



Guide to the Sir Henry Thompson papers, 1851-1913 and undated

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Summary

Collection Title:

Sir Henry Thompson papers, 1851-1913 and undated

Creator:

Thompson, Henry, Sir, 1820-1904

Abstract:

Collection of letters to and from Sir Henry Thompson (1820-1904), an English surgeon and a founder of the Cremation Society of England. Most letters in this collection are largely polite and perfunctory notes between Thompson and peers; some correspondents include his wife, the pianist Kate Loder; Empress Frederick of Germany; King George V of England; and King Leopold II of Belgium. The collection documents Thompson's social status and activities between the 1850s and early 1900s. It contains few details about his medical practice, aside from some materials advocating for the adoption of the practice of cremation. Some materials are addressed to members of his family, including son Herbert Thompson. Letters are numbered and itemized inventory is included with the materials.

Extent:

0.5 Linear Feet

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

RL.10914

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1gd7d>

Preferred Citation

Sir Henry Thompson papers, 1851-1913, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

Collection of letters to and from Sir Henry Thompson (1820-1904), a white English surgeon who was a founder of the Cremation Society of England. Most letters in this collection are largely polite and perfunctory notes between Thompson and peers; some correspondents include his wife, the pianist Kate Loder; King George of England; and King Leopold II. The collection documents Thompson's social status and activities between the 1850s and early 1900s. It contains few details about his medical practice or personal life, but indicates many high-profile and celebrity acquaintances and contains some autographs (for example, Henry James). Letters are numbered and an itemized inventory is included with the materials. There is also a detailed correspondents' list, transcriptions of some of the more information-heavy letters, and an appraisal of the letters, conducted for the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation in 2003.

The original Trent Manuscripts Collection is foldered separately within the collection, and consists of the following items: ANS, a dinner invitation, and ALS, advocating the adoption of the practice of cremation. Items are accompanied by a bibliographic note describing Thompson's dinner parties.

Biographical/Historical

Originally from Suffolk, Henry Thompson was a white British surgeon and professor at the Royal College of Surgeons, specializing in the bladder and urinary tract. Thompson's surgical expertise and reputation led him to be appointed as surgeon-extraordinary to King Leopold I and II of Belgium; he also operated on Napoleon III shortly before his death. Thompson helped found the Cremation Society of England (now Great Britain) in 1874, and served as its first president. The society sought to legitimize the practice of cremation in Great Britain.

Thompson's other interests included painting, astronomy, and collecting Chinese porcelain. He was knighted in 1867 and became a baron in 1899.

Thompson married Kate Loder in 1851, and the couple had three children.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The initial Rubenstein collection consisted of two letters transferred through the Trent Manuscripts History of Medicine collection. (Their origins and acquisition history are unknown.) In 2019, the bulk of the collection was acquired through Accession 2019-0171, a transfer to Rubenstein Library by the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Processing Information

Processed by: Rubenstein Staff. Finding aid derived from MARC record using DukeMARC2EAD-HOMproject.xsl, December 2014. Accession 2019-0171 incorporated by Meghan Lyon, Oct. 2020.

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Names and Subjects

- Mortuary Practice

- Physicians -- Records and correspondence
- Surgeons -- England
- Etiquette
- Loder, Kate, 1825-1904
- Léopold II, King of the Belgians, 1835-1909
- Cremation Society of England
- Thompson, Herbert, Sir, 1859-1944

General Note

Forms part of the Trent Manuscripts Collection.

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Collection Inventory

Assorted letters and correspondence, 1851-1913,
undated

Box 1

Scope and Contents

Folders of materials arranged loosely chronologically, with some undated materials in later folders. Includes an 1851 letter to Kate Loder, called "Kit", which contains a doodled self-portrait by Thompson and describes his current illness. An undated letter from Henry James in the House of Commons seeks to secure a vote from MP W. H. Leatham, then suffering from gout and under Thompson's care. There are letters to Thompson from King George V (a thank you note, 1893), Empress Frederick of Germany (1891), and King Leopold II (1869, 1872, 1875, 1876, 1880). Some letters are directed to Henry's son Sir Herbert Thompson, including a condolence note from King George in 1904, following Henry Thompson's death. One letter from Thompson advocates the adoption of cremation.

The majority of the letters are perfunctory and polite, without many details beyond dinner invitations and customary exchanges of courtesies between Thompson's acquaintances in the British aristocracy and elite society. Some materials are not correspondence - there are empty envelopes and some scrap notes.

Information folder with inventory of
collection, appraisal, and other accompanying

Guide to the Sir Henry Thompson papers, 1851-1913 and undated
correspondence regarding the collection's
transfer to the RL

Box 1