

INTRODUCTION

DESCRIPTION OF THE CALENDAR

This database presents a calendar of nearly 3000 letters by and to Matthew Prior, British poet and diplomat (1664–1721). The correspondence includes personal and official letters between Prior and 283 named correspondents. The manuscripts of these letters are scattered among thirty-seven repositories, including that of one private owner who prefers to remain anonymous. The single largest collection is that of the Marquess of Bath; it is preserved at Longleat House and Library. The Public Record Office (UK) and the British Library are the other major holders of Prior manuscripts, with the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, the Algemeen Rijksarchief, the London Metropolitan Archives (custodian of the Jersey Papers), and the Beinecke Library at Yale University all holding thirty-five or more Prior letters each.

Well over half of the letters (1,810) are in Prior's hand or the hands of his correspondents, others are letterbook copies or scribal copies. Less than half have ever been published. When we refer to publication, we mean publication in print and we make no attempt to cite publications in other forms. But it should be noted that there is a microfilm set of the Longleat manuscripts which is commercially available from Microform Imaging Ltd. According to WorldCat, six libraries hold relevant reels of this microfilm; but of those six, only three hold the most important reels, those of the Prior Papers. Relatively few of Prior's letters, then, are widely available in any form, and this calendar is, we hope, an important step in making available a rich collection of primary documents.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ENTRIES

The calendar entries follow a pattern of data presentation that identifies each letter by correspondent and date and leads the user to the location of the manuscripts of that letter. A "reading"

of one of them will explain the elements of the calendar:

1697.0703.Fa

P to WILLIAM BLATHWAYT

The Hague, [23 June]/3 July 1697.

Add. "mr Secretary Blathwayt."

End. "3 July 1697 From Mr. Prior."

MS. Miami U, Special Collections (orig.).

Pub. None known.

The entry is headed by an identifying sequence code, which is derived from the New Style date of the letter (here 3 July 1697) and follows the modern practice of beginning the New Year on 1 January, even though the archaic practice of beginning the New Year on 25 March was still used by some of Prior's contemporaries. This particular letter is the first (a) From Prior on that date. It is Addressed to "mr Secretary Blathwayt," who Endorsed it upon receipt with the notation "3 July 1697 From Mr. Prior." Because both Old Style dates (used in England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Protestant states of Germany) and New Style (used in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the Catholic states of Germany) were still in use during Prior's lifetime, we give both after identifying the place where the letter

was written (if known), in this case The Hague. If any part of the name or dateline is missing from the manuscript, we enclose the added element in square brackets, in this case the Old Style date. The manuscript of this letter is an original (as opposed to a copy kept by the writer in his own letterbook, for example [Ib. copy]), and it is located in the Special Collections of Miami University Libraries. There is no known Publication of this letter.

This entry is typical. Others could include additional information: identification of a language other than English in which a letter was written, a postmark if one survives, or an annotation if one is needed. Should a letter lack address or endorsement, that line will be omitted without comment. In the rare cases where a printing exists but the manuscript is lost, the MS. line will read "None recovered." For those letters already published, at least one printing is cited, the most complete from the most authoritative manuscript. Annotations will not summarize or elucidate the content of the letters except as needed to justify conjectured elements in the entry.

Unless we have reason to question our source documents, we respect their authority and do not use square brackets around data they *imply*. For example, letters surviving in letterbook copies rarely include the writer's signature, but they are assumed to have been composed by the letterbook's owner unless there is evidence to the contrary. Therefore when a letterbook copy is our source text, the sender's name is not put in square brackets. And in those few cases of lost manuscripts whose letters survive in print only, square brackets are used only if the editor of the printing used them or indicated that his identifications had been conjectured. Where square brackets are otherwise required, our rationale for the conjectured element is offered in an annotation that follows the Pub. line unless the bracketed element is justified by an unbracketed element of that same calendar entry, such as a date justified by the endorsement. Exceptions to this involve bracketed place names. If the correspondent wrote in his official capacity, we assume that he wrote from the city where he was stationed unless there is evidence to the contrary. If a

correspondent wrote several letters on one day and all but one include the same place name in the dateline, we assume that the other letter was written from that place as well. If a letter's content makes the place from where it was written clear—for example, "I am in Town"—we cite the evident place (in this example, London). In all these instances, the place name is bracketed but no rationale for identifying the place is offered.

While the spelling and punctuation of addresses and endorsements, which are placed within quotation marks, have been retained, archaic characters not found in available fonts during the many years over which the calendar was produced have been silently rendered only approximately, superscripts have been lowered to the line, lineation has not been preserved, and a terminal period has been placed at the end of each line. Prior is identified in the annotations by the single letter, capital P. Spellings of the names of his correspondents have been standardized in the identification line, as have those of place names. Both Old Style and New Style dates are given so that the

chronological sequence of the letters is as clear as possible. For the most part, calendar entries were entered into the database in chronological order; but approximately thirty letters posed particular difficulties in dating or identification of correspondent, and their entries were entered into the database after the other entries. When the calendar is browsed, the entries appear in the order in which they were input. However, when the calendar is searched by individual years, the entries appear in chronological order.

The abbreviations used by the various repositories in their shelf-marks are not expanded. Abbreviations devised by the compilers to identify the repositories themselves are defined in the Directory of Repositories, where the user will find contact information for the repositories (including email addresses and webpage URLs if available), a summary of the collections cited from each repository, and the statements of the repositories' permission to identify their holdings on this site.

The 283 named correspondents are briefly identified in the Directory of Correspondents. In the

Directory we use abbreviations to cite the most frequently used sources for biographical information, and a key to these abbreviations is provided. This key includes expansions of titles cited in abbreviated form in the calendar entries as well.

BROWSING AND SEARCHING THE CALENDAR

The browsing function for the calendar enables the user to view the calendar entries in groups of five letters at a time in the order in which the entries were input. The searching functions enable the user (1) to view the entries for individual years in chronological order, (2) to search for all the letters between Prior and any one of his correspondents, (3) to search for all the letters preserved at any one repository, (4) to search for any one letter by sequence code if the code is known, (5) and, further, to search by keyword in any of the other four searches described. In time we expect to provide an improved search function that will sort the letters at any one repository by the various collections represented. At this time, however, if users

first search by a particular repository, then consult the Directory of Repositories, find the abbreviations for the collections cited from that repository, and use those abbreviations as keywords to search for in the repository field, they will get lists further organized by collections.

Please note that some of the searches—by certain years (e.g. 1714), certain correspondents (e.g. Vernon), and certain repositories (the BL, Longleat, and the PRO)—may take several minutes to load. And secondary searches by keyword in a particular field cannot be further searched except by use of the user's browser's "Edit>Find" feature.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

Every known letter written by Prior or addressed to him is calendared, whether it is a personal missive, a diplomatic dispatch, a cryptic note, or a demand for payment. The only letters with his signature that are not calendared are the hundreds of official letters of the Board of Trade and Plantations written during

Prior's membership (1700-1707). Mary P. Clarke in "The Board of Trade at Work" (*The American Historical Review*, vol. 17, no. 1 [October, 1911] 17-43) has described the internal workings of the Board of Trade, including the process by which the Board's letters were drafted:

Whatever the business in hand every document went through three stages. First, the subject was considered and the substance of the letter or report agreed upon—a process which was sometimes adjourned from day to day and occupied the greater part of several sessions. At last the Board ordered the letter, outlining to the secretary the points which it was to involve. The actual composition fell to the secretary who presented a first draught to the Commissioners for inspection. If satisfactory it was "approved and ordered to be transcribed". It was then delivered to a clerk to be put into final form, and having been "transcribed fair" was presented to the Board again for signature (36-37).

As Clarke also explains, in 1696 the signatures of at least five members were required; in 1697 the number was reduced to four (20). Therefore, for the purposes

of this database, those letters bearing Prior's signature along with those of all the other members present when the letter was authorized are not considered part of his correspondence. Users interested in these letters are directed to J. C. Sainty's *Officials of the Boards of Trade, 1660-1870* (London: Athlone Press [for] University of London, 1974), which provides a useful bibliography of reference sources for the Board, both in manuscript and in print (xi-xii). Other letters signed solely by Prior and written in his capacity as a Commissioner are included. Newsletters originating from the Secretary of State's office in 1698 and preserved with letters to Prior from Under Secretary Robert Yard are not calendared, although Yard's personal letters to Prior, even if largely on public matters, are included.

The communications Prior sent to the States General of the United Provinces in the years 1692 through 1697 when he was stationed at The Hague were in the form of memorials, "informal state papers [. . .] embodying statements of facts, claims, or propositions made on behalf of his [an envoy's]

government [. . .]” (*OED*). This kind of document appears again from 1712 through 1714 when Prior was in Paris negotiating the Treaty of Utrecht. For the later period, we do not calendar such documents as distinct pieces of correspondence because there they can usually be tied to actual letters, usually as enclosures. If they are to be found adjacent to their letters, the manuscript line gives inclusive page numbers. If more explanation is necessary to locate them, information is provided in an annotation. For the earlier period, however, the memorials are such significant evidence of how Prior conducted diplomatic business that we cite them as letters but label each one *Memorial*.

For sixty-five of the letters in print, the manuscripts went missing after their publication, and for these our data are based on the publications. Fifty-four of these now-missing letters were printed in Gilbert Parke’s 1798 edition of Bolingbroke’s correspondence, the source text for which was the untraced papers of Thomas Hare, Bolingbroke’s Under Secretary of State who took possession of the papers when Bolingbroke was dismissed from office (Henry St.

John, Viscount Bolingbroke. *Letters and Correspondence*. . . . Ed. Gilbert Parke [London, 1798] 1: ix). The subsequent history of these papers requires some further explanation.

By 1947 the now-missing papers, four of Bolingbroke's letterbooks, had been acquired by a New York collector. In 1961, his heirs donated at least part of his collection to the New York Public Library, and an apparent inventory of his manuscripts, which is on file in the New York Public Library Department of Manuscripts, suggests that the donation included these four letterbooks. However, the New York Public Library does not have these four volumes and apparently never received them. We have been unable to trace them beyond the collector's 1947 acquisition of them.

The discovery of the present location of these Bolingbroke letterbooks is to be hoped for, because Parke's edition suppressed certain passages. As Parke explained, "The Editor has been induced to omit many passages in the letters to and from Prior, which are either unimportant or of a private nature [. . .]" (3: 153n*). One scholar, Charles K. Eves, had access to

these papers before they went missing, and in *Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist* (New York: Columbia UP, 1939), he identified passages in the Hare Papers that were omitted by Parke and quoted a number of them in his text or his footnotes. Most of these quotations are short, but they are significant and they do not appear anywhere else. We have therefore cited each one as an incomplete (inc.) printing of the letter in which it is found, and the *Bolingbroke* publication is also listed as an incomplete printing of the same letter.

MATTHEW PRIOR'S LIFE AND TIMES

Matthew Prior was a British poet prominent not only as a literary figure but also as a member of Great Britain's diplomatic service, and his correspondence is significant to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century studies in the fields of history and political science as well as literature.

He was born in July of 1664. There has long been debate about where he was born, but evidence from

his long-time secretary, Adrian Drift, indicates that it was in London. His father was a carpenter but prosperous enough to send his son to Westminster School. However, he died while Prior was a student there, and Matthew was obliged to leave school and go to work for his uncle in his London tavern keeping accounts, a fact that would impact his future in both positive and negative ways. There he was noticed reading the classics by Charles Sackville, soon to be the 6th Earl of Dorset, who took Prior under his patronage and subsidized his return to Westminster School. From there Prior went to St. John's College, University of Cambridge, and from there to a succession of employments, mostly public, culminating in 1712 in his appointment as Plenipotentiary for the Treaty of Utrecht. His humble origins prevented his advancement to the rank of ambassador. Nevertheless, he was absolutely crucial to the negotiations that ended the War of the Spanish Succession, that conflict between England and her allies and France and hers over the balance of power in Europe, which was threatened by the possibility that the king of Spain, grandson of Louis XIV, might one day inherit the throne of France as well.

As a principal negotiator, Prior was a Tory acting on behalf of a Tory government. However, Queen Anne took an inopportune time to die. The Tory party, led by rivals Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, was in disarray and unable to hang on to power after her death. This great treaty the Tories had fashioned was thought by the Whigs to have favored France. When they regained power with the accession of George I, they sought to punish those responsible. Prior ranked high in this group, and he was called before a Parliamentary Secret Committee. The Committee hoped that Prior would give evidence damaging to the Earl of Oxford. He had what were no doubt convenient lapses of memory and did not satisfy the Committee with the hoped for answers. Lack of evidence did not stop the Committee, however; Prior was made to endure a year of Parliamentary confinement in a private home not his own, and Oxford spent even more time in the Tower. Neither was ever convicted; both were denied the privileges of the Act of Grace, the 1717 amnesty granted most of the other presumed offenders.

Prior never recovered politically from this fall, but he flourished as a poet. Younger than John Dryden, older than Alexander Pope, he was one of the most important writers of his day. Jonathan Swift was a close friend, and he helped lead the drive to enlist subscribers for the magnificent 1718/[19] edition of Prior's poems. Among those who subscribed were members of the Harley family, who were indebted to Prior for his loyalty to Oxford before the Secret Committee. A warm and mutually advantageous friendship developed. Indeed, Oxford's son, Edward Harley, twenty-five years Prior's junior, was one of his most intimate friends in the last years of his life. Through a financial agreement with the younger Harley, Prior was able to purchase a country house called Down Hall, which reverted to Harley upon Prior's death. Prior's letters show his delight in being the squire and making improvements to his estate, which was situated between London, where Prior also had a house, and Harley's own country seat, Wimpole, in Cambridgeshire. Prior was a frequent guest at Wimpole and was there in September of 1721 when he

fell ill of an old complaint, “cholera morbus.” After a week’s struggle, he died there on September 18th at the age of 57. He was buried with due pomp and circumstance where he wanted to be—in Westminster Abbey at the feet of the Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser, who himself had been buried near Chaucer.

Prior’s letters begin in 1684, when he was a university student, and end in the year of his death, 1721. They reveal him, year by year, in the following capacities:

1684–1696: as student at Cambridge; secretary to envoys at The Hague; King’s Secretary at The Hague (chargé d’affaires); a keen observer of the personalities gathered at this international center and a most articulate victim of the vicissitudes experienced by a young diplomatist;

1697–1698: as Secretary to the British embassy at the Congress of Ryswick for the treaty ending the War of the Grand Alliance and as the composer of the Latin text of that treaty; as secretary (*in absentia*) to the Lords Justices of Ireland; and in Paris as secretary to

the Earl of Portland's embassy to France and subsequently to the Earl of Jersey's embassy;

1698-1708: in Paris as chargé d'affaires and as secretary to the Earl of Manchester's embassy to France; in London as Under Secretary of State involved in negotiations for the Second Partition Treaty; as successor to John Locke on the Commission of Trade and Plantations; Member of Parliament; Senior Fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge; as poet preparing the first authorized collection of his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1709);

1709-1713: as a Tory poet, member of the Brothers Club, friend of Jonathan Swift; as secret emissary from Queen Anne to Louis XIV in preliminary negotiations for ending the War of the Spanish Succession; as Commissioner of Customs; as Minister Plenipotentiary at Paris and Versailles during the peace congress at Utrecht and during the Duke of Shrewsbury's embassy;

1714-1715: in Paris, honored and entertained as the British Minister to the court of Louis XIV; as the active negotiator in regard to continuing international problems concerning commerce, territories, and military defenses; as sufferer because of the split

between his friends Oxford and Bolingbroke and because of the Whig reaction after the death of Queen Anne; in London for examination by Walpole's Secret Committee, followed by confinement as a Parliamentary prisoner;

1716-1721: as poet preparing the impressive folio edition of his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1718/[19]), sold by subscription; as close friend of Edward Harley, Lord Harley (later 2nd Earl of Oxford); as leader of a group of virtuosi; as loser in the collapse of the South Sea Bubble; as owner and developer of a country estate, Down Hall.

HISTORY OF THE MATTHEW PRIOR PROJECT

This website had its genesis in 1967 when H. Bunker Wright of Miami University and Richard B. Kline of State University College, Fredonia, of the State University of New York decided to collaborate on a project to find and to publish all the letters written by Matthew Prior or addressed to him that were extant in manuscript or in print. Both were well acquainted with this eighteenth-century British poet and statesman,

having already done biographical research on Prior for their doctoral dissertations. H. B. Wright (together with Monroe K. Spears) had also distinguished himself as editor of Prior's *Literary Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959; 2nd ed. 1971). Deborah Kempf Wright spent a year as H. B. Wright's graduate assistant for research in 1971-72, lent a hand with research now and then after their marriage in 1975, and formally joined the project as third co-editor in 1982.

The original aim of the project was to produce a multi-volume scholarly edition of the letters, using the most authoritative extant texts available as the source texts and providing explanatory and bibliographical notes. To that end, by June 1983 the compilers had conducted numerous searches in the US and had made fourteen trips to Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Monaco, locating nearly 3,000 letters preserved in forty different locations. (Transfer of some of the manuscripts has since reduced the number of repositories to thirty-seven). They had obtained photocopies of virtually all of these manuscript letters, received permission to publish the edited texts, and

prepared a typographic transcript for each manuscript. Work was begun on editing the early letters from 1684-1698.

In August 1983 the collaboration with Dr. Kline was dissolved. The financial difficulties of publishing a hardcover edition of such an extensive correspondence led the Wrights to decide instead to compile a one-volume research tool, a calendar and index of this correspondence. The calendar would provide an annotated, chronological inventory of the 3,000 letters; and the index would identify each of Prior's nearly 300 correspondents and list the letters that passed between them and Prior. Dr. Kline, though never an active participant in this project, would be named as a compiler on the title page in recognition of his contributions to the original project. This work was approximately two-thirds complete when H. B. Wright's failing health forced suspension of the project in 1992. He died in May 2000; Dr. Kline had died in 1987.

In October 2000, D. K. Wright resumed work preparing the calendar and index. At this point, the Miami University Libraries, with Judith A. Sessions as

Dean and University Librarian, realized that it had the personnel and the system requirements necessary to support a major project for World Wide Web publication. The Libraries became a full collaborator in the effort to mount and maintain an online version of the calendar and accompanying directories of correspondents and manuscript repositories.

In some respects, this calendar may never be complete. Additional letters may come to light, and new information may enable us to correct dates of letters and identifications of correspondents. One beauty of online publication is that it makes for such ease in correcting and otherwise modifying data. This living document will be updated whenever additional or improved data are received, and we invite users of this site to complete the Comments form, especially if they can provide clarifying details about any of the entries or know of additional Prior correspondence.

This calendar is phase one of a larger project. We hope in time to realize the original aim of the Prior Project by providing a transcript of every letter represented in the calendar. We will use the most

authoritative text available to us, and we have secured permission from every manuscript owner to publish the transcripts online.

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She also thanks the thirty-seven owners and custodians of the Prior letters for their generosity in granting permission for the manuscripts in their care to be calendared on this website and eventually transcribed here in full. She is also grateful to those

many members of their staffs, too numerous to mention by name, who have answered her emails and letters of various kinds of enquiry. She thanks the undergraduate and graduate students who worked on the project in the past. And she is particularly grateful to Judith A. Sessions, Dean and University Librarian, and her staff at Miami University Libraries for their collaboration on this project, especially John Millard, Digital Initiatives Librarian, Ross Shanley-Roberts, Technical Services Librarian (on leave), Janet H. Stuckey, Head of Special Collections, and William A. Wortman, Humanities Librarian.