English letter-writing:
Teaching history of English by research

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Options in history of English
- Introduction to Old English (10 credits, 2nd year)
- Introduction to Middle English (10 credits, 2nd year)
- Modern English Language (1500-present)
  (20 credits, final year)
- Editing of two letters + linguistic commentary
  is significant component in the ModE course:
  - 1/11 lectures
  - 2/10 tutorials, including library visit
  - 30% of marks

Mary Hamilton papers
John Rylands Library

The Library

The Library
Mary Hamilton Papers

- Family and friends
  - Mary Hamilton (1756-1816), courtier and diarist
  - Old aristocratic family of military/political background
  - 1777-1782, governess to George III's daughters
  - 1783-1785, London, friends with the Bluestocking circle
  - 1785, married John Dickenson; daughter Louisa b.1787

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Mary Hamilton Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>1743-1826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td>3 series, 2466 items</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correspondence (1743-1826): 22 sub-series (+53), 2474 items</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diaries (1776-1797): 16 autograph diaries</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Manuscript volumes (c. 1779-c. 1791): 6 volumes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ref</td>
<td>GB 153 HAM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Held at</td>
<td>The University of Manchester, The John Rylands University Library</td>
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</tbody>
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Project ‘Image to Text’

- David Denison and Nuria Yáñez-Bouza
- Concerned (mainly) with Mary Hamilton Papers as digitised in high-quality photos
- All existing images now freely available from JRL
  - But many letters hard to decipher
  - One aim: make material easily accessible
  - www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/image-to-text/

- Research-based teaching project from the start
  - Students at Manchester (undergraduate, then MA too)
  - Students at Vigo (undergraduate and MA)
  - Students at Uppsala (MA)
  - + …?
- Our students have session at Library with archivist, Fran Baker, who shows sample letters 17C-21C
  - History of postal systems, letter-writing constraints and conventions, problems of archiving email etc.
- Small groups have informal go at transcription

- Over several weeks, each student edits two letters in original spelling and layout, with tags from
  - XML = eXtensible Markup Language
  - TEI = Text Encoding Initiative
  - Machine-independent international standards
    - We minimise purely technical demands.
    - Use modest subset of TEI guidelines (4 sides A4) for mark-up – list updated if new problems encountered
    - Leave complex XML codes (e.g. for hyphenation) and TEI header to be added by research assistant

- Research assistant processes files, then all(!) three project members check them
  - Sometimes obsessively!
  - So far 230 letters = 122k text words
Purpose of transliterations
- For students
  - Engage with genuine texts some 200 years old
  - Solve puzzles in letters from knowledge of history of English language, plus reference works, etc.
- Learn language history from examples found in letters
- For others (historians, literary scholars, public, ...)
  - Convenient rendition of historical documents which are often hard to read, sometimes hard to understand
  - Reliable text in standard format
  - Indexing of people, places, etc.

Example letter
- Note treatment of
  - page layout, lineation and underline, superscript, etc.
  - words broken at end of line
  - abbreviations
  - corrections, additions, deletions, gaps
  - long-s
  - notes
- Website sets transliteration side by side with original.
- Letter from Queen Charlotte to Mary Hamilton, HAM/1/1/2/2 – visit project website to view.

Representation of text
- Show long-s? If so, how?
- Yes, using Unicode long-s character <ſ>:
  - paſsion, Miſs, etc.
- Good for TEI compliance ✓
- Screen character lacks descender (except when italicised paſsion, Miſs!) and sometimes has crossbar.
- ‘Latin small letter esh’ <ʃ> looks much better:
  - paʃsion, Miʃs
  - but non-compliant! ×

TEI and XML

Comma?
Physical vs. logical layout

- Desire for side-by-side display suggests
- Preserve page- and column-breaks
- Preserve line-breaks
- Keep all blocks of text together that appear on same page of original
- But then, what to do with
  - address panel written in middle of page?
  - insertions squeezed into any available space?
  - blocks of text written at 90° or upside-down or ‘crossed’?

Layout problems

- Address is on page of letter (no envelopes then); when unfolded, address appears in centre of page.
- Should address panel interrupt XML text or not?
  - Eventual pragmatic decision: only if clean break in letter content with no text on both sides of address
- Always a compromise between
  - rearranging all blocks of text on a single page in logical order – letter content, postscripts, address, insertions at side, etc. – and
  - guiding reader to relevant parts in handwritten original

Representation of text

- Correct or modernise spelling?
- Our choice: keep original spelling throughout.
  - If spelling differs from present-day standard, leave unmarked if current at the time (as shown in OED).
  - Otherwise mark obvious slips or idiosyncrasies for correction – with on-screen pop-up.
- But eventual linguistic tagging and parsing may require a different normalisation.

Plain text version

- For users such as linguists who want content only without reference to handwritten original
  - Text rearranged to maximise continuity
  - Corrections, unclear text, recombined broken words silently included
  - No long-s or macrons, but otherwise original spelling
  - Barely any mark-up: only filename, change of hand, discontinuity, gap (these tags within carets, not XML)
  - Users advised to check examples against XML text

Verb morphology
Past tenses

but you was so long in answering (HAM/1/5/2/17)
poor Dutches of Athol writ me a very melancholy letter (HAM/1/7/12/7)
We got home safe -- eat a good Supper & went to bed (HAM/1/2/49)
I was at two Concerts, [...] at which latter, Mr. Braham and Madame Catalani sung (HAM/1/4/3/28)
the little boy [...] run to Mrs. Delany and told her that he had seen a great many Kings (HAM/1/3/7)

Past participles

or have you chose to imagine that you no longer interest me (HAM/1/5/1/14)
I was drove to Town by a Pain in face (HAM/1/15/1/17)
somebody had wrote to Mr. Hamilton (HAM/1/4/2/25)
• shook, forgot, etc.

Miscellaneous inflections

Lady Elizabeth Archer dont intend leaveing this Place till the middle of Nov" (HAM/1/7/12/4)
it was the best thing and the properest he could do (HAM/1/5/2/20)

Word class

they were much pleased (HAM/1/10/1/20)
however there are such various attractions beside (HAM/1/4/3/27)
he is rather better but looks deplorably (HAM/1/5/1/14)
I shou’d think myself unworthy the constant attachment & friendship I have experienced from you & M'. Dickenson were I silent upon the character of your Cousin (HAM/1/4/1/34)

Syntax

to show you how much I am desirous to repair this my former omission (HAM/1/3/2/4)
all the little Murray’s have had the Measles, except William -- Lord and Lady Stormont wish’d much that he shou’d have them, because he is going to Westminster School -- but he did not catch them tho’ he try’d for it (HAM/1/4/3/7)
I will send her a long letter the first opportunity (HAM/1/3/2/9)
Neg. imperative, interrogative

but then I conjure you keep me not in ignorance in any thing relative to you (HAM/1/5/2/10)
let me hear next post -- fail not (HAM/1/5/2/12)
Pray don’t let my long Silence prevent your writing to me soon. (HAM/1/4/3/15)
you do not mention London, my dear, do not you mean to come, or only in the Spring? (HAM/1/5/1/9)
“Did not I ask you before where you got this Note” (HAM/1/2/45)
is not that rather too late a period (HAM/1/4/1/7)
but don’t you think it a punishment [...] ? (HAM/1/5/2/13)

No progressive passive

• Not yet found in collection: “NP is being Ved
There is a trial preparing for me -- a separation from my beloved Sister (HAM/1/5/1/8)
A Road is now making along this Valley which will be nearly flat all the way from here to Exeter (HAM/1/2/45)
a high sort of parapet [...] which is now constructing (HAM/1/2/57)
The Theatre is rebuilding (HAM/1/4/3/27)

Perfect

Lady Warwick is come (HAM/1/1/2/3)
My Brother is gone abroad for a year (HAM/1/5/1/36)
I have had the comfort of seeing my Husband return in good health at a time when by the wind I concluded he was sail’d to Torbay (HAM/1/5/2/16)
change of air & place always agrees with me & I was grown quite fat & rosy (HAM/1/5/1/40)

Perfect

It rains so hard that I fear the Weather is broke & then we cannot go to Exeter (HAM/1/2/45)
I have now passed 3 times thro this beautiful Country & am become pretty well aquainted with it (HAM/1/2/53)
I am sorry, it has not been in my power before now, to have answer’d Your last (HAM/1/5/1/12)

Grammaticalisation

but I cannot help now my Dear Madam giving you the trouble of this seeing in the news papers, Prince Alfrede has been dangerously ill, tho I hope in god by this time his Royal Highness is better and I hope will soon get well (HAM/1/7/12/10)
• Structure unclear, but probably
  […] giving you the trouble of this, seeing in the news papers […]
• Bridge context for seeing between literal ‘I having seen’ and grammaticalised ‘since, because’?

Lexis and semantics
You must my dear sister be sensible that in this affair I wish to be guided by the best motives (HAM/1/3/2/9)

Mrs Port’s visit is rather a bad & hurrying thing for poor Mrs D. (HAM/1/15/1/12)

Brooks Ball was at the Opera -- magnificent they said, but not pleasant as the crowd was amazing (HAM/1/15/1/36)

• postdates OED sense 1 'Causing distraction, consternation, confusion, dismay; stupefying, terrifying, dreadful'

We then went to see Mr. Granger's Garden which adjoins the Castle as is truly one of the Lions at Exeter (HAM/1/2/49)

and to take charge of his daughters […] and I trust she will continue to shine in that with the addition of being as good a Mother in law ['stepmother'] (HAM/1/5/2/19)

the World seems so involved in trouble and perplexity all over the face of the globe that it is wonderfull and nothing can account for it but that the Decrees of Providence are fullfilling in a way to high for us to understand (HAM/1/5/2/20)

she wished very much to write to you but I thought it more prudent to check her in that & insisted upon being her Secretary (HAM/1/5/2/3)

Foreign or not?

I was appointed Lectrice to the society and every morning read a French Drama or story of some kind, loud to a very attentive audience, from which I generally drew tears, for the choice of the lecture being left to me, you may imagine it was of a serious or affecting nature (HAM/1/15/1/17)

"lectrice" "lecture" "foreign" "fr" "sorciere"

How foreign? How incorrect?

inshort it has broke into all my plans of occupation & has unhinged me quite -- I feel dissœuvrée dissipated, without an object or a pursuit which is worse than death to me (HAM/1/15/1/10)

"desœuvrée" "désœuvrée"
Correct the text?
There are a set of Savages that are employed in making the new Road who are Strangers & earn prodigious Wages & live in on extraordinary eating raw bacon & undressed meat & drinking such Quantities of liquor as is scarce credible (HAM/1/2/47)
• a set a savages: should we correct to a set of savages?
• No: OED doesn’t treat it as form of of but as form in its own right, exactly as here on page

Correct reading?
Since my arrival here I have been in a bit of a passion but as I am quiet now I will endeavour with Composure to tell you that there is not a Soul in this town who ever heard of Oakford -- I have been to the post Office -- Never heard of the place -- I have spoken to ??? in the street -- knew no such place -- The Landlord says he has a post Boy who must know it but he will not return till later so here have I been fuming & admiring all my Relations as the most discreet sensible people in the World -- to invite me to come 200 miles to pay them a visit to direct me to go to Town & from there to take a Post Chaise & not know where to direct the Driver to direct his horse (HAM/1/2/43)

Other letter collections
• Gunmen? Gentlemen? Yeomen?
• Gave up and just put <gap>
• Gemmen = vulgar pronunciation of gentlemen [OED]

Of for have
• Unstressed have (‘ve) and unstressed of are homophones: [əv]
• of/have confusion in some spoken English, especially where have would be infinitive in irrealis clause:

Dorothy We had a hedgehog last year, I haven’t seen them this winter er you know since
Unknown speaker Yeah, something might of happened to them (INC)

Of for have
• Mary Hamilton to Fanny Burney (1789) (HAM/1/6/5/2)

• Online catalogue entry quotes letter as containing the words “she ‘certainly we have died”
• Of a broken heart ...”. (p.c. Marianne Hundt)
Of for have

Had I known of your illness I should not of written in such fiery phrase in my first Letter. (1819 Keats)
I never could of thought that force Could turn affection in its course. (1796 OED)
I would of gone Long before this but I still expected Letters from you as I wrote often to you. (1774 CORIECOR)
I should be very happy to of seen mrs. Orford at Leek (1774 Corpus of 18C Prose)
the servant to the old Lady I sho--ld not of thought of after what had past, but I wonder at no_thing (1773 ibid.)

Some course evaluations

- I think one of the things I most valued about this unit was the fact that we got to work with real 18th century letters and it was so exciting as we never had had this opportunity. (2013)
- The Mary Hamilton letter editing was really interesting, as was the opportunity to visit the Deansgate library and see original letters. It helped to contextualise the whole course unit; studying the history of the language is much more engaging when you can see original examples of it instead of just examples from textbooks or online resources. (2015)
- As strange as it may sound, even the assessment is something new and exciting – the chance to work with modern English manuscripts is incredible [...]! Easily my favourite module from my entire degree! (2016)

Acknowledgements

- Nuria Yáñez-Bouza (joint project director)
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- Lisa Crawley (archivist for Hamilton Papers)
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- various expert advisers on XML, TEI, XSL and CSS, eighteenth-century London, sea silk, ...

JSPS Fellowship

- I gratefully acknowledge funding from the JSPS Invitation Fellowship Programme for Research in Japan (short term)
  which has made this lecture possible
- and I warmly thank Professor Fujio Nakamura for organising the JSPS application and resultant visit.

Last slide!

- Image to Text project website: www.projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/image-to-text/
- This presentation can be downloaded from http://tinyurl.com/DD-download
- Comments welcome!

Domo arigato – Thank you