
John Forster Papers: Finding Aid

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The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

Manuscripts Department

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Overview of the Collection

Title: John Forster Papers

Dates (inclusive): 1828-1894

Collection Number: mssHM 52437-52572

Creator: Forster, John, 1812-1876.

Extent: 135 pieces in 2 boxes

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Abstract: This collection consists of correspondence and literary manuscripts by English authors and friends of English editor and Charles Dickens biographer John Forster (1812-1876) and his second wife, Eliza Ann Crosbie Colburn Forster.

Language: English.

Access

Open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, contact Reader Services.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item]. John Forster Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Purchased from Sotheby's (Lot 180), December 10, 1964.

Biographical Note

English writer and editor John Forster (1812-1876) was born April 2, 1812, in Newcastle, England. At the age of 15, in June 1827, he wrote a paper, "A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage." Entering University College in London in 1828 as a law student, Forster became friends with such fellow students as James Emerson Tennent and James Whiteside. He was admitted to the bar in 1843, but seldom practiced law thereafter.

Forster was an editor and a contributor to many magazines and newspapers including *The Examiner*, *Foreign Quarterly Review*, *Daily News*, and the *Edinburgh Review*. In 1836, the first of his five volumes of *Lives of the Statesmen of the Commonwealth* was published as part of *Lardner's Cyclopaedia*. This set included a biography of Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford which would cause a controversy concerning authorship after Forster's death. He also published biographies of such notables as Oliver Goldsmith (1854), Landor (1869), and the first volume of a biography of Jonathan Swift (1876). Perhaps his most famous biography, however, was that of his friend Charles Dickens which appeared in three volumes in 1872, 1873, and 1874.

First married to poet L. E. Landon, Forster became estranged from his wife and on September 12, 1856, married Eliza Ann (Crosbie) Colburn. Eliza was the daughter of Captain Robert Crosbie, R.N., and widow of Henry Colburn, a well-known publisher. There were no children as the result of either marriage.

John Forster died on February 2, 1876. He had been working on the first volume of *Life of Jonathan Swift* at the time.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of correspondence and literary manuscripts by English authors and friends of both John Forster and his second wife, Eliza Ann Crosbie Colburn Forster. The literary manuscripts include essays, poems, and diary and text extracts both by and about John Forster. The correspondence deals with the personal life and business dealings of Forster. There is also detailed genealogical information in the collection.

Correspondents include: Julius Althaus, Robert Barrett Browning, Edward Robert Bulwer-Lytton, Thomas Carlyle, Sir John Duke Coleridge, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Fanny Crosbie, Charles Dickens, Benjamin Disraeli, Whitwell Elwin, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, Eliza Lynn Linton, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Bryan Waller Procter, Henry E. Rawlins, Sir James Emerson Tennent, and James Whiteside.

Persons represented by 5 or more pieces:

- Althaus, Julius (1883-1900) physician. 7 autograph letters to John Forster dated 1871-1873. HM 52443-52449
- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward Robert, 1st Earl Lytton (1831-1891) statesman and poet. 1 manuscript dedication to John Forster from Poems by Owen Meredith, 1894. Dated 1857. HM 52455 6 autograph letters to Eliza Ann (Crosbie) Colburn Forster dated 1860-1880. HM 52456-52461
- Carlyle, Thomas (1795-1881) essayist and historian. 11 letters to John Forster dated 1847-1876. HM 52464-52474
- Cooper, Anthony Ashley, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885) philanthropist. 5 autograph letters to Eliza Ann (Crosbie) Colburn Forster dated 1869-1881. HM 52477-52481
- Rawlins, Henry E. personal friend and employee. 2 manuscripts, one compilation of extracts of letters of condolence to Mrs. Forster on the occasion of John Forster's death, and one memoir of John Forster. HM 52545-52546 5 autograph letters to Whitwell Elwin (Forster's biographer) dated 1876-1880. HM 52547-52551

Some notable items include:

- Crosbie, Fanny. To Whitwell Elwin, 1893, Apr. 22. Letter covers the controversy over authorship of Life of Strafford between John Forster and Robert Browning following Forster's death. HM 52487
- Elwin, Whitwell. To Eliza Ann (Crosbie) Colburn Forster, 1879. Discusses the controversy concerning authorship of Life of Strafford between John Forster and Robert Browning following Forster's death. HM 52496
- Bulwer-Lytton, Edward Robert, 1st Earl Lytton. Dedication to John Forster, dated 1857. Printed poems with autograph corrections in the hand of John Forster. HM 52455
- Forster, John. A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage, June, 1827. A contemporary copy of the first elaborate paper written by John Forster. Written at the age of 15 (see biographical note). HM 52506
- Whiteside, James. Journal: extract. Recounts the death of John Forster from the point of view of an old friend. HM 52568

Mostly letters. Primarily autograph, but with many contemporary copies. Also includes 10 manuscripts, and a large amount of genealogical material. Papers in good condition (three requiring repair).

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the [Huntington Library's Online Catalog](#).

Subjects

Forster, Eliza.

Forster, John, 1812-1876.

Authors -- 19th century -- Correspondence.

Authors, English -- 19th century -- Correspondence.

Editors -- Great Britain -- Correspondence.

Forms/Genres

Letters (correspondence) -- 19th century.

Manuscripts -- 19th century.

Alternate Authors

Althaus, Julius, 1833-1900.

Browning, Robert Barrett, 1846-1912.

Carlyle, Thomas, 1795-1881.

Coleridge, John Duke Coleridge, Baron, 1820-1894.

Cornwall, Barry, 1787-1874.

Crosbie, Fanny.

Dickens, Charles, 1812-1870.

Disraeli, Benjamin, 1804-1881.

Elwin, Whitwell, 1816-1900.

Forster, Eliza.

Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, 1810-1865.

Linton, E. Lynn (Elizabeth Lynn), 1822-1898.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, 1807-1882.

Lytton, Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, Earl of, 1831-1891.

Rawlins, Henry E.

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of, 1801-1885.

Tennent, James Emerson, Sir, 1804-1869.

Whiteside, James, 1804-1876.

Box 1

Althaus-Forster

Box 2

Frith-Worth; Anonymous; Ephemera