedule was enforced which taught discipline.<sup>43</sup> Sir Ralph's 'constant letter day' was Tuesday, although he often wrote to John

daily, even when they both were in London. John's writing day was Monday to meet Sir Ralph's carrier's schedule.<sup>44</sup> As with visits and gifts, reciprocity was required. Letter writing was not a casual affair, for the receiver paid the postage and failure to respond was a breach of conduct. Hence, John's nephew was upset when he found himself 'a letter in your debt'. If one did forget to answer, apologies were sent. In extreme cases, one might request that letters be returned. Obviously, when letter writing forced observance of norms, it strengthened dynastic and social controls.<sup>45</sup> Yet letters played a multitude of roles, some of which also liberated the individual.

All epistolary functions were shaped by the demands of polite society, along with dynastic and individual needs. Because teaching polite manners was a major purpose of letters, the Verneys' social context must be considered. The family lived in an age that was concerned with the human being as a social animal.<sup>46</sup> Processes of social exchange like letters, visits, and favours were viewed as a fundamental basis of society.<sup>47</sup> The harmony produced by these reciprocal interactions nurtured a stable order.<sup>48</sup> The elite also acknowledged an intimate link between outward manners and status. Lineage became less important as a determinant of rank, while shared behaviour, including letter writing, increasingly afforded entry into elite society.<sup>49</sup>

Polite conduct was most clearly observed in the art of conversation, which was intimately tied to letters. By 1715, The Gentleman's Library found conversation 'a point of such importance, that upon it depends the whole course of young gentlemen's lives and manners'.<sup>50</sup> Letter-writing manuals had always described letters as 'conversation between absent friends'.<sup>51</sup> Although writing was not the same as conversation, the Verneys accepted the analogy. Thus, John believed that 'writing is talking at a distance',<sup>52</sup> and Aunt Gardiner wrote to him because: 'I love to converse with you...'<sup>53</sup> Others compared letters to social calls, where conversation was bound to formal rules. Ralph Palmer called his letters 'paper visits', while John was begged to 'visit [Elizabeth Baker] with letters'.<sup>54</sup>

But epistolary conversation was not just comforting, it disclosed one's breeding and status. The ability to speak politely through letters was a critical proof of gentility at a time when cultural competition with France led to a concern with refinement. In practice, letters served as a badge of membership in elite society. 'The writing of letters has so much to do in all the occurrences of human life', declared John Locke, 'that no gentleman can avoid showing himself in this kind of writing....His pen...always lays him open to a severer examination of his breeding, sense, and abilities than oral discourses'.<sup>55</sup>

Locke's restriction of this principle to males was no accident, for although Verney women wrote many letters, earlier generations lacked training. After not writing on an important occasion, Elizabeth Adams admitted: 'I being sinc abell of my ill riting and speling is the real cose of my long silence....'<sup>56</sup> Plagued by phonetic spelling and disconnected sentences, women of Sir Ralph's day referred to their efforts as 'imperfect', 'impertinent', or 'not worth paying for'.<sup>57</sup> However, the letters of the next generation of women and servants stand

in elegant contrast. In 1694, John's daughter Margaret wrote to Sir Ralph with easy grace to show 'how diligent I have been at my business'.<sup>58</sup> And in 1699, John's black servant from Guinea wrote an elegant courtesy letter. Its only rival was a similar epistle from John's country cook.<sup>59</sup>

Everyone's letters were scrutinized for signs of proper manners.<sup>60</sup> Even Aunt Gardiner, the oracle of politeness, had to readdress a letter because she knew Sir Richard Temple 'likes to be writ with both his titles'. It was even more important to properly honour the receiver. 'I have no business to discuss', John wrote Aunt Adams, 'but I send this as in good manners and duty bound to...tender you my humble services'.<sup>61</sup> When Cousin Jack Nicholas forgot to wish John joy of a son, he was said to 'forget all manners and good nature'.<sup>62</sup>

Polite correspondence not only taught manners, it stabilized family relations. The letter is often cited in connection with the novel, which developed themes of family and friendship. Yet its role in linking real fragmented families has hardly been noticed. Nor has there been an awareness of its connection to gentry sociability and residence patterns. The eighteenth-century family has been characterized as more close-knit than its predecessors,<sup>63</sup> but the fact that its members were frequently apart has been overlooked. Because the Verneys spent up to nine months in London, kin were in constant motion. Husbands, wives, children, and lovers were torn from each other by the peripatetic nature of city and country life. Sir John Busby and his lady were 'like buckets in a well; as one goes up the other goes down between town and country'. Furthermore, many a mother like Mary Lovett was forced to leave a new-born babe.<sup>64</sup> Verney women were particularly affected, spending more time in town, but retaining country-house duties. Moreover, after the Restoration, the Verneys no longer married neighbours, but had wider family horizons. Thus, John's children lived in far-flung country houses from Essex to Ireland.<sup>65</sup>

After the Civil War, the patriarchal family also experienced economic fragility and internal divisions. Letters helped the family head to maintain cohesion. Aunt Adams called her letters 'paper messengers', for they linked her to others.<sup>66</sup> And for John's third wife Elizabeth, letters made 'a new life...When I think of you', she wrote, 'I go to my letters'.<sup>67</sup> John's daughter Margaret yearned for the post, and thought no charge too great to bear for 'the happiness of your company'.<sup>68</sup>

Letters also were an accepted method of maintaining social networks. Because people's chances in life were dependent upon connections, an alliance with the Verneys was of critical importance. The right to correspond was a public display of this link, while the form of address and frequency of letters revealed one's relative place in the Verneys' networks.<sup>69</sup> Permission to write regularly was an honour, which was only given to intimates. Thus, after John inherited, cousin Kitty Stewkeley asked him to 'give me leave to enquire after your health'.<sup>70</sup> Cousin Nancy Nicholas was one of John's luckier correspondents. She wrote to John every week, even when she had no news and was always told about family events. When Nancy died, her daughter sent John a note in hopes that 'you will not wholly lay aside your correspondence with our family'. She

did inherit her mother's powerful privilege, as if it were a legacy. In contrast, Aunt Adams felt her status had declined, when she was not told about a new child.<sup>71</sup>

Letters also eased anxiety about death, illness, and poverty. The Verneys were a stoic group and often repressed emotion. But even Sir Ralph and John used the post to alleviate fears. Letters brought news of safe journeys<sup>72</sup> and relief about sickness. When her mother was too ill to write, Cary Stewkeley endured 'a thousand frights and fears', while nephew Palmer wrote John: 'All your healths are so valuable...we can scarce bear silence with Christian patience'.<sup>73</sup> Aunt Gardiner thought letters eased everyone's problems. 'Tis the comfort of this life', she wrote, 'to hear of those we love'.<sup>74</sup>

If letters comforted the receiver, they provided a vehicle of self-expression for the author. Thus, letters also had liberating effects. Writing has been described as a psychological process which brings self-exploration and the means to relate oneself to society.<sup>75</sup> Many factors encouraged the Verneys to use letters in this way, including the Protestant focus on individual redemption and self-examination.<sup>76</sup> Writing gave the Verneys occasions to develop narrative skills, while its pauses, unlike speech, offered time for self-reflection. In the Verneys' patriarchal world, collective needs were paramount, leaving few private spaces for individual release. This made the relatively free outlets provided by letters even more crucial to the Verneys. This was especially true for women, who had fewer alternative forms of self-expression than their male counterparts.

Letter writing has been seen by some as a particularly feminine form of self-expression: a life-line for cloistered women, who were isolated from public life.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Verney men and women used letters for a wide range of purposes, not just cathartic release. As an activity, letter writing was prized by both sexes, and was not considered an inferior form of leisure. It is true that women could write letters at odd moments in between domestic duties. And if writing books was considered unseemly for a woman, letter writing was acceptable.<sup>78</sup> However, the Verney archive shows that letters were not a female compensation for boredom. Although Verney women used letters as a form of self-expression, they did so from a position of strength. Patricia Spacks has shown how letters enabled women to make sense of their lives. In her view, writing was a positive outlet, implying choice, responsibility, and autonomy. Moreover, as women wrote to other women, they created 'a mutually understood subtle transformation of male orthodoxies'. Consequently, letters became an acceptable method for acting politically, socially, and psychologically outside the family.<sup>79</sup>

As Spacks maintained, Verney women used letters to exercise powers of observation, express ideas, and attain personal goals. Although financially dependent females had to couch missives in deferential terms, they regarded free articulation as a natural right. Housekeeper Elizabeth Lilly lectured Sir Ralph and John about their duties to fulfill country customs.<sup>80</sup> Aunt Gardiner, on the other hand, loved to gossip and her political information was the best that John could get. Moreover, in matters of social protocol, women often tutored

the family head. Like the supposedly harmless visit, the innocent letter was a place where women carved out niches of power.<sup>81</sup> At different times they used letters to obtain freedom, authority, and psychological release. Sir Ralph's poor, but worldly-wise, London aunts begged for money and gave political advice in the same letter.<sup>82</sup> Often, they coordinated their letters, pleading causes for one another. At other times they plotted against rival kin, like the best Whigs and Tories of their day.

Both men and women obtained cathartic release in epistolary outbursts of friendship. Like the Greeks and Romans, the Verneys thought of letters as bonds between close companions.<sup>83</sup> A letter from John's daughter-in-law Catherine was 'esteem[ed]... as a very great instance of...friendship', while another friend to whom John wrote was in 'no way sensible how I merited so great an honour'.<sup>84</sup> Some epistolary friendships were expressed in passionate terms. Kitty Stewkeley told cousin Pen: 'Every moment [I] surpass myself by loving you a thousand times more than I did'. Usually the Verneys were more restrained, but both sexes openly asserted affection.<sup>85</sup>

Yet because letters were so highly prized, they also created tensions. Constant apologies and self-disparagement, though formulaic, revealed anxieties about writing.<sup>86</sup> One problem was that letters were so very often lost. Restoration England was still marked by unsafe roads and vehicles, highway crime, and tampering with the post.<sup>87</sup> Nosy gentry families like the Shuckboroughs were known to 'open all letters that comes to their hands'.<sup>88</sup> These factors led to a feeling of helplessness. To prevent loss, the Temples of Stowe and the Verneys sent duplicates of important letters via carriers, coach, and the post. Luckily, the Verneys' carrier took letters for free, although this was illegal.<sup>89</sup>

Not surprisingly, fears of lost mail emerge in every archive.<sup>90</sup> In 1697, 'the northern post boy was tied to a tree...his letters opened and...exchequer bills taken out'. Twice, John's annuity to his uncle Tom was lost. Tom was surely guilty of understatement about his missing money: 'In this deplorable age', he noted, 'letters may sometimes halt by the way'.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, receiving too many letters was also a problem, since postage was paid by the recipient. Like the Verneys, Scroop Egerton, 4th. Earl of Bridgewater and Buckinghamshire's Lord Lieutenant, kept accounts of every penny spent on stamps.<sup>92</sup> The cost of letters was not insignificant: the Verneys paid 5s. for 500 sheets of paper which they bought in reams, while a bottle of ink ranged from 1.5s. to 3s.<sup>93</sup> More important, postage expenses mounted as scribbling increased. Until 1711, one page cost 2d. up to eighty miles outside of London, and Sir Ralph constantly complained about charges.<sup>94</sup> When John entered Parliament in 1710, his free franking privileges reduced costs.<sup>95</sup> Prior to that time, he wrote to friends only once a week.<sup>96</sup>

Luckily, the Verneys were masters at manipulating franks and received them from many friends. Since franks could be used only for legislative purposes, one had to know their owners' locations. Thus, in 1699, Cousin Nancy Nicholas feared to use Lord Russell's franks, noting: "Tis not proper when the

Parliament men are in London to frank papers out of the country'. When Parliament ended or friends died, writing often ebbed.<sup>97</sup>

Eighteenth-century postal innovations enhanced service<sup>98</sup> and led to an increase in use.<sup>99</sup> This trend was part of a nationwide growth of communications in response to commercial and financial pressures. The easing of laws limiting religion and speech led to a booming publishing industry, which in turn prompted postal reforms. There was also a great hunger for information. Indeed, it is hard for twentieth-century readers to understand how acutely news was craved. Nancy Nicholas in the country was aware of her need. 'Us mortals are in the state (not of innocence), of ignorance', she admitted, 'if London did not afford us some news'. Letters not only satisfied curiosity, they stimulated self-growth. John's daughter Mary confirmed this fact as she thanked him for his letter: 'Our persons are confined to a narrow compass, so are our understandings, for we hear nor see any new thing. A line from your Lordship is our greatest entertainment'.<sup>100</sup> As letters linked the Verneys to the wider community, they again had a liberating effect.

In practice, letter writing was both a controlling device and a process offering individual freedom. The tension between the two is most apparent in letters written to meet patronage needs. Normally, the Verneys' personal letters used informal language and style. Sir Ralph voiced his hatred of 'letter[s] of ceremony' and desired those written 'without compliment in a more friendly strain...'. Sir Ralph's brother Tom ascribed the Verney hatred of 'hypocritical ways' to his 'father's great care'. Clearly, the Verneys wished to construct their own civilized identity. As Mun observed, they longed to cease sending 'young gentlemen...into France to learn manners....They come back fool as ever, imitating the French mode with so much affectation...that in derision we Englishmen are justly styled apes of the French'.<sup>101</sup>

By the 1700s, these views complemented Britain's growing military and commercial ascendancy over France. They reflected a wish for a 'natural way of speaking'<sup>102</sup> evident in eighteenth-century, English letter-writing manuals.<sup>103</sup> Mun's comments also revealed a fear that French politeness might corrupt English masculinity, cloud gender boundaries, and lead to foppish effeminacy or emasculation. Thus, an earlier desire for French refinement was replaced by an assertion of British manliness.<sup>104</sup>

Still, in order to meet social and political needs, John had to write fawning letters requesting favours from noblemen, Tory politicians, and influential patrons.<sup>105</sup> He received similar requests from his own clients, especially after entering Parliament. Thus, John was asked to request a ship captain's aid because 'he loves to have letters from great persons'.<sup>106</sup> Others begged John for jobs, church livings, or the Queen's touch against illness. Frances Luttrell thought that John's letters to him showed a magnanimous 'esteem for the little man'.<sup>107</sup> Luttrell was a respected gentleman, whose deference in no way lowered his status. It merely showed that he knew how to write a proper letter to someone whose interest he desired.

John's fawning patronage letters on his own behalf began as a response

to Whig/Tory politics. Upon first standing for office, he wrote scores of circular letters asking for votes from freeholders. He penned them 'without compliment', for, he admitted, 'I'm not good at that'. But after losing three elections, John revised his letter-writing style. Highly-edited drafts show labourious efforts to reformulate speech and do his 'devoirs'. 'I don't love to send letters', he admitted, 'that may be thought rugged'.<sup>108</sup> By 1700, John had acquired a language of courtesy, through which he flattered influential people. In a letter to Tory Lord Henry Bertie, he admitted he was unknown to their family head, Lord Abingdon. But, he declared, 'by post I'll kiss his hands with a letter', for because the Berties knew Sir Ralph, they might befriend his son.

John used similar tropes which evoked body gesture and polite manners to William Cheyne, 2nd. Viscount Newhaven. Cheyne was the leader of the Buckinghamshire Tories who chose John to stand for Parliament in 1710.<sup>109</sup> 'As long as I live I shall record your favour in my heart', John declared to William Bromley, Secretary of State. Bromley, who was a relation by marriage, might aid the career of John's son.<sup>110</sup> In short, whenever John needed help, he repressed his normal pride and used the tropes of patronage.

Yet even the Verneys' courtesy letters were not as servile as continental models.<sup>111</sup> They resembled samples in the best-selling manuals of John's old tutor, Claudius Mauger, who came to London in 1676. Having taught sons of English gentlemen in France, he knew his market well, and his practical models met British tastes.<sup>112</sup> Like Mauger, the Verneys used polite forms of speech, but avoided French etiquette regarding spacing and address.<sup>113</sup> The Verneys refused to place inflated titles in huge letters at the top of the page. Nor did they insert five inch spaces or put cringing signatures at the bottom of the paper.<sup>114</sup>

Finally, only a small portion of their letters used fawning language. The Verneys never wrote slavishly to intimates. Moreover, males increasingly rebelled against social constraints that were considered overly refined. John told his wife Elizabeth not to bother sending services: 'Its only a matter of form', he noted, 'and serves only to fill up letters'. By 1713, his son-in-law Sir Thomas Cave foreswore reciprocity: 'I don't desire our correspondence should be so formal', Thomas wrote, 'as letter by letter'.<sup>115</sup> Even with outsiders, there were limits to John's servility. Hence, he let a prized tenant go rather than send '...under my hand...a fawning letter, that I thought it too mean for me to purchase his stay upon such terms'.<sup>116</sup> These comments displayed his manly honour and his refusal to resort to affectation.

Furthermore, the Verneys were acutely aware of the tension between nature and artifice, truth and compliment. Sir Ralph's close friend Dr. Denton vowed he wrote 'not to flatter', for his praise was 'no compliment...but really true'.<sup>117</sup> Trusted Nancy Nicholas also swore that she wrote 'without compliment or lying'.<sup>118</sup> It was vital to differentiate between the two at a time when patronage underpinned social practices. As the Verneys wrote different kinds of letters they made this distinction and constructed their own balance between candour and ceremony.

Clearly, the Verneys used letter writing to meet their personal, dynastic, and patronage needs. Moreover, because letters pervaded every aspect of life,

they influenced the family's corporate personality. By writing, rereading, and saving records, each generation took part in the construction of a cumulative family identity. Their letters functioned both as truth and myth. They were the Verneys' history, biography, and memoirs, to be drawn upon over time in order to strengthen survivors. In 1866, an unopened letter from Mun to John written 200 years earlier was found. 'It seemed almost like a breach of confidence to open it', noted Lady Verney, but the family gathered to read it, 'that it might be done under the shelter of the family conscience'.<sup>119</sup> Long after their genesis, the letters kept functioning as a legacy,<sup>120</sup> shaping, not just reflecting, a family ethos. The fact that Verneys still live in Claydon House and that letter collection continues is significant. We see that the way the Verneys used writing and the attitudes they held about written records affected their family history.<sup>121</sup>

The importance that the Verneys attached to letters bears a lesson for historians. Through letters, we can see how individuals coped in a society based upon lineage, custom, and manners. We can uncover a family's social code, and note whether they accepted or evaded its norms. Through letters, we can watch the rise of a discourse of politeness and note how gentility was instilled. We can see how people brought stability to their lives by constructing networks, maintaining friendships, and communicating with absent loved-ones. Through letters, we can watch how people dealt with anxiety, illness, and isolation. We can see how they found means of self-expression, personal development, and even power, in a patriarchal environment. Through letters, we can see how people obtained the patronage that determined one's place in life. The development of the letter went hand in hand with the promotion of social values, as well as individual identities.

Literary scholars have long used epistolary collections and criticism to describe the eighteenth-century intellectual world. Now historians can use letters to create cultural studies that embrace social and political themes. Far from being a marginal genre, letters can show continuities and change that usually lie hidden from view. Like the Verneys, we too can use 'paper messengers' to proclaim our vision of the past.

1. Miriam Slater, Family Life in the Seventeenth Century: The Verneys of Claydon House. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 2. Microfilm copies of the personal letters may be found at the British Library, Buckinghamshire Record Office, and the Princeton University Library. Titles of Sir Ralph Verney, Baronet; John Verney, Viscount Fermanagh; and Sir Thomas Cave, 2nd. Baronet are omitted in the endnotes. Spelling has been modernized and dates assume that the year starts on 1 January. I wish to thank Sir Ralph Verney for permission to use his family papers. John Broad, Hugh Hanley, and Susan Ranson gave valuable assistance concerning the documents. For help with this paper, I thank Jeanne and Lawrence Stone, Sonia Anderson, John Bidwell, Clare Brant, Betsy Brown, John Catanzariti, Natalie Davis, Mary George, Anthony Grafton, Frances Harris, Jonathan Lambe, Peter Lake, John Murrin, Richard Olney, and April Shelford.

2. For the same intergenerational training and collecting see L.H. Butterfield, ed., The Adams Family Correspondence. (Cambridge: Harvard University (Univ.) Press, 1963), vol. 1, introduction, xix-xxxvii and The Diary and Autobiography of John Adams. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), vol. 1, introduction, xiii-xxii, especially xii, which notes that the 'habit of making and keeping written records became as persistent a family trait among the Adamses as the distinctive conformation of their skulls'.

3. This debate is discussed by writers including Janet Altman, Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form. (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1982); Bruce Redford, The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986); [Samuel Johnson] Lives of the English Poets, vol. II, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1926) and The Rambler, no. 158, Sat. August 31 1751, (London: Jones and Co., 1826), 262-4.

4. H. Anderson and I. Ehrenpreis, 'The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century: Some Generalizations', in Anderson, Daghljan, and Ehrenpreis, eds., The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century. (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1966), 269-71; J.C. Bailey, Studies in Some Famous Letters. (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), 1; R. Day, Told in Letters: Epistolary Fiction Before Richardson. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Pr. 1966), 25, 49, 65-8; Dena Goodman, The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 136-82; Kathryn Shevelov, Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical. (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 38; Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957), 176.

5. Edme Boursauct, Letters from a Lady of Quality to a Chevalier, translated from the French by Mrs. [Eliza] Haywood, (London, 1721); M. Delariviere Manley, Court Intrigues, in a Collection of Original Letters from the Island of the New Atlantic, &c., (London, 1711); Del Chevalier, Five Love Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier: Done out of French into English by Roger L'Estrange. (London, 1693); Charles Gildon, The Post-Boy Robb'd of his Mail: or the Pacquet Broke Open, 2nd. ed., (London, 1706); [A. Behn], Love-Letters Between a Noble-man and his Sister. (London, 1684); Margaret Cavendish, CCXI. Sociable Letters, written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle. (London, 1664); Janet Altman 'Political Ideology in the Letter Manual (France, England and

New England)', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, 18 (1988), 106.

6. For two basic bibliographies see Ruth Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 191-99 and Day, Told in Letters, 237-270. Perry, 15, estimates 100-200 epistolary works in the early eighteenth-century, while Day's estimate (p. 77) assumes that most editions were issued in about 2,000 copies.

7. Familiar and Courtly Letters to Persons of Honour and Quality by Monsieur Voiture, A Member of the Royal Academy at Paris, vol. 1, (London, 1701); Mark Motley, 'Educating the English Gentleman Abroad: The Verney Family in Seventeenth-Century France and Holland', Journal of Education, 23 (1994), 251; 49-486, Booklist, [1697?]; 49-637, 'List of Books of Sir J. Verney's', April 21 1697; 50-279, Booklist, [Jan, 1698?].

8. References to the Verney Letters (VL) refer to microfilmed documents in the Princeton University Library. Citations include the microfilm reel number, the sequential number of the document as found on that reel, correspondents, and the date of the document. 48-104, John Verney/Ralph Verney, Dec 6 1694; British Library (BL), Burney Newspaper Collection, Reel #103A, The Athenian Gazette or Causistical Mercury, Tuesday, March 17-Saturday, March 30 1690, first volume and supplements, (London, 1691).

9. Giles Constable, Letters and Letter-Collections, (Turnhout: Editions Breplos, 1976), 40-41; Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel, 65; George Steiner, 'The Distribution of Discourse' in On Difficulty and other Essays, (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 73. In The Rise of the Novel, Chapter 2,

10. David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 129, 176; Shevolow, Women and Print Culture, 30; G. Greer et al, Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse, (London: Virago Press, 1988), introduction, 1-31.

11. 38-6, Edmund Verney/Ralph Verney, August 20 1683; 47-133, Ralph Verney/Ralph Verney, October 19 1693; 48-520, John Verney/Ralph Verney, September 11 1695; 48-544, Betty Verney/Ralph Verney, October 14 1695; 56-169, Betty Lovett/John Verney, May 5 1717; 51-358, Joseph Churchill/John Verney, Dec 21 1700; 50-523, Thomas Phelps/John Verney, October 19 1698; 54-52, William Mason/Elizabeth Baker Verney, April 16 1709; 30-14, Joseph Churchill/Ralph Verney, February 6 1677.

12. Kathleen Lambley, The Teaching and Cultivation of the French Language in England during Tudor and Stuart Times, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1920), 301-13, 341-3; Motley, 'Educating the English Gentleman', 247. Sources about the family include: F. P. and M. M. Verney, eds., Memoirs of the Verney Family, 4 vols., (London: Tabard Press, 1970); M. M. Verney, ed., The Verney Letters of the Eighteenth Century from the MSS. at Claydon House, 2 vols. (London: Ernest Benn, 1930); Broad, John, 'Sir Ralph Verney and his Estates, 1630-1696', unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford Univ., 1973; and 'Gentry Finances and the Civil War: The Case of the Buckinghamshire Verneys', Economic History Review 2nd., 32 (1979), 183-200.

13. 35-25, John Verney/Ralph Verney, March 14 1680; 29-20, Ralph Verney/Edmund Verney, February 17 1676.

14. H.S. Bennet, The Pastons and Their England, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 125.

15. Bodleian Library (Bodl) MS Top Bucks c. 1, fo. 94, 'Lady Verney's Account of the Portraits at Claydon House', Macmillan Magazine, September 1866, insert, 352; M. M. Verney, Memoirs vol. 1, xiv.
16. For example, the amounts for upper servants' annuities were cut out of several deeds, some of which were cancelled. CH 1/214-218, Deeds, 1673-1698. I thank Susan Ranson for this reference.
17. 21-1, Ralph Verney/[Nan Hobart, 1666?].
18. 52-231,lc/John Verney, June 14 1703; CH 14/2, Letters Patent, Grant to John Verney, June 16 1703; Basil Henning, The House of Commons, 1660-1690, vol. III, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), 634.
19. 51-397, Penelope Viccars/John Verney, February 19 1701.
20. Two examples of editing and marginalia are 38-11, Edmund Verney/Ralph Verney, August 31 1683 and 39-30, John Verney, [Jan, 1685?]. In the Le Neve Papers, BL Add. MS 71573, Peter Le Neve adds comments about his letters and his replies. Like John, he clearly reread letters.
21. CH 14/19-49, 68, 69, Genealogical Papers of John Verney; CH 15/6 Faults in the Book of Mr. Verney's Descents of Baronets. Comments of Mr. La Neve, Sept. 24, 1694; 55-337, William Viccars/John Verney, June 17 1714. Although the Verney letters, make this point, no copy has been found. I wish to thank Mr. Robert Yorke, Archivist of the College of Arms, London.
22. Quoted in Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, xxvi-xxvii, John Quincy Adams 2/Charles Francis Adams, February 5 1867.
23. 55-590, Ralph Palmer 2/Ralph Verney 2, 23 September 1715. Similarly, in BL Add. MS 72515, Trumbull Papers, Anne Bynns told Sir William Temple on August 17 [1687], 'I can't forbear by every opportunity to enjoy the pleasure of writing to you'.
24. The author has constructed a computerized database of over 10,000 records to enable searches of the letters by personal name, date, place, subject headings, and other variables. This permits control over the data and allows underlying patterns to emerge into view.
25. Henry Wyld, A History of Modern Colloquial English, 3rd. ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), 2-3, 162-5.
26. A similar process is noticed by Muriel St. Clare Byrne, ed., The Lisle Letters: An Abridgement, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), xxv.
27. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson thought that 'the letters of a person, especially one whose business has been chiefly transacted by letters, form the only full and genuine journal of his life'. See Julian P. Boyd, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 1, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1950), xi, quoting Thomas Jefferson to Robert Walsh, April 5 1823. Jonathan Swift claimed that the recipient's character could be exposed by subtle changes in authorial expression in the introduction to Letters written by Sir W. Temple, Baronet and other Ministers of State, both at Home and Abroad, 1665-72, vol. I, (London: J. Swift for Tonson and Churchill, 1700), A3r.
28. 51-545, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, August 22 1700; 51-72, Cary Gardiner/John Verney, September 27 1699; Joyce Carol Oates, 'Tennessee in the Stoned Age', Times Literary Supplement, #4594 (April 19, 1991), 8.
29. Clare Brant, 'Eighteenth-Century Letters: Aspects of the Genre, with Reference to the Epistolary Novel and the Familiar Letters of Personal Correspondence', unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford Univ., 1988; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality,

(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

30. I thank Dr. Frances Harris of the British Library for her help in providing references.

31. Exceptions to the rule of writing on only one side of the page and using no margins are found in BL Add. MS 22226, Wentworth Papers. See also BL Add. MS 29572, Hatton Papers, for examples of no margins. On the other hand, BL Add. MS 72517, Trumbull Papers, includes many examples of writing sideways in the margins like the Verneys.

32. M.M. Verney, Memoirs, vol. I, xii-xiii; Bodl MS Top Bucks c.1, fo. 94, insert, 340-56. Sir William Trumbull docketed his letters in the same manner as Sir Ralph. See BL Add. MS 72515, Trumbull Papers, John Bridges/Sir William Temple, 11 May 1695. In BL Add. MS 69936, Coke Papers, docketing is brief but consistent with the names of writer and recipient, the date and a short topical summary. In contrast, BL Add. MS 28051, Leeds and Osborne Papers, shows irregular docketing practice. It also discusses 'transcribing by a slow amanuensis' in fo. 142, William Lloyd, Bishop of St. Asaph to the Earl of Danby, October 13 1682. BL Add. MS 72516, fos. 13-14, Charles Cottrell to Lady Elizabeth Trumbull, January 22 [1686?] discusses pros and cons of writing letters oneself, while the Duke of Bedford noted that the Duchess of Marlborough in BL Add. MS 61449, fo. 64, May 13 1725, spared 'yrself the trouble of writing with yr own hand....' Letter books such as BL Add. MS 47025, Egmont Papers, enabled owners to make elaborate collections with indexes, personal views and annotations.

33. R. Reiber, 'James Boswell's Personal Correspondence', in H. Anderson, ed., The Familiar Letter, 245.

34. Barbara H. Smith, On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language, (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 61-2.

35. 47-102, Ralph Palmer/John Verney, October 7 1693; 52-300, Isabelle Stewkeley/John Verney, Nov 6 1703; 52-486, William Butterfield/John Verney, June 19 1704.

36. Philip Stanhope, 2nd. Earl of Chesterfield, Some Short Observations for the Lady Mary Stanhope Concerning the Writing of Ordinary Letters, ed., W. S. Lewis (Farmington, Ct., 1934). Some of Lady Mary's letters may be found in BL Add. MS 69938, Coke Papers. Her spelling is good and her handwriting is small, well-formed, but cramped onto small 4x6 paper without margins. See fo. 40 to her husband Thomas Coke, January 14 1700 for crossed out words. BL Add. MS 69939, fo. 43, to her husband Thomas on January 13 [1701/2?] shows grace and ease. BL Add. MS 69938, fo. 200, Nov 18 1[1701] is a letter from her father, the 2nd. Earl of Chesterfield, expressing his concern about his son's letter-writing habits.

37. 46-34, John Verney/Ralph Verney, July 21 1692.

38. Although gossip was a source of news, it was noted as such. 46-177, Ralph Verney/Cary Gardiner, October 30 1692. See also Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Borderlands: Letters and Gossip', The Georgia Review, 37 (1983), 791-813 and Gossip, (N.Y: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

39. Elizabeth Hamilton, The Mordaunts: An Eighteenth-century family, (London: William Heinemann, 1965); Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, vol.1, xxiii-xxiv. These themes are prominent in every collection examined.

40. 41-19, John Stewkeley/Ralph Verney, October 6 1686; 32-47, Captain

- T. Stafford/Ralph Verney, Dec 2 1678; 46-518, Cary Gardiner/Ralph Verney, June 7 1693.
41. Motley, 'Educating the English Gentleman', 251-2.
42. 16-15, John Verney/Ralph Verney, July 20 1659; 21-5, John Verney/Ralph Verney, June 10 1667.
43. Stephen Penton's The Gentleman Instructed, (London, 1688), 59, noted: 'Letters to and fro are some kind of guard upon a youth...an honest use of filling idle time'.
44. 48-630, Cary Gardiner/Ralph Verney, Dec 31 1695; 46-115, Ralph Verney/John Verney, September 10 1692; 36-26, Ralph Verney/John Verney, Dec 5 1681.
45. Goodman, The Republic of Letters, 139-40; 54-135, Ralph Palmer/Ralph Verney, October 13 1709; Jack Goody, The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 20.
46. The Restoration dramas underline this point, as do The Spectator, Tatler and other early eighteenth century periodicals. See the Spectator, No. 9, vol. 1 (London, n.p. 1710/11), 41, for a particular example and D. Bond, ed., The Spectator, vol. I, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), introduction; R. Bond, The Tatler: The Making of a Literary Journal, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971); A. Humphreys, Steele, Addison and Their Essays, (London: Longmans Green, 1959); E. and L. Bloom, Joseph Addison's Sociable Animal, (Providence: Brown Univ., 1971). See also the seminal work of Maurice Agulhon on sociability.
47. D. Gordon, Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought 1670-1789, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 6, 33-42.
48. A. Bryson, 'Concepts of Civility in England, 1560-1685', unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford Univ., 1984; F. Childs, 'Prescriptions for Manners in English Courtesy Literature and Their Social Implications, 1690-1760', unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford Univ., 1984; M. Ketcham, Transparent Designs: Reading, Performance, and Form in the Spectator's Papers, (Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985), 1-2; Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politics and Politeness in the Reigns of Anne and the Early Hanoverians', in J. Pocock (ed.), The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 211-45.
49. For birth and manners see [W. Darrell], The Gentleman Instructed in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life, 4th. ed., (London, 1709), 13-4; [W. Ramesey], The Gentleman's Companion or a Character of True Nobility and Gentility, (London, 1676), 1, 6; J. Dare, Counsellor Manners, His Last Legacy to His Son, (London, 1673); P. Coss, 'The Formation of the English Gentry', Past and Present 147 (1995), 38-64; J. Mason, Gentlefolk in the Making, (New York: Octagon, 1971); P. J. Corfield, 'The Rivals: Landed and Other Gentleman', in N. Harte and R. Quinault, Land and Society in Britain 1700-1914, (Manchester: Manchester Univ Press, 1996).

For the classical roots of English social behavior see Cicero, De Officiis, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1974), xxiv. 9, 28; M. Rostvig, The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, vol. II, (New York: Humanities Press, 1971); L. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness, (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994).

For the roots of court society and Renaissance humanists see D.

Erasmus, De Civilitate Morum Puerilium, trans. R. Whittington (London, 1540); B. Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans.; L. Opdycke, (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1901); N. Elias, The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners, (New York: Urizen Books, 1978); M. Becker, Civility and Society in Western Europe, 1300-1600, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988); M. James, 'English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642', Past and Present, supplement no. 3 (1978).

50. The Gentleman's Library, Containing Rules for Conduct in All Parts of Life, (London, 1715), 77; Obadiah Walker, Of Education, Especially of Young Gentlemen, 5th. ed., (Oxford, 1687), 258; The Art of Complaisance, or the Means... to Oblige in Conversation, (London, 1673); Giovanni della Casa, Galateo, of Manners: Or Instruction to a Young Gentleman How to Behave himself in Conversation, (London, 1703); [Abel Boyer,] The English Theophrastus: Or the Manners of the Age, (London, 1702); The Lady's Preceptor, (London, 1743), 49.

51. Angel Day referred to 'the familiar and mutual talk of one absent friend to another' in The English Secretorie, (London, [1625]), 8. Hannah Wolley spoke of 'writing to a friend at a distance' in The Gentlewoman's Companion, (London, 1675), 218. Erasmus talked of 'conversation between two absent friends, in his Collected Works, ed., J. K. Sowards. vol. 25, (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1985), 258. See also Antoine de Courtin, The Rules of Civility, (London, 1671), 136; Philomusus, The Academy of Complements, (London, 1705), 101; Constable, Letters and Letter-Collections, 13.

52.49-256, John Verney/Thomas Verney, February 16 1697.

53.51-408, Cary Gardiner/John Verney, March 4 1701. See also 52-5, John Verney/Elizabeth Baker Verney, July 8 1702; In BL Add. MS 22226, fo. 33, Wentworth Papers, Anne, Lady Strafford wrote to her husband Thomas, 3rd. Earl of Strafford, Nov 27 1711: '... talking to you in this way is more pleasing to me than all the conversation in the world besides'. Dorothy Osborne noted 'the received opinion that people ought to write as they speak....' in Letters to Sir Wm Temple, (London and Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 197, letter #61, Dorothy Osborne/Sir William Temple, March 12 1654. For a different view see Janet Altman, 'Postscript', in Alan T. McKenzie, ed., Sent as a Gift: Eight Correspondences from the Eighteenth Century, (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1993), 214; H. Anderson and I. Ehrenpreis, 'The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century: Some Generalizations', in Anderson, The Familiar Letter, 274.

54. Cavendish, CCXI Sociable Letters, (London, 1664), preface; 53-694, Ralph Palmer/John Verney, Dec 30 1708; 56-209, Francis Luttrell/John Verney, May 7 1717.

55. The Works of John Locke, vol. IX, (London: Law and Gilbert, 1812), 180; W. H. Irving, The Providence of Wit in the English Letter Writers, (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1955), 15.

56.49-407, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, October 24 1696. Original spelling has been reproduced.

57.50-440, Isabelle Stewkeley/John Verney, July 12 1698; 50-654, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, June 19 1699; 51-229, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, April 2 1700. For differences between older and younger generations of women compare those of Anne, Lady Strafford throughout BL Add. MS 22226 with fo. 159 from her mother Lady Rawston, May 6 1712, and fos. 80

and 299 from her mother-in-law Isabella, Lady Wentworth, January 29 1712 and February 19 1712. The letters in BL Add. MS 61453, fos. 15-24b, Blenheim Papers, from Elizabeth Annesley, widow of Arthur, 1rst. Earl of Anglesea in 1692, have the same poor layout and spelling as those of Sir Ralph's sisters. In BL Add. MS 28052, fo. 1, Leeds and Osborne Papers, Elizabeth Byne writes to Sir Wm Godolphin on September 20 1663 about her daughter who 'begs your pardon for not answering your letter she being so ill a scribe'. John Verney's third wife, Elizabeth Baker, calls herself 'an indifferent scribe' in 49-242, Elizabeth Baker Verney/John Verney, August 22 1696. 58.48-18, Margaret Cave/Ralph Verney, October 23 1694. The Trumbull children showed similar skills and forms of address: BL Add. 72515, Trumbull Papers, Brooke Bridges to Sir William Temple, January 29 [1687?]. Similar letters may also be found in the Huntington Library's (HL) collection of the Temples of Stowe. See HL Stowe MS STT 1911, Arthur Temple/James Mellifont, [October 7, c.1695]. 59.50-637, Peregrine Tyam/John Verney, May 1699; Bodl MS Top Bucks c.1, fo. 94; 51-12, Edward Norgrave/Elizabeth Baker Verney, July 22 1699. 60. Thus in 52-265, Cary Gardiner/John Verney, September 21 1703, John gave instructions for addressing him as a Viscount. See also William Fulwood, The Enimie of Idlenesse, (London, 1593), 12-13; Jonathan Goldberg, Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance, (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1990), 252-3. 61.49-107, Cary Gardiner/Ralph Verney, April 14 1696; 53-141, John Verney/Elizabeth Adams, January 1 1706. See also BL Add. Ms. 22226, fo. 335, Anne, Countess of Strafford to her mother, Lady Rawston, September 16 1713: 'I have no news to send...but that my Lord and I...joyn in duty to your Ladyship'. 62.54-212, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, February 6 1710; 33-9, Ralph Verney/John Verney, July 12 1679. 63. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, (London: Harper and Row, 1979). 64.31-23, John Verney/Edmund Verney, [1687?]; 52-628, Mary Lovett/John Verney, Nov 18 1704; 52-629, John Verney/Mary Lovett, Dec 6 1704. 65. The same physical separation between generations was noted by the Adams family. See Butterfield, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, xxii-xxiii. 66.52-411, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, February 15 1704. 67.50-494, Elizabeth Baker Verney/John Verney, September 4 1698. See also BL Add. MS 29572, fo. 46, Hatton-Finch Papers, C. Hatton to Christopher, First Viscount Hatton, [n.d.], 'I can as well hang myself, as let a post go without a letter and when I begin I can never give over as long as my paper will hold out, but persecute you with long letters which I know well to be a trouble to you, but I have no ease, no longer then I am writing or reading yours'. 68.52-389, Margaret Cave/John Verney, February 1 1703. In BL Add. MS 22226, fo. 9, Anne, Lady Strafford to Thomas, 3rd. Earl of Strafford, October 25 1711, Anne was 'made happy by hearing from my dear life...which next to the enjoyment of your dear company is the greatest satisfaction I can have'. 69. Becker, Civility and Society, xviii; Naomi Tadmor, 'Dimensions of Inequality among Siblings in Eighteenth-Century English Novels', Continuity

and Change, 7 (1992), 303-333. For networks see S. Berkowitz, An Introduction to Structural Analysis: The Network Approach, (Toronto: Butterworth and Co., 1982); J. Mitchell, ed., Social Networks in Urban Situations, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1969); C. Wetherell, 'Network Analysis Comes of Age', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 19 (1989), 645-51. Less quantitative sociologists have helpful insights including E. Bott, Family and Social Network, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1957) and J. Boissevain, Friends of My Friends, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

70.53-61, Katherine Stewkeley/John Verney, October 27 1705.  
71.47-39, Nancy Nicholas/John Verney/August 29 1693; 51-247, Jenny Abdy/John Verney, April 30 1700; 53-91, Elizabeth Adams/John Verney, Dec 6 1705.

72. Andrew Burstein, 'Jefferson and the Familiar Letter', Journal of the Early Republic, 14 (1994), 198; 55-109, Thomas Cave/John Verney, May 1713.  
73.48-627, Cary Stewkeley/Ralph Verney, Dec 29 1695; 55-32, Ralph Palmer<sup>2</sup>/Ralph Verney<sup>2</sup>, January 1 1713. See also BL Add. MS 22226, fo. 347, Anne, Lady Strafford to her mother, Lady Rawston, October 8 1713: 'Nobody but I that endure it can tell the concern I am now in for your ladyship's illness....'

74.51-301, Cary Gardiner/John Verney, September 26 1700; Richard Brown, Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 45-6.

75. Carolyn Steedman, Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), 11; Spacks, 'Borderlands', 791-813.

76. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 74-6, 177; Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel, ix.

77. C. Goldsmith, ed., Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature, (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 1989), xii; Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel, 68-70; Spacks, Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), 83-109; Mary Favret, Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 10. For other helpful sources about women's writing see Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); Claire Brant and Diane Purkiss, eds, Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979); Linda Kauffman, Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions, (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986); C. Lowenthal, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter, (Athens: Univ. of Georgia, Ga., 1994); Melissa Mowry, '(Re)productive Histories: Epistolary Fiction and the Origin of the Epistolary Novel', unpublished PhD thesis, Univ. of Delaware, 1993); Jane Spencer, The Rise of the Woman Novelist, (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Domna Stanton, ed, The Female Autograph, (New York: Literary Forum, 1984); J. Todd, ed., A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1600-1800, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 1987).

78. Virginia Woolf, The Common Reader, 2nd. Series, (London: Hogarth

Press, 1935), 60; Osborne, Letters to Sir Wm Temple, 31-2.

79.Spacks, Boredom, 92; Steiner, 'The Distribution of Discourse', 73.

80.49-382,Elizabeth Lilly/Ralph Verney, February 23 1695; 49-275, Elizabeth Lilly/John Verney, September 29 1696.

81.51-361,Cary Gardiner/John Verney,Dec 25 1700. The work of Natalie Davis has been helpful concerning this point.

82.51-631,Cary Gardiner/John Verney,Dec 16 1701.

83.John White, Light from Ancient Writers, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Stanley Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986);Giles Constable, Letters and Letter Collections, 13-16; Janet Todd, Women's Friendship in Literature, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980).

84.55-341,A.Isted/Catherine Verney,June 22 1714; 53-290,Frances Lovett/John Verney,Nov 2 1706.

85.32-155,Katherine Stewkeley/Penelope Stewkeley,October 1 1678. Anne Dormer to Lady Elizabeth Trumbull writes in the same fashion in BL Add. MS 72516, Trumbull Papers, February 4 n.d.: 'Could you possibly know with how much tenderness I think of you; How passionately I love you....' See also the letters of Ralph Palmer Jr. to Ralph Verney Jr. and those of Thomas Cave to John Verney.

86.Clare Brant emphasizes the tensions produced by letters in 'Eighteenth Century Letters', 14, 212, and generally. For an extreme case of tension see BL Add. MS 70500, fo. 74, March 24 1674, Vere/Cavendish Papers, Countess of Ogle to her daughter Elizabeth, Duchess of Albemarle, recalling 'one of the unkindest, undutyfullest letters that ever was writ to a mother'.

87.Joan Parkes, Travel in England in the Seventeenth-Century. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925); J.Crofts, Packhorse, Wagon and Post. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Pat Rogers, The Augustan Vision. (London: Methuen and Co., 1974).

88.36-29,John Verney/Ralph Verney,Dec 12 1681. Thomas, 3rd. Earl of Strafford, sent his letter to Mrs. Arundell in his mother's packet so 'you may be sure it will not be opened', and advised her to answer without her name and to use a code for the Queen. BL Add. MS 22228, fos. 7-8, Wentworth Papers, May 25 1714. Letters first went to London before local distribution. See Howard Robinson, The British Post Office: A History, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948), 64-67.

89.47-66,Ralph Verney/John Verney,September 19 1683; 48-513,Ralph Verney/John Verney,September 15 1695; HL Stowe MS STT 324, William Chapman/ Sir Richard Temple, July 13 1684; 39-51,Ralph Verney/John Verney, March 19 1685.

90.For example, BL Add. MS 72516, Trumbull Papers, Charles Cottrell to Sir William Temple, July 22 1690: 'It is a great trouble unto me that so many of your letters do miscarry'. See also Hamilton, The Mordaunts, 10.

91.50-181,Nancy Nicholas/John Verney,October 14 1697; 50-182,Thomas Verney/John Verney,October 16 1697; 53-268,John Verney/John Deere,October 10 1706; 50-630,Thomas Verney/John Verney,April 28 1699.

92.51-47,Nancy Nicholas/John Verney,August 31 1699; HL Ellesmere MS EL 8639, Bridgewater Accounts, Week ending 29 August, 1690.

93.CH 4/6/4 London Accounts of John Verney: August 6 1687, for a bottle of ink, 1s. 6d; September 20 1683/4, for a quire of paper, 1s.; for a ream of cut paper 5s.; for a ream of cut ordinary paper, 3s. 4d; for a ream of Genoa Paper 2s. 6d. A penny bought 8+ sheets and a shilling bought 100 sheets of paper. Greer, Kissing the Rod, 6. I thank John Broad for references to these documents. E. J. Labarre, Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of Paper and Paper-Making, 2nd. ed., (Amsterdam: Swets and Zeitlinger, 1952), 215. I thank John Bidwell for references to paper.

94.46-550,Ralph Verney/John Verney,June 25 1693; Robinson, The British Post Office: A History, 31, 49; Brian Austen, English Provincial Posts 1633-1840, (London: Phillimore and Co., 1978), 5, 32; The Post Office: An Historical Summary, (London: HMSO, 1911), 6. In 1716, John refused to give 3s. 9d. for letters to be sent on to his grandson's friends. See 55-579,John Verney/C.Lovett, August 23 1716.

95.54-333,John Verney/Ralph Verney2,Nov 30 1710; BL Add. MS 69936, fo. 74, Coke Papers, Charles Fitzwilliam/John Coke, May 14 [dated 1686, but BL note suggests 1689], is an example of a franked letter as is another unsigned, uncatalogued letter written October 24 1700 in BL Add. MS 70276, Portland Papers, addressed to Robert Harley. See also George Brumell, A Short Account of the Franking System in the Post Office, 1652-1840, (Bournemouth: Bournemouth Guardian Ltd., 1936); Robinson, The British Post Office, 40, 44, 50.

96.51-87,Nancy Nicholas/John Verney,October 10 1699.

97.50-626,Nancy Nicholas/John Verney,April 20 1699; 50-441,Elizabeth Adams/John Verney,July 12 1698.

98.For postal history see: T. H. Elliott, State Papers Domestic Concerning the Post Office in the Reign of Charles II, Special Series #20, (Postal Historical Society, 1964); J. C. Hemmeon, The History of the British Post Office, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1912); George Kay, Royal Mail, (London: Rockliff Publishing Co., 1951).

99.Robinson, The British Post Office, 80-85. In 1688 receipts were about £90,000. In 1700 there was a net profit of £148,000, which rose to over £156,000 by 1703/4. By 1697/8, over 792,000 letters and packages were sent, with 77,530 going into the country. By 1703/4 the number of letters had risen to over 951,000, with 95,694 sent to the country. See also Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel, 65.

100.48-281,Nancy Nicholas/John Verney,June 4 1695; 56-96,Mary Lovett/John Verney, August 25 1716.

101.21-1,Ralph Verney/[Nan Hobart, 1666?]; 51-402,Thomas Verney/John Verney,February 8 1701; 34-3,Edmund Verney/Ralph Verney, [January 1680?].

102.Perry, Women, Letters, and the Novel, 75; Thomas Sprat, History of the Royal Society, (London, 1667), 113. Reproduced by Washington University Studies, eds, Jackson Cope and Harold W. Jones, (St. Louis, Mo., 1958).

103.For two basic bibliographies of English Letter-writing manuals see Katherine Hornbeak, 'The Complete Letter-Writer in English, 1568-1800', Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, 15 (1934), 128-145; Jean Robertson, The Art of Letter Writing: An Essay on the Handbooks published in England during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1942), 67-80. For later informal English manuals see T.

Goodman, Esq., The Experienced Secretary. (London, 1707); [John Constable], The Conversation of Gentlemen Considered. (London, 1738); The Complete Letter Writer Containing Familiar Letters..... (Edinburgh, 1768); John Hill, The Young Secretary's Guide. (London, 1696); The Lady's Preceptor. (London, 1743); Samuel Richardson, Familiar Letters on Important Occasions. (London; George Routledge and Sons, 1928). Earlier English manuals examined include N. Breton, A Poste with a Packet. (London, 1660); Henry Care, The Female Secretary. (London, 1651); John Cotgrave, Wit's Interpreter, the English Parnassus..... (London, 1671); Day, The English Secretary; Fulwood, The Inimie of Idleness; G. Markham, Hobson's Horse Load of Letters..... (London, 1613). For trends in English letters see Brimley Johnson, English Letter Writers. (London: Gerald Howe, 1927); M. Hansche, 'The Formative Period of English Familiar Letter-Writers....', unpublished PhD thesis, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1902); Howard Williams, English Letters and Letter-Writers of the Eighteenth Century. (London: G. Bell, 1886); G. Saintsbury, A Letter Book. (London: G. Bell, 1922).

104.M. Cohen, Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 9-10, 46-53; M. Kimmel, 'The Contemporary "Crisis" of Masculinity in Historical Perspective', in H. Brod, ed., The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies. (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 121-153; Philip Carter, 'Mollies, Fops and Men of Feeling: Aspects of Male Effeminacy and Masculinity in Britain, c. 1700-1780', (unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1995). 105.54-528, Browne Willis/John Verney, January 15 1713, [misfiled]; S. Kettering, Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) and 'The Historical Development of Political Clientelism', Journal of Interdisciplinary History. 13 (1988), 419-447.

106. In the Portland Papers, BL Add. MS 70276, many letters to Robert Harley are requests for favours. For other examples see BL Add. MS 22228, fos. 13-14, Frances Arundell/Thomas, 3rd. Earl of Strafford, February 1712. In the Trumbull papers, letters often are referred to as 'favours', for example BL Add. MS 72515, Charles Bridges/Sir William Temple, September 10 [n.d., 1687?-1713].

107.54-442, Thomas Rand/John Verney, [June, 1711]; 54-485, Browne Willis/John Verney, January 15 1713; 54-372, Edward Henry Lee, 1rst. Earl of Litchfield/John Verney, Dec 15 1710; 52-305, Mary Saunders/John Verney, Nov 12 1703, 56-209, Francis Luttrell/John Verney, May 7 1717.

108.49-334, John Verney/Thomas Tyrrell, Dec 26 1696; 51-86, John Verney/Edward Henry Lee, 1rst. Earl of Litchfield, October 8 1699; 52-716, John Verney/Isabelle Stewkeley, March 4 1705.

109.51-590, John Verney/Honourable Henry Bertie, Dec 2 1700; 51-45, John Verney/William Cheyne, 2nd. Viscount Newhaven, August 23 1699. 'Kiss your hands' is a common phrase used often as in BL Add. MS 46956A, fo. 85, Egmont Papers, Sir Philip Perceval 2nd. Baronet (1656-80) to Sir Robert Southwell, April 2 1679: 'This is to kiss your hands and to let you know that last night I came to ...[Bristol]'. 110.55-186, John Verney/William Bromley, September 14 1713. In the Le Neve Papers, BL Add. MS 71573, fo. 66, Oliver Le Neve wrote to the Duke of Norfolk on October 30 1690 for help to avoid being sheriff: 'My most honoured Lord' (followed by a space), I have no harbour in this storm but your

Grace's breast, where I should be the happiest of men to find safe anchorage.... Your Grace's most humble, most devoted and obedient servant'. Another example is BL Add. MS 29572, fo. 244, C. Hatton to Christopher, 1<sup>st</sup>. Viscount Hatton, October 28 1682.

111. Examples of conduct manuals which contained letter-writing instructions are De Courtin, The Rules of Civility; Jean de la Serre, Academy of Complements, (London, 1640), Philomusus, The Academy of Complements, (London, 1705). For a comprehensive list see Gertrude Noyes, Bibliography of Courtesy and Conduct Books in Seventeenth Century England, (New Haven, 1937). See also Janet Altman, 'Political Ideology in the Letter Manual', 105-22; Sister Mary Humiliata, 'Standards of Taste Advocated for Feminine Letter Writing, 1640-1797', Huntington Library Quarterly, 13 (1950), 262-8.

112. Claudius Mauger, Mauger's Letters Written Upon Several Subjects, (London, 1671); French and English Letters Upon all Subjects, Mean and Sublime, 2nd. ed., (London, 1676); Grammaire Anglaise, (London, 1699); French Grammar with Additions, [169?]; Mauger and P. Festeau, New Double Grammar, French-English and English-French, (Bruxelles, 1696); Charles Bouton, Les Grammaires Francaises de Claude Mauger a l'Usage Anglais, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1922).

113. See also BL Add. MS 22221, fos. 9, 97, 150-1 from Lord Ailesbury, Nov 19 1711, Lord Bathurst, Nov 1 1712, Lady Frances Bathurst, June 5 1707, for similar examples among elite writers.

114. Other collections show similar characteristics. There is a common respect for spacing after the salutation and before closure, which ranges with rank, (up to 3" at top and bottom is common). Formulaic salutations and closures often reinforce relative places in the social structure. Care is taken regarding penmanship, page layout, and composition but courtesy language is rarely used in familiar letters and there is little servility. Some letters to the Duchess of Marlborough in BL Add. MSS 61449-50, 61468, 61471 have up to a 3" margin below salutation and before signature. This appears to be the practice of many writers when writing courtesy letters to 'great persons', but, even here, there is little similarity to French letters.

115. 34-71, John Verney/Ralph Verney, May 20 1680; 52-272, John Verney/Mry Lloyd, April 25 1704; 55-227, Thomas Cave/John Verney, Nov 28 1713.

116. 43-9, John Verney/Ralph Verney, September 4 1688.

117. 38-75, Dr. William Denton/Ralph Verney, October 18 1683; H. Morley, ed., The Spectator, #103, June 28 1711, (London, 1891), 372-4. For a similar comment in the Wentworth Papers see BL Add. MS 22221, fo. 150-1, Lady Frances Bathurst/Thomas, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Earl of Strafford, June 8 1707: 'I am afraid your Lordship will think it a compliment to tell you the pleasure I receive by the honour of your letters.

118. 49-211, Nancy Nicholas/Ralph Verney, July 28 1696.

119. Bodl MS Top Bucks c. 1, fo. 94, insert, p. 353.

120. David Patterson, A Phoenix in Fetters: Studies in Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Hebrew Fiction, (Totowa, N.J.: Roman and Littlefield, 1988), 24.

121. Richard Brodhead, Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America, (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993); Henri-Jean Martin, The History and Power of Writing, trans, L. G.

Cochrane, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994).