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S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

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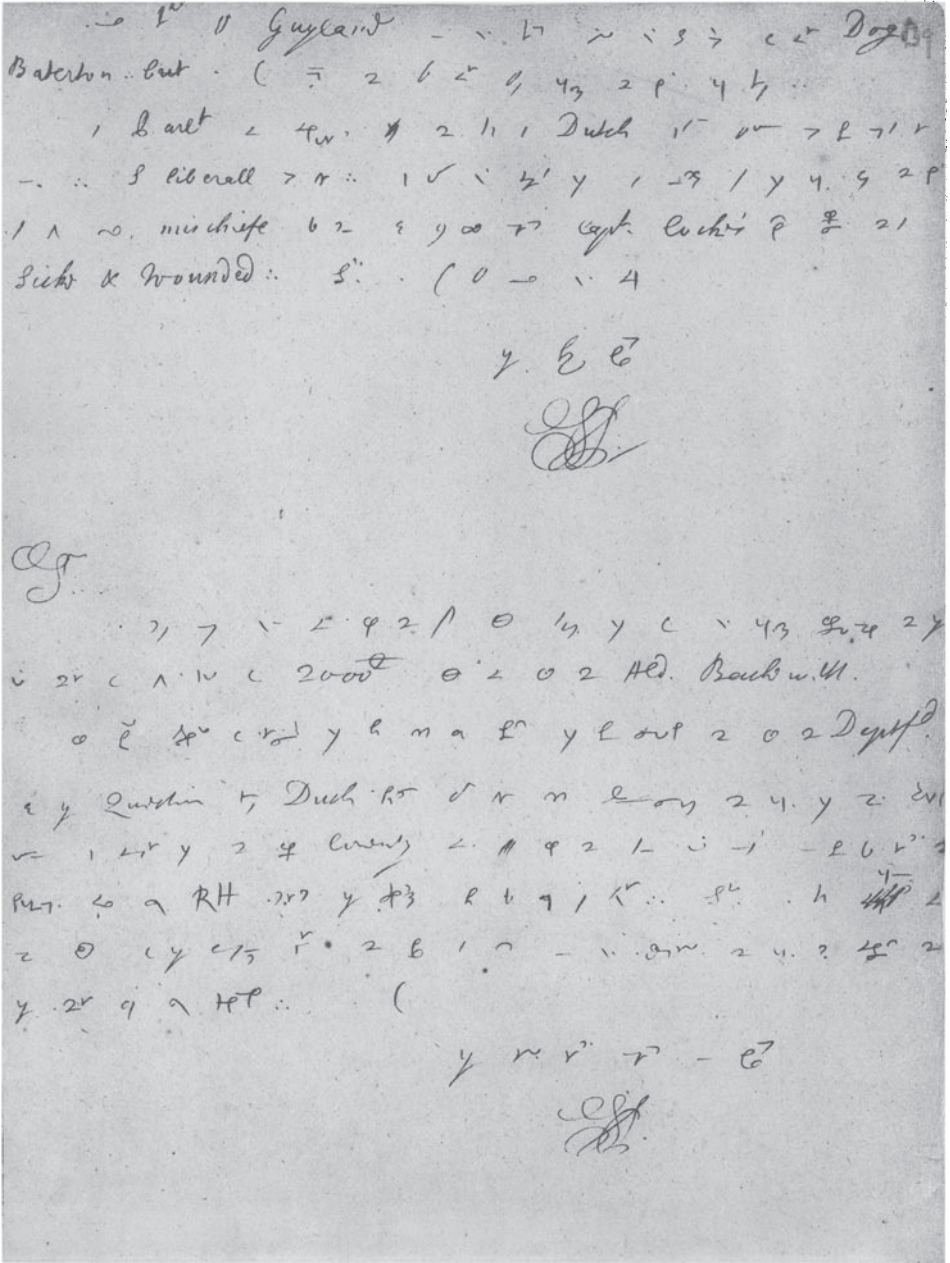
Frontmatter

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 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)



PHOTOGRAPH OF FOLIO 139

showing the conclusion of Letter IX and the whole of Letter X. The long-hand words *Guyland*, *Dog* and *Baterton* can be clearly seen.

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Frontmatter

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# SHORTHAND LETTERS OF SAMUEL PEPYS

From a volume entitled

*S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679*

Transcribed & edited by

EDWIN CHAPPELL

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Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

<i>A Page of the Shorthand</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>page vij</i>
<i>List of Works quoted</i>	xv
<i>Letters and Memoranda</i>	

NO.	FOL.	ADDRESSEE	DATE	page
1	110	Lord Sandwich	1664 Sept. 20	1
2	124	Mr Coventry	1664 Nov. 18	2
3	125-7	Mr Coventry	1664 Nov. 22	4
4	128-30	Mr Coventry	1664 Nov. 24	9
5	131	Mr Coventry	1664 Nov. 26	14
6	132	Mr Coventry	1664 Nov. 29	16
7	133	Col. Middleton	1664 Nov. 29	18
8	138	Lord Sandwich	1664 Dec. 3	20
9	138-9	Sir Wm. Penn	1664 Dec. ?	21
10	139	Mr Johnson	1664 Dec. 6	22
11	144	Lord Sandwich	1664/5 Jan. 7	23
12	154-5	Mr Coventry	1664/5 Feb. 9	24
13	156	Mr Christopher Pett	1664/5 Feb. 11	27
14	157	Mr Johnson	1664/5 Feb. 16	27
15	157	Lord Sandwich	1664/5 Feb. 18	28
16	160-1	Mr Coventry	1664/5 Mar. 2	29
17	166	Mr Coventry	1664/5 Mar. 10	33
18	166	Mr Sheldon	1664/5 Mar. 11	34
19	167	Mr Deane	1664/5 Mar. 14	35
20	168	Mr White	1664/5 Mar. 14	38
21	188	Lord Sandwich	1665 April 8	39
22	206	Mr Deane	1665 May 4	39
23	207	Mr Deane	1665 May 6	40
24	208	Mr Deane	1665 May 9	41
25	211	Mr Deane	1665 May 16	42

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978-1-107-58595-9 - Shorthand Letters of Samuel Pepys: From a Volume Entitled:  
S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

NO.	FOL.	ADDRESSEE	DATE	
26	215	Capt. Taylor	1665	May 20 <i>page</i> 43
27	223	Commissioner Pett	1665	June 16 44
28	226	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	June 27 46
29	230	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	July 15 48
30	237	Sir George Carteret	1665	Aug. 24 50
31	240	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	Sept. 28 52
32	241	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	Oct. 3 53
33	242-4	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	Oct. 5 54
34	251	Lord Sandwich	1665	Oct. 10 59
35	252-3	Lord Sandwich	1665	Oct. 12 62
36	254-5	The Duke of Albemarle	1665	Oct. 14 64
37	258-9	Sir George Carteret	1665	Oct. 14 66
38	263-4	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	Oct. 19 69
39	308	Lord Sandwich	1665	Nov. 25 72
40	328	Sir George Carteret	1665	Dec. 16 74
41	332	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665	Dec. 26 75
42	357	Lord Sandwich	1665/6	Jan. 9 76
43	361	Sir George Carteret	1665/6	Jan. 13 77
44	365	Sir Wm. Coventry	1665/6	Jan. 18 78
45	382	Sir Wm. Coventry	1666	June 8 79
46	385	Sir Wm. Coventry	1666	June 12 80
47	387	Sir Wm. Penn	1666	June 28 82
48	393	Sir Wm. Coventry	1666	July 9 83
49	401	Memorandum	1666	July 25 84
50	422	Mr Deane	1666	Dec. 1 85
51	422-3	Sir Wm. Coventry	1666	Dec. 6 86
52	447	Mr Lanyon	1666/7	Jan. 19 88
53	447	Commissioner Taylor	1666/7	Jan. 19 89
54	470	Mr Lanyon	1666/7	Mar. 21 90
55	491	Memorandum	1667	June 11 92
56	530	Sir Wm. Coventry	1668	Mar. 30 93

*Appendix*

57	748-9	Sir Leoline Jenkins	1676	July 24 94
----	-------	---------------------	------	------------

*Index*

97

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978-1-107-58595-9 - Shorthand Letters of Samuel Pepys: From a Volume Entitled:  
S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

It is by this time common knowledge that nearly all Samuel Pepys' books and manuscripts passed in 1724, after the death of his nephew John Jackson, into the keeping of Magdalene College, Cambridge. A few books, however, including five volumes of letters, remained in the private ownership of the Pepys-Cockerell family until 1931, when they were sold by auction. As the result of this sale, one of these volumes of letters, with the misleading title, *S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679*, came into the possession of the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum. It is a folio volume of 898 pages containing about 940 letters, memoranda, etc., of which 45 are wholly, and 11 partly in shorthand. It is hoped that eventually every one of these documents will be published, but as the editing of the whole 940 would have meant considerable delay, it was thought that the public demand would be better satisfied with a preliminary selection. Some of the longhand letters have already been printed, wholly or in part, in *Further Correspondence of Samuel Pepys 1662-1679*, edited by the late Dr J. R. Tanner. In his Introduction to that book, he makes the follow-

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ing remark: 'In making the selection printed in this volume, it has been necessary to omit a good many letters of a routine character, but the editor thinks he may claim that everything of historical or biographical importance has been included'. This of course was not intended to include the shorthand letters, which at that time had not been transcribed. It seemed therefore a natural proceeding to take Dr Tanner at his word, for the time being, and to supplement his selection with the transcribed shorthand letters in full, leaving only, what he considered, the less important longhand letters for publication at a later date. While it is believed to be true that the shorthand letters have not been transcribed, it must not be overlooked that their original longhand counterparts may still be in existence. This is known to be so in the case of three letters to Lord Sandwich concerning the Prize-Goods Scandal. (Nos. 34, 35, 39.) A few sentences from these letters are quoted by Mr F. R. Harris in his *Life of Edward Mountagu, first Earl of Sandwich*, and two of them are printed in full in the *Occasional Papers* of the Pepys Club. The longhand originals are in the possession of the present Earl of Sandwich.

Astonishment is often expressed that Pepys' Diary remained untranscribed for a hundred and twenty years after his death, but the extraordinary



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S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

want of curiosity that this denoted, is as nothing compared with that which allowed these letters to wait yet another hundred years after Pepys and his Diary had become household words, in spite of the fact that their existence was well known.

It is impossible to be consistent in spelling without modernising the longhand of the original, as several clerks, besides Pepys himself, held greatly diverging views on this matter, which seems to have been of very slight importance in the seventeenth century. There could be no question of imitating any one of these spellings for the transcription of the shorthand, and so the decision has been made to render the shorthand in modern spelling in Roman type, and the original longhand in the actual spelling in Italics, with the exception that contractions (e.g. *lre* for letter), initials of persons (e.g. Sir W. P. for Sir Wm. Penn) and perversions of place-names (e.g. Quinsborough for Königsberg) have been expanded and modernised. This has been done chiefly with a view of making the text comprehensible without irritating the reader by a plethora of foot-notes. For the same reason, where necessary an explanatory note precedes each letter.

One would like to think that it is unnecessary at this time to expose the old heresy that Pepys

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S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

wrote his Diary in a secret cipher, which one writer improved by the addition of the words 'of his own invention', but it seems necessary to state the truth yet once more.

A cipher is a system of secret writing that is intended to be unintelligible to all but those who hold the key and, with this end in view, it is only natural that the number of such persons should be very limited. A system of shorthand is a means of rapid writing, and has no aims at secrecy at all; on the contrary, its author is often a commercially minded person who wishes to sell as many copies of his work as possible. These two clearly differentiated objects should show the error made by interchanging the words 'cipher' and 'shorthand'. Pepys did not write his Diary or these letters in a cipher at all, but in a very popular system of shorthand, invented by Thomas Shelton.

This author seems to have produced a system about the year 1620, which was superseded in 1641 by an improved one with the name of *Tachygraphy*; this went through numerous editions, one being printed at the University Press, Cambridge, in 1645, the copy in the Pepysian Library being dated 1691. In an age when carbon copies and even copying-presses were unknown, there must have been a great demand for anything that would lighten the labour of writing, and a system that had

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Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

been in print for fifty years must have been known to as large a proportion of the clerical population of those days, as that to which Pitman's shorthand is to-day. It is definitely stated in the Diary that both Hewer and Sir Wm. Coventry were familiar with the system, so that it is quite contrary to the facts to describe it as a cipher. In 1820, the conditions were temporarily different. Shelton's works apparently did not give him immortality, so that when it was first decided to transcribe Pepys' Diary, 'deciphering' was a correct description of the process. When it was discovered later what the system was, and that there was a copy of it in the Pepysian Library, and many copies of it in the British Museum, it again became inaccurate to speak of 'deciphering', 'transcribing' being the correct word to describe what has been done to the present letters.

If *Tachygraphy* was an improvement on its author's previous system, as well as on other systems dating back to 1588, or even earlier, they must have been very poor systems indeed. Shelton may be entitled to the honour given to pioneers, but not on account of the intrinsic excellence of his shorthand. It has several defects: awkward forms, ambiguous signs and undue straggling. It consists of an alphabet of consonants and initial vowels. A final vowel is indicated by a dot in one of five

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Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

positions, and a medial vowel by the relative positions of the two consonants between which it occurs, such consonants being unjoined. After the alphabet has been learnt, there are lists of prefixes and suffixes, which have little or no connection with the alphabetical signs which they include (e.g. the alphabetical rendering of 'kl' is not only the arbitrary sign for 'it', but also for the suffix '-fication'). The learner's task concludes with a long list of arbitrary signs for common words that must be learnt by heart. A necessary sequel to writing shorthand is transcribing it, and in this respect Shelton gave his followers many puzzles to solve, and seems to glory in so doing, for when discussing the resemblance of characters, as in the 'kl' example above, he says: "The same Character sometimes standeth for two things: as for example, there is the same for *-ture* and *Christ*, *-ternal* and *which*, *mess-* and *what*, which is no hindrance (*but a help*)".

It is impossible to indicate the length of the vowels; *stripped* and *striped*, *behalf* and *behave*, *on one* and *own*, are indistinguishable. It is almost impossible to distinguish with certainty: *your* and *great*, *go* and *give*, *work* and *word*, *will* and *answer*, *breadth* and *width*, *they* and *not*, *thou though through* and *thought*, *present* and *promise*. Certain signs are almost laughable, such as those for *carpenter*,

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S. Pepys' Official Correspondence 1662-1679

Edited by Edwin Chappell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

*congratulate* and *reimbursed*, all of which could be written as quickly in longhand. It will be seen in the letters that Pepys often writes *carpenter* in longhand, in preference to the unwieldy shorthand. Finally, the punctuation is a difficulty. Pepys only uses one stop sign that has to do duty for all. It is used very sparingly and usually has the value of a full stop, commas being very seldom indicated.

From these remarks it is to be inferred that no claim is made for finality in the transcriptions which follow. Both words and punctuation may be wrong in places, but it is thought that in every letter there is sufficient beyond doubt to make the meaning clear. A few meaningless sentences have been included as giving the reader the best idea of certain corrupt passages and with the hope that suggestions will be made for their elucidation. A few words have baffled all attempts at transcription. In spite of some writers' references to Pepys' beautiful penmanship, the truth is that much of his handwriting is only with difficulty legible, so that in reading the letters, it must not be assumed that the longhand is not subject to revision, on the contrary the longhand has, if anything, caused more trouble than the shorthand.

The folio numbers refer to the pencilled pagination of the original.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

As the date of the first letter is 1664 Sept. 20 and of the last 1668 March 30, they all come within the Diary period. It seems most unlikely that anyone who has not read the Diary will read these letters, so that it should be unnecessary to give biographical notes of persons who have already been made familiar in its pages, such as Pepys' fellow members of the Navy Board.

The period covered is also roughly that of the Second Dutch War, to which there are many allusions. The subjects referred to are somewhat diverse. The supply of stores is perhaps the most frequent topic. Appointments, recommendations, hiring of ships, victualling, prize-goods and convoys receive considerable attention, and there are single references to: Prince Rupert's right to wear a standard; the excessive draught of the *Royal Katherine*; the revision of Deane's design for the *Rupert*; the Board's (or Pepys') reproof of Commissioner Pett in reply to his accusation about masts; the name of the most suitable person for the position of Surveyor-General of Victualling; an interview with a woman, an alleged trafficker in tickets; paper, pens, candles and fire for Commissioner Taylor; and lastly, the 'fowle' accusations of Mr Waltham against Mr Lanyon.

E. C.

Greenwich  
November 1932

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## LIST OF WORKS QUOTED

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