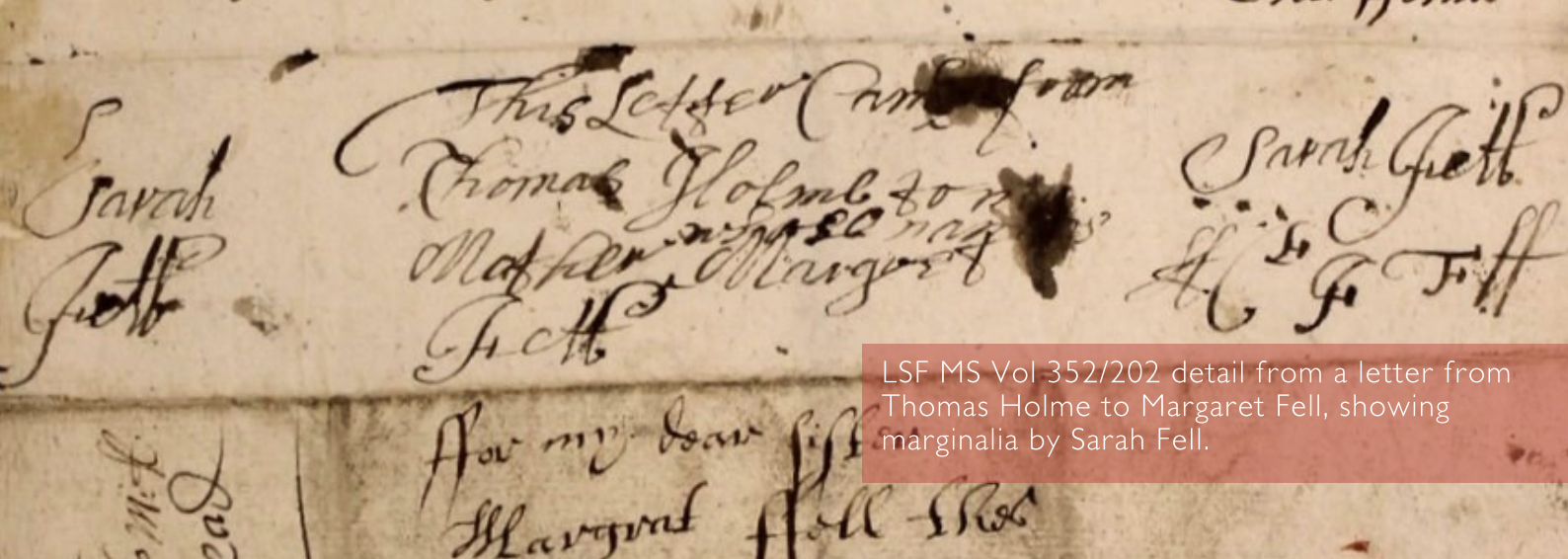


The Swarthmore Documents

Research guide





LSF MS Vol 352/202 detail from a letter from Thomas Holme to Margaret Fell, showing marginalia by Sarah Fell.

What are the Swarthmore Documents?

The Swarthmore Documents are a 17th century collection of manuscript papers that belonged to the early Quaker leader Margaret Fell. The core of the collection was curated by her and her second husband George Fox, one of the founding figures of Quakerism.

Items from Margaret's collection have one or more of the following identifying features:

- They are original letters sent through the post, addressed to either Margaret Fell, George Fox or one of Margaret's daughters
- They have an endorsement in the hand of George Fox, sometimes with additional notes regarding copying
- They have an endorsement in the hand of John Abraham, Margaret Fell's grandson
- They have marginalia featuring the names and initials of members of the Fell household, particularly the children

History of the Swarthmore Documents

In 1652 George Fox met Margaret Fell for the first time, and she became a Quaker. At this point she was the mother of 7 children and she gave birth again the following year. Her first husband was Judge Thomas Fell, an assize judge who was

frequently away from home travelling on his circuit. It was hard for Margaret to leave home and travel around preaching as others in the movement were doing. She instead became the hub of a Quaker information network that stretched across the world.

Friends would write to her, letting her know the latest news or sending her copies of epistles. Where relevant she would then have the letters copied and sent on. She also wrote many letters herself, offering advice and support to Friends or speaking to those in power. She kept the letters that she was sent, as well as copies of some that she wrote, collecting them together in an archive.

George Fox was very aware of the importance of public perception to the young Quaker movement. He was given approval rights over Quaker publications from as early as 1653. After his imprisonment in Worcester in the 1670s, he began to seriously think about his legacy. He came to convalesce at Swarthmoor Hall after his release. Whilst there he dictated his autobiography (later published as his *Journal*), and sorted through Margaret's collection of letters, ordering some to be copied for a London-based collection, editing some and presumably destroying others. His endorsement appears on the majority of the surviving letters.

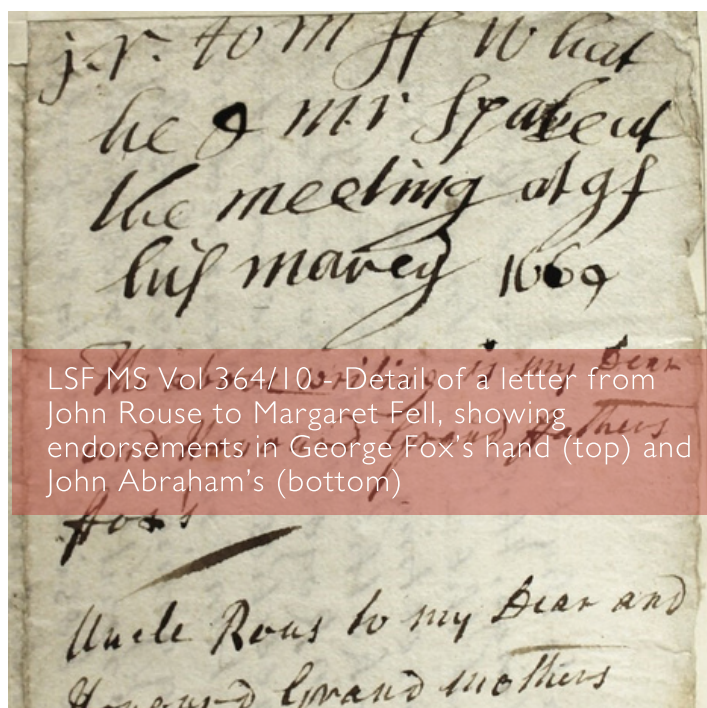
For more on this see:

Larry Ingle, H (1993) "George Fox, Historian" *Quaker History* Vol. 82(1) pp.28-35.

Margaret held on to the curated documents, adding letters she received in her later years. The collection was passed down her family to her grandson John Abraham.

John split up the collection, and today it exists in multiple parts, most of which are held in the Library.

To date there is no single complete listing of the collection, so this guide will outline the different parts that are held by the Library, noting existing transcripts and the best ways of navigating the material.



LSF MS Vol 364/10. Detail of a letter from John Rouse to Margaret Fell, showing endorsements in George Fox's hand (top) and John Abraham's (bottom)

Getting started

As a first step in finding documents, particularly if you are interested in a specific individual, you should look at the manuscript card index in the reading room.

A note on spelling

In the 17th century Swarthmoor and Swarthmore were used interchangeably. Today the convention is to use Swarthmore for the manuscripts and Swarthmoor for the village and the hall.

Transcriptions

If you are not used to reading 17th century writing and/or you are primarily interested in the contents of a document rather than the document itself, you will find it a lot quicker and easier to use the various transcripts that have been made of the collection.

Transcripts of particular sections of the collection are noted at the relevant point below.

Letters from across the Swarthmore Documents have been transcribed in several publications, notably:

Barclay, AR (1841) *Letters, &c. of Early Friends*.

London: Harvey and Darton.

LSF Shelfmark: **SR 097.01 BAR**

Online version:

archive.org/details/letterscearlyfr00barcgoog

Webb, M (1865) *The Fells of Swarthmoor Hall and their Friends*. London: Alfred W. Bennett. LSF

Shelfmark: **092.9 FEL**

American edition online:

archive.org/details/fellofswarthmoo00webb

Crosfield, H (1913) *Margaret Fox of Swarthmoor Hall*. London: Headley Brothers.

LSF Shelfmark: **092.4 FOX/CRO**

Not available online.

Cadbury, Henry J (1972) *The Narrative Papers of George Fox*. Richmond: Friends United Press.

LSF Shelfmark: **007 FOX**

Online version:

archive.org/details/narrativepaperso0000foxg

The Journal of the Friends Historical Society. Available in the Library reading room and online here:

journals.sas.ac.uk/fhs/search

It should be noted that some of these transcripts, particularly in the earlier publications, have been modernized and edited to some degree.

The PRINT Project

The People, Religion, Information Networks and Travel Project is a collaborative digital humanities project housed at the University of Central Florida. They have digitised 17th and 18th century letters from several archives, including ours, and are crowd sourcing transcription using Zooniverse.

Many of the letters chosen from the Library of the Society of Friends are Swarthmore Documents.

To find out more about the project, and to assist with the transcription work go here:

www.zooniverse.org/projects/printmigration/network/print

Parts of the collection in the Library

The Swarthmore Manuscripts

LSF Archive Reference: **MS Vol 351 - 360**

The largest part of the collection, consisting of at least 5 volumes of epistles and organisational documents of the early Quaker movement, was given by John Abraham to fellow Quaker Edmund Peckover in 1755.

Four volumes (Swarthmore MSS volumes 1-4, MS Vol 351-356) were given to the Library by Peckover's descendants and a fifth was bought by the Library from James Backhouse (Swarthmore MSS Volume 7, MS Vol 359). These were given the name Swarthmore Manuscripts by the Library.

The documents known in the Library as volumes 5 and 6 of the Swarthmore Manuscripts don't appear to be from Margaret Fell's collection. They contain some letters that were written at Swarthmoor Hall and other original 17th century papers, but none of the documents have any of the identifying features listed above. Volume 8 of the Swarthmore Manuscripts consists of 4 items which were removed from the Spence Manuscripts (see below).

Finding Aids

Geoffrey Nuttall created a typescript calendar of the pre-1660 letters from volumes 1, 3 and 4. This is called *Early Quaker Letters from the Swarthmore MSS* and is available in the Library reading room. There are also copies at other larger libraries such as the Bodleian and the British Library. It offers indexes of places and people mentioned as well as a summary of the topics of each letter and the chronological arrangement.

Transcriptions

Handwritten transcripts of volumes 1-4 were made by Emily Jermyn in 1866-1867.

Handwritten transcripts of volumes 5-7 were made by Hilda Douglas in 1938-9.

These are available as bound volumes in the Library reading room. They are not arranged in the same way as the original letters, instead being arranged alphabetically by the letter's author. This can be useful for locating letters by particular people.

In the Jermyn transcripts each transcribed letter has the reference of the original written in pencil in the format [volume number]/[item number]. In the Douglas transcripts, the item number is given at the top of each letter, but it is necessary to look at the index page at the front of the transcript volume to find the manuscript volume number.

The Spence Manuscripts

LSF Archive Reference: **MS Vol 376-378**

The Spence Manuscripts primarily consist of the autobiography that George Fox dictated at Swarthmoor Hall in 1675. It is in 2 volumes and includes letters and other documents Fox used to better tell his story. There is also an additional volume of letters primarily relating to the experiences of Margaret Fell and her daughters in the early days of Quakerism.

Margaret Fell's grandson John Abraham held on to these manuscripts until his death. They passed

to his wife, and through her to her cousin Dodshon Foster. Five generations later they had become the property of the artist Robert Spence, who first lent, then sold them to the Library.

Some of the Fosters gave away parts of the manuscripts. Four items were given to the Richardsons of Newcastle. These were later donated to the Library and form **Swarthmore MSS Volume 8 (MS Vol 360)**. Other items given away include some pages from the journal. One of these was later given to the Library (page 105 in Volume II of Penney's published edition, see below). This is currently part of MS Vol 366.

Finding Aids

Craig Horle, former member of Library staff, created a typescript listing of the letters in volume 3 of the Spence MSS. It also includes a contents list by author, as well as indexes of people, places and subjects. This is available in the reading room.

Transcriptions

Norman Penney, former librarian at the Library of the Society of Friends, published an edition of George Fox's Journal that is a word for word transcription of the Spence manuscript version. This is known as the Cambridge Journal.

Penney, N (1911) *The Journal of George Fox* (2 Vols). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

LSF Shelfmark: **092.281**

Volume one can be found online here:

archive.org/details/journalgeorgefox01foxuoft

Many of the letters have been transcribed in various published volumes (see the transcriptions section at the beginning of the guide).

The Family Manuscripts

John Abraham gave some of the Swarthmore Documents to his children, Thomas and Margaret Abraham. These largely consisted of letters specifically relating to Margaret Fell and her

daughters. These were passed down the family, added to with documents about later generations and have come to the Library in the form of the **Thirnbeck MSS (MS Vol 367-368)** and the **Abraham MSS (MS Vol 365)**.

The Thirnbeck Manuscripts are currently closed for preservation reasons, but they have been fully transcribed in Volume 9 of *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* (see above for a link to the online version).

The Abraham Manuscripts also incorporates another, smaller, part of the collection known as the Shackleton Manuscripts. Items from the collection are transcribed in various volumes of *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society*. A summary of transcription locations, alongside additional transcription is found in *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* Volume 11 (4) pp. 145-189.

A third portion of the family's collection, the **Miller MSS**, was on its way to the Library in 1940 when it was heavily damaged in a train fire. Later items from the collection survive (MS Vol 295) but all the 17th century material was destroyed and now exists only in transcripts. There is a typescript transcript volume in the Library, catalogued as Miller MSS, LSF shelfmark **L 004 MIL**. This is supplemented by "Miller Manuscripts" in *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* Volume 30 pp. 41-43.

A.R. Barclay Manuscripts

MS Vol 323-324

The collection is named for Abram Rawlinson Barclay (1793-1845) who had apparently done some work with it (although the evidence for this is now lost). The manuscripts have been part of the Library's collections since at least the beginning of the 20th century, but their earlier provenance is unknown.

The volumes contain many items that meet the criteria for being Swarthmore Documents, including letters written to Margaret Fell at

Swarthmoor Hall. It also contains many letters written to George Fox from the latter part of his life when he was living in London.

Finding Aids

Craig Horle created an annotated listing of the collection which is available in the reading room.

Transcriptions

157 of the 255 documents in the collection were fully or partially transcribed in *The Journal of the Friends Historical Society* between 1930 and 1963.

Other Collections

Individual items from the Swarthmore collection were given away by former owners and have been collected by enthusiastic Quakers over the intervening centuries.

Several letters ended up as part of wider collections of Quakeriana which have also been acquired by the Library. Library collections with known Swarthmore Documents in them are:

- Dix Manuscripts MS Vol 294
- Crosfield Manuscripts MS Vol 329
- Gibson Manuscripts MS Vol 335-339
- MS Vol 101

Transcriptions

Handwritten transcripts of 17th century material from the Dix Manuscripts were created by Emily

Jermyn and are in a slim volume appended to her Swarthmore Manuscripts transcripts in the reading room.

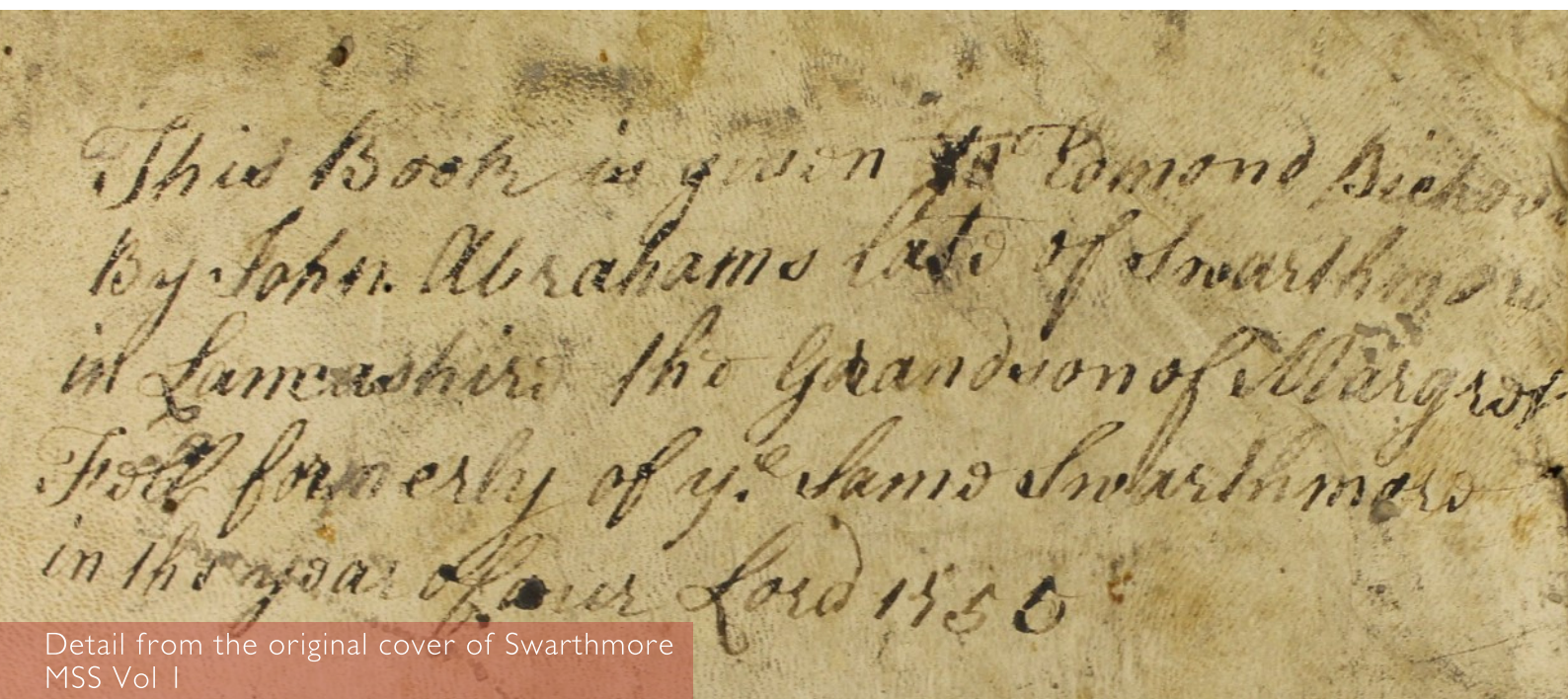
Collections not held in the Library

Collections in the US

Several items from the Swarthmore Documents have found their way into American collections such as the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Quaker collections at Haverford and Swarthmore Colleges. These have been transcribed in: Cadbury, H J (1940) *The Swarthmore Documents in America*. JFHS Supplement No. 40. London: Friends Historical Society.

The Thwaite MSS

The 19th century published volumes of transcriptions include items from a collection referred to as the Thwaite manuscripts. This collection did not come to the Library and is believed to have been split up.



Detail from the original cover of Swarthmore MSS Vol 1

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