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Guide to the

Joseph Johnson Letterbook

1795-1810

Pforz MS

Summary

Creator: Johnson, Joseph, 1738-1809

Title: Joseph Johnson Letterbook

Date: 1795-1810

Size: ca. 240 items, Contemporary vellum lettered in ink (faintly) on spine; ca. 240 items, Contemporary vellum lettered in ink (faintly) on spine

Source: Purchased from Pickering and Chatto, Ltd., 1995.

Abstract: Copies of about 240 outgoing letters from the bookseller and publisher Joseph Johnson (in his own hand, and by copyists) to various individuals, including many of the writers he published.

Conditions Governing Access:

Access to the collection is restricted to qualified scholars and researchers through the Office of Special Collections, Room 316.

Preferred citation: Joseph Johnson Letterbook, Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle, The New York Public Library Requests for reproduction and/or permission to quote must be made in writing to the Curator.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Machine-readable finding aid created by . Machine-readable finding aid created by .

Creator History

Joseph Johnson was born near Liverpool in 1738. He came to London in 1752, when he was fourteen, and became apprenticed to George Keith, a bookseller. Between 1760 and 1765, he had several bookshops of his own before he formed partnerships first with Benjamin Davenport, then with John Payne, in Paternoster Row. After a fire destroyed his and Payne's business in 1770, he opened a new shop in St. Paul's Churchyard, where he remained for the next thirty-nine years.

During the 1760s, Johnson became friends with a number of people who would influence his thinking and whose writings he would later publish, among them John Aikin, George Fordyce, Henry Fuseli, and Joseph Priestley. In part because of Priestley's influence, Johnson, reared a Baptist, became a Unitarian, and in 1774 was a co-founder, with Theophilus Lindsey, of the Essex Street Chapel, the first Unitarian place of worship in England.

With the establishment of his own shop in 1770, Johnson became known as an advocate of publishing inexpensive books, in order to create as wide a readership as possible for them. From the early 1770s until shortly before his death in 1809, he held weekly dinners for the authors he published, and is credited for bringing together many of the leading intellectuals of his time. Frequent guests included Fuseli, Priestley, William Godwin, John Aikin, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and John Horne Tooke.

In 1788, Johnson and his friend Thomas Christie founded the *Analytical Review*, a liberal and Unitarian periodical that one of his biographers has described as "as accurate a reflection of the thought of English liberalism in the 1790s as we have." During its ten-year run, the *Review* published articles by Henry Fuseli, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays, among many others. In 1796, Johnson also participated in the founding and production of the Dissenting periodical, the *Monthly Magazine*, whose contributors included John Aikin and Anna Letitia Barbauld.

Johnson's continuing interest in progressive thought in those years is also reflected by his publication of such works as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794), and Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791). The 1790s, however, were also a decade of increasing political conservatism in England, in which publishers and booksellers came under increasing scrutiny for their production of allegedly seditious material. In 1798, Johnson was charged with selling a controversial pamphlet by Gilbert Wakefield, and sentenced in January 1799 to six months in prison. A chronic sufferer of asthma, Johnson's condition worsened during his imprisonment; he never completely regained his health.

Partly because of his imprisonment, partly owing to changes in the political climate, and in part because of the growth of large publishing houses in the early 1800s, Johnson's business suffered after 1800; after another fire damaged his shop in 1806, he went into semi-retirement. He died in December 1809, at age 71.

Scope and Content Note

The letterbook contains about 240 letters from Johnson (and a few from his grandnephew, John Miles, Johnson's business associate in later years and the executor of his estate) written between September 1795 and July 1810. Some are in Johnson's own hand; others are the work of copyists. The correspondence is primarily of a business nature; however, since many of the writers Johnson published were also his friends, a number of these letters are personal in tone as well. Notable recipients include Joseph Priestley, Charles Wollstonecraft, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan), Maria Edgeworth, and Erasmus Darwin.

Key Terms

Subjects

Authors and publishers -- Great Britain -- 18th century
Book industries and trade -- Great Britain -- 18th century
Booksellers and book trade -- Great Britain -- England -- London, 18th century
Booksellers and bookselling -- Great Britain -- 18th century
Publishers and publishing -- Great Britain -- 18th century

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Letterbooks -- Great Britain -- London

Occupations

Publishers -- Great Britain -- London

Names

Johnson, Joseph, 1738-1809
Arden, Thomas S., -1805
Ballantyne, James
Barlas, William
Baynes, R.
Beddoes, Thomas, 1760-1808
Bell, John, approximately 1736-1806
Belsham, Thomas, 1750-1829
Carr, John, Sir, 1772-1832
Conder, Thomas, 1746 or 7-1831
Cooper, Thomas, 1759-1839
Cottle, Joseph, 1770-1853
Coxe, Tench, 1755-1824
Darwin, Erasmus, 1731-1802
Davy, Humphry, Sir, 1778-1829
Denman, Thomas, 1733-1815
Devonshire, Elizabeth Cavendish, Duchess of, 1758-1824
Dobson, Thomas, 1751-1823
Dugdale, Bennet
Edgeworth, Maria, 1768-1849
Edgeworth, Richard Lovell, 1744-1817
Fellows, John, 1759-1844
Hartley, David, approximately 1731-1813
Hayley, William, 1745-1820
Hollis, John, 1757-1824
Hutchinson, Benjamin, 1729?-1804
Leslie, John, Sir, 1766-1832
Longman, Thomas Norton, 1771-1842
Madison, James, 1751-1836
Miller, Samuel, 1769-1850
Morgan, Lady (Sydney), 1783-1859
Parr, Bartholomew, 1750-1810
Priestley, Joseph, 1733-1804
Seagrave, J.
Skrimshire, F. (Fenwick), 1774 or 1775-1855
Smith, Charlotte, 1749-1806
Sullivan, William, 1774-1839
Turton, William, 1762-1835
Wollstonecraft, Charles
D. and A. Cowan
Gilbert and Hodges
K. E. Mercier and Co
Lackington, Allen and Co.

Manners and Miller
Murray and Cochrane
Murray and Highley
Oxenham and Company
T. & J. Swords (Firm)

Container List

Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1795 Sept.
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1795 Sept. 25
Letter : to Maria Edgeworth 1795 Oct. 5
Letter : to Charles Wollstonecraft 1795 Nov. 1
Letter : to Maria Edgeworth 1795 Oct. 5
Letter : to Charles Wollstonecraft 1795 Nov. 1
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1795 Nov. 3
Letter : to "Revd. Maurice" 1796 Jan. 8
Letter : to Erasmus Darwin 1796 Jan. 8
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1796 Jan. 15
Letter : to "Mr. Fauche," Hamburg 1796 June 10
Letter : to "Mr. Fellows," New York 1796 June 18
Letter : to "Lieutenant Moor," Bombay 1796 June 18
Letter : to A. L. Landry 1796 June 20
Letter : to "Mr. Fauche," Hamburg 1796 July 5
Letter : to Thomas Cooper 1796 Aug. 5
Letter : to W. Russell 1796 Aug. 24
Letter : to [Joseph Priestley] 1796 Aug. 24
Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1796 Aug. 24
Letter : to Messrs. Murray and Cochrane 1796 Sept. 25
Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1796 Oct. 10
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1796 Oct. 12
Letter : to "Mr. MundellPrinter," Edinburgh 1796 Oct. 22
Letter : to Charles Wollstonecraft 1796 Nov. 15
Letter : to Sir B. Hammet 1796 Nov. 25
Letter : to [Sir B. Hammet] 1797 Feb. 11
Letter : to Messrs. Morrison, Perth 1796 Nov. 26
Letter : to [Messrs. Morrison], [Perth] 1796 Dec. 7
Letter : to Messrs. Murray and Cochrane 1797 Jan. 23
Letter : to W. Remnant 1797 Feb. 23
Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1797 June 20
Letter : to "Extract of a letter from A. R. Robinson," 1797 June 27
Letter : to "Sir" 1797 July 18
Letter : to Charles Wollstonecraft 1797 July 15
Letter : to Ralph Mather, Merch't., Philadelphia 1797 July 15
Letter : to Messrs. Rogers and Berry, New York 1797 July 16
Letter : to Arthur Cooper, Merchant, St. Croix 1797 July 17
Letter : to W. Remnant, Hamburg 1797 Aug. 11
Letter : to Sir B. Hammet 1797 Dec. 14

Letter : to Mr. B. Hutchinson 1797 Sept. 25
Letter : to Isaac Brunson, New York 1797 Dec. 16
Letter : to "Sir" [Johnson's landlord] 1797 Oct. 20
Letter : to "Dr. Darwin to Mr. Smith, New York" n.d.
Letter : to R. L. Edgeworth 1799 Feb. 18
Letter : to [R. L. Edgeworth] 1799 [Feb. 19, ?
Letter : to [R. L. Edgeworth] n.d.
Letter : to Erasmus Darwin 1799 Apr. 15
Letter : to John Higginson 1799 Feb. 13
Letter : to Tench Coxe, Philadelphia 1799 July 12
Letter : to W. D. Boardman, New York 1799 July 12
Letter : to Ralph Mather, Philadelphia 1799 July 15
Letter : to Arthur Cooper, St. Croix 1799 July 13
Letter : to W. Kendrick 1799 July 17
Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1799 July 17
Letter : to Erasmus Darwin, Derby 1799 July 20
Letter : to David Hartley, Bath 1799 July 22
Letter : to Ballard Beckford Nembhard, Kingston, Jamaica 1799 July 23
Letter : to Mr. Holloway 1799 July 23
Letter : to John Fellows, New York 1799 Sept. 2
Letter : to John David Macbride, Exmouth 1799 Sept. 9
Letter : to J. Watson, Edinburgh 1799 Oct. 11
Letter : to Erasmus Darwin 1799 Oct.
Letter : to Mrs. Stedman, Tiverton 1799 Oct. 25
Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1800 Feb. 5
Letter : to Oxenham and Co., Exeter 1800 Feb. 18
Letter : to Mr. Newcome 1800 Feb. 24
Letter : to Humphry Davy 1800 Feb. 27
Letter : to Oxenham and Co., Exeter 1800 Mar. 10
Letter : to Murray and Highley 1800 Mar. 10
Letter : to Oxenham and Co. 1800 Mar. 17
Letter : to Dr. [Thomas] Beddoes 1800 Mar. 28
Letter : to K. E. Mercier and Co., Dublin 1800 Apr. 4
Letter : to E. Jones, Berwick [?] 1800 Apr. 4
Letter : to John Bell, Edinburgh 1800 May 24
Letter : to W. Eyres 1800 Jul. 7
Letter : to N. Dennis, Tiverton 1800 Jul. 9
Letter : to S. Freeman 1800 Aug. 3
Letter : to B. Dugdale, Dublin 1800 Oct. 13
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1800 Oct. 4
Letter : to J. Watson, Edinburgh 1800 Oct. 20

Letter : to Thomas Dobson, Philadelphia 1800 Nov. 21
Letter : to "Dr. Stokes" 1800 Dec. 10
Letter : to J. Peat, Dundee 1800 Dec. 15
Letter : to "Mr. Highley" 1800 Dec. 19
Letter : to "Mr. Highley" 1800 Dec. 31
Letter : to J. Todd 1801 Feb. 28
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1801 Mar. 10
Letter : to W. Henry, Manchester 1801 June 3
Letter : to Mr. Mayne, Star Office 1801 Aug. 20
Letter : to Executors of J. Murray 1801 Sep. 5
Letter : to Lt. C. Wollstonecraft, New York 1801 Sep. 5
Letter : to Executors of J. Murray 1801 Sep. 23
Letter : to The Duchess of Devonshire 1801 Oct. 14
Letter : to "Dear Sir" n.d.
Letter : to Mr. Perry, Liverpool 1801 Nov. 18
Letter : to B. Dugdale, Dublin 1801 Nov. 19
Letter : to Erasmus Darwin 1801 Dec. 11
Letter : to Constable Fairburn and Dickson 1801 Dec. 15
Letter : to Messrs. Ridge, Newark 1801 Dec. 22
Letter : to W. Hayley 1802 Jan. 4
Letter : to J. Seagrave 1802 May 12
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1802 May 12
Letter : to Eyres, Warrington 1802 May 17
Letter : to William Sullivan, Boston 1802 Sep. 2
Letter : to P. Holstyn, Rotterdam 1802 Sep. 3
Letter : to Lieut. C. Wollstonecraft 1802 Oct. 4
Letter : to W. Eyres 1802 Oct. 4
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1802 Sep. 20
Letter : to W. B. Johnson 1802 Oct. 10
Letter : to Arthur Cooper, St. Croix 1802 Oct. 28
Letter : to T. S. Arden, New York 1802 Dec. 4
Letter : to Arthur Cooper, St. Croix 1803 Jan. 4
Letter : to "Mr. Mannix, Atty.", Cork 1803 Jan. 21
Letter : to John Carr 1803 Feb. 2
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1803 Feb. 15
Letter : to E. Jones, Birmingham 1803 Feb. 22
Letter : to Dr. Denman 1803 Mar. 2
Letter : to M. E. Jac[k]son 1803 Mar. 25
Letter : to James Madison, Secretary of State, Washington 1803 Mar. 7
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1803 Apr. 13
Letter : to Dr. Stokes, Chesterfield 1803 May 17

Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1803 June 9
Letter : to Dr. [Fenwick] Skrimshire 1803 June 24
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1803 Jul. 6
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1803 Jul. 13
Letter : to W. Barlas, New York 1803 Jul. 15
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1803 Jul. 15
Letter : to Charlotte Smith 1803 Nov. 25
Letter : to Rev. Mr. [Thomas] Belsham 1803 Nov. 20
Letter : to Dr. [Fenwick] Skrimshire 1803 Dec. 9
Letter : to G. Cooper, St. Croix 1804 Jan. 3
Letter : to Joppe [?] Praetorius, Copenhagen 1804 Jan. 3
Letter : to Mr. T. S. Arden, New York 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to W. Barlas, New York 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to T. and J. Swords Books, New York 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to Joseph Priestley, Northumberland 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to Mr. T. Oram, New York 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to Mr. John Fellows, New York 1804 Feb. 24
Letter : to J. Grogan, Vine St., Piccadilly n.d.
Letter : to Jas. Ballantyne, Printer, Edinburgh 1804 Sep. 10
Letter : to Dr. Turton, Swansea 1804 Sep. 19
Letter : to Mrs. C. Smith 1804 Oct. 3
Letter : to John Hollis, Esq. 1804 Oct. 11
Letter : to James Edwards 1804 Oct. 13
Letter : to Mr. Conder 1804 Oct. 15
Letter : to Mr. Jas. Ballantyne 1804 Nov. 10
Letter : to Mr. Joseph Cottle 1804 Dec. 6
Letter : to E. J. Luscombe 1804 Dec. 14
Letter : to William Hayley 1805 Jan. 11
Letter : to Joshua Lace, Liverpool 1805 Mar. 12
Letter : to Dr. Parr, Exeter 1805 Mar. 15
Letter : to The Rev. Samuel Miller, New York 1805 Apr. 8
Letter : to William Austen, Boston 1805 Apr. 16
Letter : to Joseph Cottle, Bristol 1805 Apr. 19
Letter : to T. and J. Swords 1805 May 1
Letter : to William Barlas, New York 1805 May 1
Letter : to Dr. Parr, Exeter 1805 Jun. 7
Letter : to From William Cullen Brown to George Burgess (re JJ) 1805 Jun. 12
Letter : to Dr. Parr, Exeter 1805 Jun. 13
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1805 June 26
Letter : to Joseph Cottle, Bristol 1805 Apr. 9
Letter : to Reverend Symmons 1805 Apr. 9

Letter : to William Henry, Manchester 1805 Aug. 14
Letter : to Reverend Dr. Miller, New York 1805 Aug. 14
Letter : to Dr. Barton, Philadelphia 1805 Aug. 14
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1805 Sep. 21
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1805 Nov. 4
Letter : to Messrs. Lackington 1805 Dec. 7
Letter : to Joseph Priestley, Northumberland 1805 Dec. 9
Letter : to Mr. Longman 1806 April 9
Letter : to From R. Baynes to JJ 1806 Apr. 23
Letter : to "Reverend Sir" 1806 Apr. 25
Letter : to Thomas Wilkie 1806 Apr. 26
Letter : to Mr. Conder 1806 Apr. 26
Letter : to Mr. Eaton 1806 Apr. 26
Letter : to G. Eusa [?] 1806 July 21
Letter : to Messrs. Murray and Cochrane, Edinburgh 1807 Jan. 1
Letter : to Miss Hamilton 1807 Jan. 16
Letter : to Messrs. D. and A. Cowan, Edinburgh 1807 Jan. 19
Letter : to Messrs. Murray and Cochrane, Edinburgh 1807 Jan. 19
Letter : to Messrs. D. and A. Cowan, Edinburgh 1807 Jan. 26
Letter : to Miss Hamilton, Edinburgh 1807 Feb. 9
Letter : to Miss Wollstonecraft, Dublin 1807 Apr. 1
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Letter : to Mr. Belcher, Birmingham 1807 Jul. 25
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1807 Aug. 3
Letter : to Michael Jones, Lancaster 1807 Sep. 16
Letter : to Mr. Wilkinson, Globe Insurance Company 1808 Jan. 14
Letter : to Mr. Edgeworth 1808 Jan. 29
Letter : to James Weeks 1808 Mar. 30
Letter : to Rd. Sharpe, Esq., M.P. 1808 Mar. 21
Letter : to B. Crosby 1808 Oct. 3
Letter : to T. and J. Swords, New York 1808 Oct. 4
Letter : to "Extract of a letter to W. Hayley" 1809 Sep. 5
Letter : to Miss Sydney Owenson, Dublin 1810 Apr. 30
Letter : to John Leslie, Professor of Mathematics, University [of] Edinburgh
1810 Apr. 30
Letter : to Messrs. Gilbert and Hodges, Dublin 1810 May 7
Letter : to W. Hayley, Felpham 1810 May 7
Letter : to James McCartney, Lydd near Romney 1810 Jul. 25
Letter : to Manners Miller, Booksellers, Edinburgh 1810 Jul. 26
Letter : to Joseph Priestley 1805 Mar. 15
Letter : to Mr. Seagrave, Printer, Chichester 1803 Feb. 5
Letter : to Mr. Booth 1806 Mar. 13

Letter : to Miss [Sydney] Owenson, Dublin 1806 Apr. 5

Letter : [at back of volume, upside-down: some notes about printing] 1801 Nov.
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