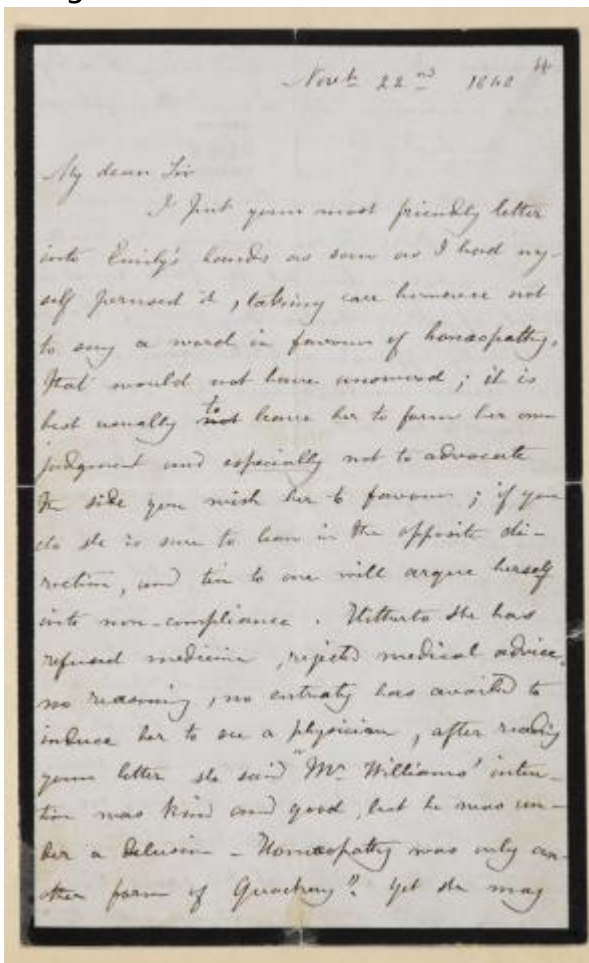


Recently discovered Charlotte Brontë letters saved for the nation

12 December 2012

The Brontë Society is today celebrating the acquisition of a rare collection of important Charlotte Brontë letters which will now return to the writer's home in Haworth, West Yorkshire, now the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

Image



Letter from Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey

The letters, which went under the hammer at Sotheby's in London on Wednesday 12 December, were previously in a private collection. They were expected to fetch between £100,000 - £150,000, though in the end sold for £185,000. The Society was able to acquire the letters thanks to support of £198,450 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF), the UK's fund of last resort for saving the nation's most important heritage at risk.

Ann Dinsdale, Collections Manager, Brontë Parsonage Museum, said: "These are amongst the most significant Brontë letters to come to light in decades. They belong in Haworth and we are delighted that both scholars and members of the public will now have the opportunity to study and enjoy them, either here at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, or through our on-line resources."

Jenny Abramsky, Chair of NHMF, said: "This is marvellous news. Charlotte Brontë's outstanding contribution to British literature puts her at the centre of the UK's literary landscape. The National Heritage Memorial Fund was set up to save the UK's most important heritage and therefore trustees felt it was vital to support the Brontë Parsonage in its endeavour to secure these rare letters for future generations to enjoy."

The collection consists of six letters written by Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, her closest friend. Their lifelong friendship began in 1831 when they both became pupils at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, near Mirfield. After leaving school in 1832, the two friends wrote to each other regularly and it is thanks to Ellen that Charlotte's letters, upon which so much of Brontë scholarship is based, have survived.

These letters were amongst approximately 350 which Ellen loaned to Elizabeth Gaskell during her research for *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), and which Gaskell considered to be important enough to quote from in the biography. The letters have been incorporated in a first edition copy of Gaskell's two-volume biography, close to the printed texts. Together, the letters chart the friendship between the two women, the first having been written on 18 October 1832, shortly after their schooldays ended, and the final letter, written to Ellen's sister on 28 December 1854, shortly before Charlotte's death in the following March.

Scholars have not had access to the original letters and have been forced to base their texts on inaccurate transcripts. In every case, the letters do not correspond exactly with the published versions. Their rediscovery now will allow corrections to be made to the imperfect versions previously published.

Further information

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