

## LETTERS FROM A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY RECTOR OF LUTTERWORTH: NATHANIEL TOVEY AS MARRIAGE AGENT

to my very Loving Brother Mr George Warner  
at Mr Westfield's house in Laurence Poultney Lane  
Loving brother,

I have here sent you a couple of cheeses for a token, as good as I had at this time, praying you that you would send back the cloths and basket (?) in which they are lain (?); for I shall stand (in need) of them. I pray let us hear from you as soon as your (?) occasions will permit you and withall certify (?) us of my brother William. No more at this time, but my prayers for your health and happiness. Hoping you will let us hear from you shortly I rest

your affectionate sister, Elizabeth Tovey

I pray forget not to send my cheese fat again next week; for I have present use of the same. And remember my child's cap. I pray let it not be a green one.

This letter, written at Lutterworth by the wife of Nathaniel Tovey the Rector there, to her brother, a merchant in London, could have been from any period in history. It is one of the series of Warner family private papers preserved by some lucky chance at the Public Record Office that has recently been brought to our notice during sorting and listing. A further dozen and a half are letters written to George Warner by Nathaniel himself in the years 1638 to 1642. His wife's letter accompanies tokens of affection and is mainly a request for personal news; but his own letters remind us that in the seventeenth century the network of compliments and obligations that stretched across the family and beyond was an important part of business, even very personal business, especially for the educated and wealthy classes. If Elizabeth had given a couple of cheeses she might also ask for a cap for her little daughter or for a few thousand pins. The relations between her husband and her brother were more formal, in that Nathaniel was one of the chain of parties involved in the lengthy negotiations leading towards George securing a bride. The principal party on the Warner side was not George's father Silvester but his uncle George. It appears that the younger George was working as a factor for this difficult uncle and that the latter was an important figure in Warwickshire, being High Sheriff in 1642. He and Silvester both lived on his manor at Wolston, which is half way between Rugby and Coventry. He was visited by one Dr Samuel Hinton, who wrote to the younger George a letter from there beginning: 'Mr Warner! I have been acquainted with your liking of my niece Mistress Elizabeth Chester! I have by your uncle's consent acquainted my brother her father with it . . .' Perhaps George did in the end marry Elizabeth, thereby cementing his obligation to his uncle for life. A fragment of a poem survives among the papers entitled 'Epithalamium for a Wedding Night'.

The letters are of interest not only for the details they give of the family and connexions of a Lutterworth rector. Amidst the negotiations Nathaniel's writing becomes quite literary when adding his friendly advice for planning the campaign of courtship. And finally his martial metaphors for courting lead him naturally to the latest news of the preliminary skirmishes at Leicester which ended within a month in the declaration of the Civil War. He reveals his hostility to the Roundheads that was to lead to his being ejected from his rectory at Lutterworth. He later became Rector at Aylestone, where both he and his wife died in September 1658.

As far as possible the letters have been arranged in order of date and the spelling has been modernized for the following extracts. They are all written by Nathaniel Tovey to his brother in law, the younger George Warner, and, unless stated, are addressed from Lutterworth to the house of Mr Edward Westfield in St Laurence Pulteney Lane in London. Details are given at the start of the extracts from each letter, in brackets where conjectural. The letters with folio numbers are in State Papers Domestic 46 Supplementary Volume 83. Elizabeth's of 10 May (1640) is fo 62, Dr Hinton's of 9 Oct 1641 is fo 41 and the poem is fo 100. The rest are in the same class but are at present being listed for the first time. We are grateful to Miss Norah Fuidge, who is engaged in this task, for bringing the Tovey letters to our attention and for generously making them available for study at this stage.

12 Nov 1638 fo 9

You see how careful your uncle is for the managing of this trivial blow-point business. However it will be wisdom in you to be punctual in your observance of his instructions and to give him a just account of your performing of all particulars.

This day we have received a first token of your loving remembrance; namely a barrel of oysters. I think I scarce ever had the honesty to return you thanks for the wine you sent us. But I hope you believe (as) well of me, as that I keep all your courteous expressions in a faithful Registry. You are a kind man. God increase your gifts. I hope you will find leisure to come down at Xmas. In the interim and for ever I am

(your) most affectionate (brother) Nat: Tovey

Your Master was at my house last Friday and your uncle (met?) him here.

to Mr George Clarke's house in Milk Street (London)

Good Brother,

27 July (1641)

I heartily congratulate your safe return into your native soil. And I hope God will give you the wisdom (unless your occasions be extremely urgent) to keep your four quarters from henceforward upon the ground, your natural and proper element, and not trust yourself any more to the fury of the billows, or the

uncertainty of a few rotten boards.

Your uncle George desired me to advertize you, that he shall be very glad to see you so soon as your fair leisure will give you leave. But his lust is not such as that he desires to cut you off from your occasions. First accommodate and settle your concernments, and then he will expect you and bid you welcome to Wolstan.

Your sister will needs have me spar (?) you a question. What's become of her watch? That's all. In good earnest she longs to see you. So do I.

Your most affectionate brother Nat. Tovey

Good Brother,

6 Aug (1641)

Since my last I have had a full parley with Dr Hinton and his wife. And after that moved the matter the second time to our old Master. He like the business better and better. What Mr Chester he father will do towards the augmentation of her portion the Dr nor Mistress Hinton will not undertake to know. But they think for a good match he will come off. Well upon these grounds at all adventures I would advise you, if you have a desire to her, to make yourself acquainted with her, and you may be bold at least to intimate your affections either to herself or some of her friends or both. For hitherto there was never any motion relished so well with your old man as this. And I think he will be content you should lay your knife a-board there, though upon cheaper terms than anywhere else, that he ever heard of yet.

The Dr and Mistress Hinton have offered assistance either by writing, riding or speaking. And this week your old man will to Coventry on purpose to speak to them about it.

She has a weak sister not likely to live, to whom Mr Stone gave an equal portion, namely £2,000. There is some expectation in that. Mr Chester has but one only son and if he should drop away there's a further expectation in that. All this I laid open before our uncle. And I perceive him not only willing but desirous to promote it. You will hear from him shortly. Only I write so soon as I can . . .  
your loving brother N.T.

from Wolston (Oct 1641) fo 46

I hope my letter written to you about a fortnight since miscarried not, though I have not received from you any advertisement since.

I am now able to afford you some little account more of your business. Dr Hinton has received an answer not from the father's own hand but from his brother Dr Robert Chester of Stevenage by his direction, which for your better satisfaction and to save myself a labour in writing I have here inclosed so far as concerns you.

Now you have a good ground to walk upon. Lay all the traps and stratagemms you can honestly devise to win the gentlewoman's affection, and she being so tender in her father's eyes will be able to bring off his consent. I make no doubt of it. I would advise you to venture so far however. There can (if the

gentlewoman and the father be content (?)) no rub be feared but matter of portion. And I hope to win your old man off to reasonable terms if the matter be well set afoot. I can tell you no more at present. Expect my further currents as occasion serves. . .

I am now at Wolston where all remember their several affections to you. So does Dr Hinton with promises of all assistance. This letter will be with you on Saturday night. I send it by Thomas Waples, Mr Hawford's man.

Adieu from your ever loving brother Nat Tovey

1 Nov (1641)

I received your letter or rather your sheet of paper with almost just nothing in it. Did you not receive mine by Thomas Waples? If you did I wonder you say nev'r a syllable of it. In truth now I think you are in love indeed, and your thoughts being so much employed in that passion I must pardon you if you can think of nothing else.

How do you know that I am to be at London so very shortly as you seem to intimate in your letter? It is true, fain I would come but I must stay God's leisure and your sister's' who makes me believe every day she is falling in pieces. But still she holds out and I know not how long she will. I thank you for your kind invitation to your house . . .

Tomorrow I am for Wolston, there to meet Dr Parsons and Mr Hawford and Dr Hinton. Our uncle is tampering again with phisic. The last Thursday he was let blood. God send him good luck after it. Your sister remembers her kindest respects to you. Remember mine to Mr Wastfeild. Write us at the return of the carrier some news. So God be with you,

your ever loving brother N.T. . . .

Good Brother,

4 Nov (1641) fo 39

My resolution was peremptory and fix to have set my face this day towards London. But two things have happened to cross my designs. First the sickness of my little wench, who at this time is very ill, and I am very loath to leave your sister alone not knowing how it may please God to deal with her little one. The second is an homely impediment to acquaint you withall but yet such it is that renders me for the present altogether unable to ride. It is (saving your presence) a little boil or angry what (quatte) grown upon my sitting place which makes me impatient of the motion of an horse, unless I could ride altogether upon one side. Yet for all this I have a very good mind to be with you and if these inconveniences cease may perhaps come upon you unawares.

My heart is with you, and shall as seriously rejoice at the good speed of your business as though it concerned mine own person.

I have examined the ways of carrying to you an hogshead of Worcestershire liquor, but the way by sea to Bristol (Bristowe) and so to London is so full of uncertainty that they tell me it is an hundred to one it will be abused or drunk up before it come to you, unless you could acquaint me with some Bristol friend

that will take charge of it there.

I desire you to recommend my loving and hearty respects to mine uncle George and acquaint him with this my just excusation. God send him a day to his full content, so heartily wisheth

your most affectionate brother Nat: Tovey

I pray you let us hear a word or two from you the next week how things go. Remember me to brother Will and the (rest?) of our friends.

Good Brother, from Wolston 19 Jan (1642) fo 49  
You will receive a very round letter from our Master. If I had set down all that he bade me, you would have thought him very angry. But it was but a fit of choler and it is past. Let me receive satisfaction from you this week and all is well. High Sheriffs must swagger. They have the privilege so to do and it becomes them. My sister Isabell thinks long till she receive the things she spake to you for. Remember my two cloaks ready made and directed to Lutterworth. All here remain in the state you left them. And command their hearty affections to you. You have taken upon you a factorship for a Master which is somewhat hard to please, but will pay you well for your pains at long run. Adieu from  
your most affectionate brother N.T.

Be sure fail not to send down the things for (Isabell?) and likewise the cloth for clothes (at least some of it) this week; for if you fail another return of the carrier it will be horribly out of time.

Good Brother, 28 Jan (1642) fo 51  
I thank you for your news. And if you have any spare time from your more serious occasions I shall take it as a copy of your favour to acquaint me with such passages of the time as come to your knowledge. In term time I have letters of intelligence from my friends: but out of term when they are gone, I live in darkness and ignorance and know not which end of the world stands upwards, unless it be by pedling rumours in the country, whereof a man can believe scarce one of an hundred . . .  
I will look out as well as I can for a convenient horse for you. I am about my under George Benyon's colt. He will break him very shortly and if I like him upon his breaking I will venture upon him. But I must tell you he will not be for any service this twelvemonth yet, for he is but three years old now. You may play with him for a journey of half a score miles or just a trifle but he will not be for any substantial use yet. But if I can light upon one that is for your turn and fit for present service I will have him for you if I can upon any reasonable terms.  
I came yesterday from Wolston. Our uncle is not very (lame?). His legs are worse than they were and put him in great pain towards night. But he is not sick, God be thanked. I pray you have a care of your health. I would not have you tamper more with physic than necessity requireth . . .

God be with you from your ever loving brother Nat Tovey

3 Mar (1642) fo 25

. . . At Wolston all friends are well, and remember their kind love to you. My sister Isabell is well recovered from a dangerous fever.

Your uncle would be well content to hear of your likelihood of matching, and I believe upon parley would be easily brought off to reason. Let me know whether Mr Shute ever sent to you, or how probable your other projects (?) are to fare (?). I shall be your faithful agent in the country: you yourself must look you start good game, and when she is started to hunt eagerly . . .

I thank you not only for your loving but your liberal expressions . . . I am behind hand with you in the account of courtesies; a debt that shall ever be acknowledged by

Your most affectional brother Nat: Tovey

Your uncle is willing that Will should have the money for his chamber to his own use (?). It behoves him to manage it well. I have written so much (to him?) My love and respects to Captain Wolston and Mr Wastfeild and his Mistress.

Good Brother,

(to Wolston) (1642)

My occasions are such that in truth I cannot spare either today or tomorrow to come to you, unless I should wrong myself. And therefore I pray you let us see you here in your return, if it must be so short as you pretend. You may come here the night before you set forward without any loss of time. Besides I must deliver you a sour salute from your sister and tell you in a pouting phrase that she takes it not kindly at your hands, that you will not see her at her own house. And says you have not been at Lutterworth these two years. 'Tis an heavy charge. Come and make your apology . . . So hoping to see you. In haste. Adieu from

your ever loving brother Nat: Tovey

Good Brother,

(to Wolston) (1642)

What humour our uncle was in to shew no more sensibility of your business when it was represented to him so fairly as now it is by Mr Shute's letter I wonder much of it. But you know he will be sometimes in his dumps, no man knows why or wherefore. Well. Get you gone to London and spur and switch on your business as far as possibly you can. Lose no time nor opportunity. My advice is likewise that you procure a letter from Sir George Clerke to your uncle in commendation of your match. I know he will (..) in his report.

I cannot tarry any longer. I am very weary having had a communion of above four hundred communicants. Let me alone for tampering here in the country with your old man. Assure yourself of the utmost of the endeavour of

Your most affectionate brother N.T.

Your sister would desire you to send her four thousand of pins, three of the small ones, one of the great . . .

Good Brother, (1642)  
Your sister and I join our forces together to thank you for your kind and most loving (?) token. We will eat it for your sake, and remember you in the best wine our town will afford. I hope I shall be strong enough one of these days to venture upon it. (Venison?) is too high and mighty meat for me yet . . . I begin now to pick up my crumbs, but am yet weak . . .

Good Brother, from Wolston 29 June (1642) fo 31  
It was almost seven of the clock at night before I received your letter and being the eve of the fast I was in great straits, not knowing how to go to Wolston and provide a sermon for my parish the next day. Yet rather than I would be wanting to you in a matter of this consequence I presently mounted toward Wolston. Our uncle had dispatched both his letters before my coming, not being full to the point and written with his own hand I thought good not to alter them, though he would have had me so done. I hope they will give all parties full content. You are likely all of a sudden to step into a plentiful fortune. Much joy and contentment I wish you with all my heart.  
And our uncle commands me to write thus much more to you by way of addition, that he expects you should be a liberal and kind brother to your younger brother and sister which are yet undisposed of.  
And he is confident of the goodness of your disposition that, though he is loath to interpose any knots or scruples which may retard the proceedings of your match, yet that hereafter you will be content to conform yourself to such motions which he shall make to you. They shall be neither many nor burdensome. What part of your portion your uncle will have reserved for him he hath referred to Sir George Clarke, so that it be not less than £2,000, which he conceives cannot be any stop in the treaty; it being so little a share in the whole sum. But rather than that motion shall break (?) any squares, it is likely he will be persuaded to take assurance of your private promise. He is very right and trusty in the entertainment of any thoughts which may conduce to the advancement of your business. And if you can think of anything else wherein I may serve you I shall do it with all possible faithfulness and hearty affection, i being  
your most affectionate brother N. Tovey  
And truly I conceive he means not to take near so much of the portion from you. Only he will have it in his power.

Good Brother, (from Wolston) 6 July (1642) fo 33  
I told our uncle at first that his manner of proposing the jointure would be excepted against. But he swore more oaths than a good many he would never condescend farther. Has he laboured and wiled for an estate all his life time, and should he live to see it go to he knew not whom whilst he lived? No, he would be hanged first. And in no other resolution was he this morning when I woke him at his bedside. He vowed and swore he would never do it, no, not for the greatest portion in London. But at last he was content in cool blood to hear

reason. And this fair resolution is he now come to: which I hope will give (. . .) contentment . . .

My head is muddy, being called out of my bed this morning by two of the clock to come hither and here I was presently after four. God in heaven speed you in your proceedings, so trustily intrust (?)

your very loving brother Nat Tovey

(Tuesday 26 July 1642)

What, Brother, is the day of our fair hopes so pitifully overclouded? What, is the castle of her affection impregnable? How is she fortified more than all other women? If she were a tower or a town methinks you have forces enough to take her. Tell her you have sworn to marry her and it may be religion and conscience will work her off to preserve you from the sin of perjury. Learn who be her playfellows, her she companions which consort most with her. Plough with these heifers if possibly you can . . .

And now I think on't I'll tell you some news. The King has been at Leicester ever since Friday. And is as much troubled about the magazine as you are about your Mistress. Sir Arthur and my Lord Ruthin were training the ordinance soldiers till the morning the King came. And Dr Bastwick (God blest us) was brought down by them out of the city to muster the soldiers. They gave out how glad they were of his majesty's coming and they would stand to what they had done, that they would. But when they heard for certain the King was upon the way between Leicester and Nottingham, all the whole rout of them ran away as though quicksilver had been in their heels. There was messengers sent after them to attach them. Bastwick and one Captain Ludlow they recovered and brought them back, and they are now both in Leicester gaol. Sir Arthur Haselrig was too nimble and outrid them. Only some thirty or forty possessed themselves of the magazine, which lies in a strong gatehouse, and notwithstanding it has been demanded by the Grand Jury (the representative body of the Shire), all the Gentlemen of the County, many of the Lords, yet they will not yield it but upon some conditions left with them by my Lord of (Ruthin) and Sir Arthur. (The King has not been?) to demand it yet (?) in his own (name?). I cannot tell whether he will or no, for I hear say he goes away this day about eleven of the clock. But two or three pieces of ordinance are come to Leicester as I hear. The King was bravely welcome by all the Gentlemen and freeholders of the County. There were not so few as twenty thousand people met him upon the way some miles of Leicester, and shouted as though their throats would burst asunder. The Roundheads are most horribly battered. But I suppose they look for within these few days some Aqua vitae from the Parliament to revive them. No more now.

But I pray you remember me heartily to Mr Westfield and his Lady . . . (. . .) difficulty about your mistress. Your sister thanks you infinitely for your (. . .)

Your most affectionate brother Nat. Tovey