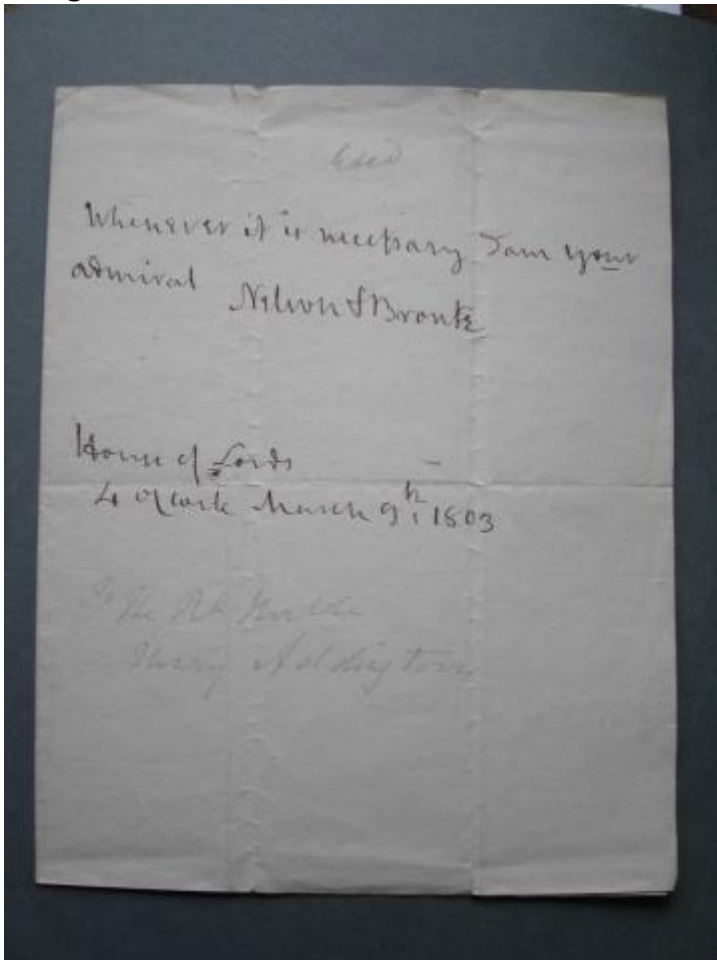


Prime Minister's papers saved for the nation

15 January 2008

Letters between British Prime Minister, Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth, and prominent political figures ranging from Lord Nelson to William Wilberforce to George III, have been saved for the nation, thanks to a generous grant of £1.6million from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF).

Image



Nelson letter

The approximately 9,000 papers and 50 volumes mainly cover the period up to 1824 when Addington was in office and politically active.

They were deposited by the 6th Viscount Sidmouth in the Devon County Council's Exeter-based Record Office in 1955, where they have been conserved and catalogued in detail.

The collection, known as the Sidmouth Papers, includes letters to and from other prominent people in national affairs of the time including George III, William Pitt (the younger), Nelson, Lord Grenville, Lord Liverpool, Lord Castlereagh, the Duke of Wellington and William Wilberforce.

Henry Addington was MP for Devizes and in addition to being Prime Minister between 1801 to 1804, he held the roles of Speaker of the House of Commons, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary.

The papers also include some family and personal correspondence, from the period 1772 to 1790, of Addington's father, Dr Anthony Addington MD, whose medical practice in London brought him into contact and close friendship with many politically prominent people. He treated William Pitt, 1st Earl of Chatham, in 1767, and George III in 1788.

Topics include the colonies, church matters, foreign affairs (including negotiations for the peace of Amiens), the repression of the Luddites and the Peterloo Massacre, Ireland and royalty.

Devon County Council's Executive Member for Culture, Cllr Sheila Hobden, said: "Henry Addington was a prominent participant in national affairs from 1789 to 1824, particularly as Prime Minister of the conservative pro-peace and financial retrenchment government of 1801-1804. "The papers of a prime minister are of national importance in themselves, and these have particular significance because they relate to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, a period which marked a turning point in British and European history. The collection came under particular scrutiny in 2005, with the celebration of the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar, and several of the Nelson letters were published in Colin White's new edition of the correspondence."

Carole Souter, Director of NHMF, said: "This unique archive contains a wealth of information. It gives a fascinating insight into the life of a British Prime Minister, and into the history of the United Kingdom. We're delighted this National Heritage Memorial Fund grant has helped ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy and learn from it."

The family, though not Devonian by birth, had a seat in Upottery, where the 1st Viscount spent much of his retirement.

Following the death of the 7th Viscount in January 2005, the correspondence was offered to the nation in lieu of inheritance tax. The market value of the collection has been estimated at over £3m, but part of this can be set against the tax

liability. The grant from NHMF, together with smaller contributions from Devon County Council, the Friends of Devon's Archives, and other bodies, will make it possible to complete the purchase.

This means that the collection's future at the Devon Record Office is secure, and that the correspondence will continue to be accessible to anyone interested in this important period in British history.

A full on-line catalogue is available on the Access to Archives website, www.a2a.org.uk.

The Devon Record Office holds other collections which complement the Addington papers, including those of the Drake family of Colyton (recently purchased with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund), which include the correspondence of Francis Drake, 1764-1821, who held diplomatic positions at Genoa and Munich during the Napoleonic Wars.

The letters are expected to arrive back in Devon in January 2008 once the full legal process of the sale is completed.

Notes to editors

Images of the documents are available. Please contact Janet.kipling@devon.gov.uk.

Further information

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