

BOWNE HOUSE ARCHIVES



Bowne House Historical Society, Inc.

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BOWNE FAMILY PAPERS OF FLUSHING, L.I.

Transcription of BFP #2018.1.02-01

Letter of John Swinton from Newgate Prison

Date: circa 6th month (August) 1660 Old Style

Note: This transcription retains the spelling and punctuation of the original document.

Transcribed by Kate Lynch; reviewed/edited by Charlotte Jackson

Last revised: 6/2024

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NOTES ON 17TH- AND 18TH-CENTURY DOCUMENTS

Dates:

1. Quaker dates: early Quakers used the numbers, not the names, of the months and the days of the week. (Note that the numbering of the months was different in the Old Style calendar-- i.e., their "seventh month" is September, not July.)
2. Old Style ("O.S.") vs. New Style (N.S.): Prior to 1752, English people mostly used "Old Style" dating, which followed the Julian calendar and began the New Year on March 25. However, the Dutch and many other European countries followed the "New Style" calendar in use today. By the 17th century, the Old Style calendar had fallen ten days behind the New Style.
3. Dual dating: because the New Style calendar began the year on January 1 and the Old Style began it on March 25, dates that fall in between are sometimes given in a format like 1663/4 or 1663-4.

Common abbreviations:

y ^e = the or thee	y ^m = them
y ^t = that	w th = with
y ⁿ = than or then	w ^{ch} = which

Note: words like "ye" are spelled with the Old English character thorn, which looks like the letter "y" but is pronounced "-th."

Money is denominated in pounds, shillings, and pence, in columns as follows: £ : s : d

Transcription Notations:

Text in ROUND PARENTHESES: () is in parentheses in the original document

Text in BRACKETS or SQUARE PARENTHESES: [] indicates missing or hard-to-read words supplied from context, or from an alternative source.

Text in BRACES or CURLY PARENTHESES: { } is an annotation inserted by the editor

[...] indicates missing text (page torn, ink faded, or letters blotted out)

[???] indicates hard-to-read words that we have yet to transcribe.

The forward slash: "/" represents the end of a line in the original document (where we have not been able to fit the text onto one line in the typed transcription).

Letter from John Swinton in Newgate Prison

6th mo. 1660 (Old Style)

BFP #2018.1.02-01

In y^e eternall & infallible I doe {do} see a terrible storme appearing: therefore ffriends watch¹ & yet be not discouraged for in y^e same allsoe I see Redemption draw nigh it hast[e]neth, I know it, I have seene it away unuttereable, & glorious: yea y^e cause in thes[e] nationes is not, shall not be lost; his owne Arme shall bring redemptione, nothing shall hinder it, it is y^e eternall word of y^e lord god; I say y^e day hastenes; yea salvation lingereth not, looke not out it is such a day as will try all, retire in-wards, be wholly given up, but none be upon reserves, lett noething be saved: but [resorte] to meete him in the most terrible apearance: yet tremble before him for he [shall?] worke wonders as [in y^e land] of Zoar;² I doe say it in y^e name and authourity of y^e Lord god; knowing it infallably y^t will be exalted in y^e na[me] y^t he will gett unto himselfe, by y^e signall diliverance inward, & outward: y^t he will worke in thes nationes; in y^e behalfe of his owne good; & in it to other nationes; yea I doe say knowing it y^t y^e truth shall overspread thes nationes; & the mountaines of y^e lord in his people shall come over, & stand on top of all mountain[s] in thes nationes; whosoever will not bow to that shall be broken, and shall [be as] stubble before y^e fiere: & great terrible & signall shall be y^e Day of god upo[n] his enemyes: yea friends if this [n]eed a signe, lett this be one, y^t there are amongst thes att this houre y^t are accounted amongst y^m y^t are apoynted [fo]r death: whose eyes and not anothers shall see y^e accomplishing of thes things howle, howle, howle yee Inhabitants of y^e earth; yⁿ thes words arose in me wth soe mighty a power as I cou[ld] [not] [c]ontaine: but I was forced to cry ou[t] woeful [m]isery, & desolation & an[....] y^e people of the genneration, for y^e [g...] [...]rrible day of [judgment?] [re]ady to breake forth suddenly; [...] day as [h]ath not bene before it, [...] shall be affter it; a day y^t com[eth] [...] [whirl-]wind [w^{ch}] shall overtake, & surprize this genneration; so as noe man shall be able to say w^{ch} way it cometh; or from whence it comes, yⁿ was I silent but under a great agony of body & minde, and after some time thes words arose

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in me, I will keepe my people in y^e hollow of my hand, yⁿ my spirrits retuer[ned] as it were & was still, I see this in y^e infallible eternall & infallible to be y^e true word of god. this was on y^e 4th day of y^e 6th Month 1660: y^e 3^d day of y^e weeke aboute y^e 3^d houre in y^e morning.³ y^e 6th day of y^e weeke of y^e same month, y^e [21th]⁴ day as I thinke: a little affter I had written y^e former on y^e other side, y^e conditione of frends being upon me:⁵ these words arose in power in me. I worke wonders; I will worke wonders. I y^e lord god will worke wonders in y^e behalfe of my people. I will work wonders. I the lord god will work wonders in the behalf of my people. I will work wonders: or he will work wonders writing hereof I cannot positively say whether the word was he or I: being some time affter ere I had liberty to write it: y^e rest I doe as in y^e Infallible see to be y^e word of y^e Lord.

John Swinton,⁶

¹ *I doe see a terrible storme appearing: therefore ffriends watch:* John Swinton warns fellow Quakers of the perils they face after the May 1660 Restoration of the monarchy and the Church of England.

² Zoar was one of the Biblical "cities of the plain" that was spared destruction when Lot and his family took refuge there after fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 19:20, 22, 30).

³ Shortly after the 1660 Restoration, John Swinton was arrested at the house of a London Quaker and taken to Newgate Prison where he composed this epistle in August 1660.

⁴ If the 4th of the month was a Tuesday ("3rd day of the week" to Quakers) then "ye 6th day of ye weeke of ye same month," a Friday, must refer to the 7th, 14th, 21st, or 28th. Though hard to make out, the number most closely resembles 21.

⁵ *y^e conditione of frends being upon me:* inspired the imprisoned Swinton to write the final section of his letter, of which he could not say "whether the word was he [God] or I."

⁶ John Swinton (c.1621–1679): the 23rd laird of Swinton, Scotland, a soldier and statesman during the Protectorate (1653-1659), he was known as "the man of all Scotland ... most trusted and employed by Cromwell." See Paul J. Pinckney, "The Scottish Representation in the Cromwellian Parliament of 1656," *The Scottish Historical Review* 46, no. 142 (1967): 108.