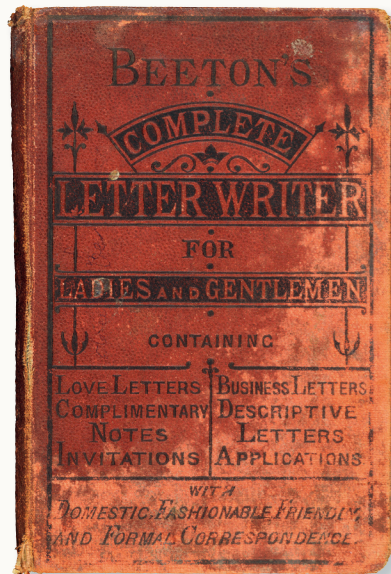




# Living Letters

Correspondence then and now

## Getting it right: life, love and family

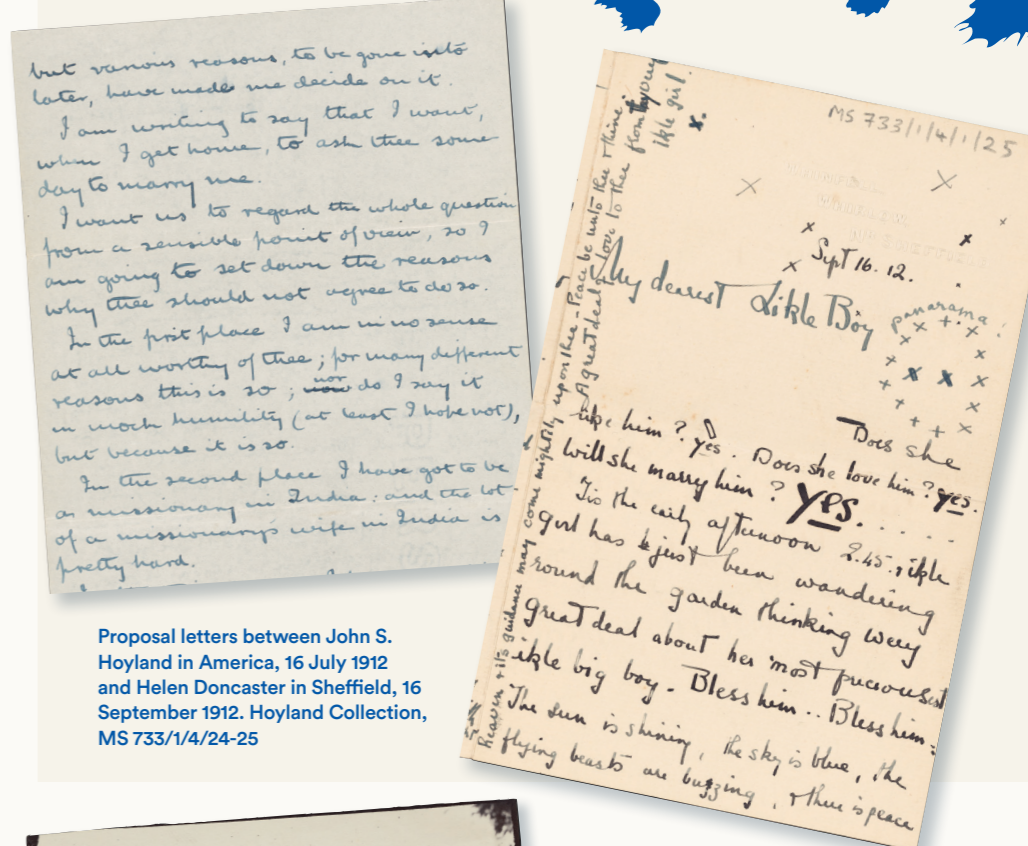


**Letter writing has long been seen as an important social skill in which adults need to be schooled.**

Manuals such as Beeton's *Complete Letter Writer for Ladies and Gentlemen* catered to and fostered the view that writing a good letter, note, application or invitation can be the difference between success or failure in all aspects of life, including 'business' and 'love'. The Quaker John Hoyland's 1912 proposal to Helen Doncaster, which carefully sets out the advantages and disadvantages (mainly the latter) of her marrying him, illustrates this. Hoyland appears to have struck the right note - and Helen replied with an extremely enthusiastic 'yes'. However, the language and tone of her joyful acceptance, addressed to her 'Likle Boy' from his 'Ikle Girl', contrasts sharply with that of Hoyland's formal letter. They married but, unfortunately, Helen died at a relatively young age in 1919.

Letters also provide insights into relationship breakdown and its painful consequences. Correspondence concerning the ill-starred union of Effie Gray and John Ruskin

(champion of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood of artists) sheds new light on both the events that in 1854 culminated in the marriage's annulment on the grounds of non-consummation and on the lingering gossip and rumour that impacted on Effie's reputation for decades to come. In contrast, correspondence's ability to sustain connections between families or friends separated by geography is shown in the long, highly detailed and closely written letters sent by Emma Alderson from her new home in Cincinnati, Ohio to her British sister, the writer Mary Howitt, and mother, Ann Botham.



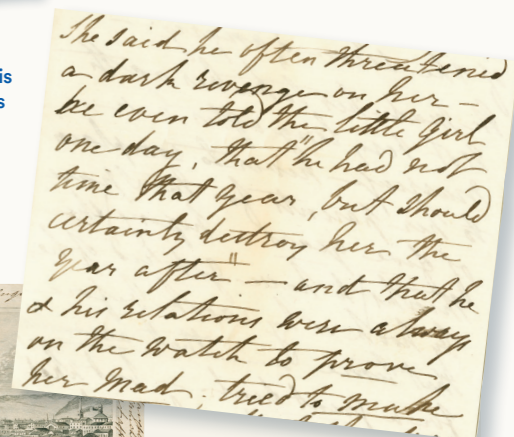
Proposal letters between John S. Hoyland in America, 16 July 1912 and Helen Doncaster in Sheffield, 16 September 1912. Hoyland Collection, MS 733/1/4/24-25



Snapshot photograph of John Hoyland and his sons John and Denys, c.1918. No photographs of Helen Hoyland can be found in the collection, but it is possible that she was behind the camera taking this image of her husband and small sons. Hoyland Collection, MS 733/12/6

Detail from letter from Mrs C.L. Marlay recalling what Effie Ruskin had told her of her marriage, 16 September 1855. Marlay Collection, My 267/12

"She said he often threatened a dark revenge on her - he even told the little girl one day that 'he had not time that year, but should certainly destroy her the year after - and that he and his relations were always on the watch to prove her mad'"



Letter from Emma Alderson, Cedar Lodge [Cincinnati, U.S.A.], to her mother Ann Botham, 2 June [1844]. Howitt Collection, Ht/7/2/18