

# Linnaean Correspondence Project



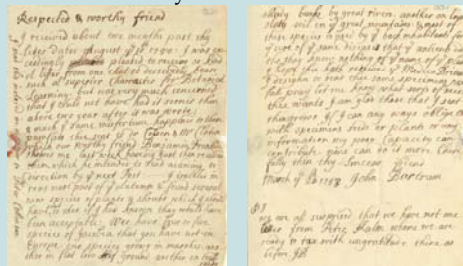
Carl Linnaeus, aged about 30, wearing Lapp dress and holding a Sami drum and a sprig of *Linnaea borealis*.  
Artist: Hoffman

## The Correspondence Collection

The Society has in its care almost 4,000 letters sent to Linnaeus by 600 different correspondents. His reputation was such that many of the major figures in eighteenth-century science were corresponding with him.

The letters are an invaluable source of information for interpreting the other parts of the Collection. For example, the herbarium specimens – many of them recognised as type-specimens – have no details attached as to where and when they were collected and by whom. This vital information can often be gleaned from careful study of the letters.

The Linnaean Correspondence Project was conceived as a three-phase programme to preserve the correspondence for future generations of scholars and to make it more widely accessible.



A typical letter. This is dated 1753 and is from the American botanist John Bartram. He bemoans postal delays, mentions a visit to Benjamin Franklin, offers to send specimens and criticises Pehr Kalm (one of Linnaeus's 'disciples') for failing to write a letter of thanks for their hospitality in Philadelphia.

## Phase 1: Conservation

In Victorian times the letters were transferred into 17 large albums. There was considerable risk of damage to the letters from the acidity of the pages onto which the letters were mounted and from the difficulty of handling the unwieldy volumes.

It was decided that the letters should be removed from the albums, conserved and re-mounted onto acid-free paper.

This part of the project was undertaken by the expert team at the University of Dundee, Book & Paper Conservation Studio. It is now completed.



Monica Matthews at work in the Conservation Studio.

## Phase 2: Digitisation

Once conserved, the letters were in perfect condition to be digitised.

This part of the project is being undertaken by Capita Micromedia Solutions, based in Bicester.

Digitisation started in February 2006 and will be completed by the end of the year.

## Phase 3: On-line availability

Once the digitisation process is completed, the images will be made available on the web.

It will be possible to access them all via the Society's website.

They will also be linked to the website of Project Linnaeus, which is building a comprehensive archive of electronic resources relating to Linnaeus, including his correspondence and collected writings.

This will form an exceptionally powerful research tool designed to meet the requirements of historians of science, botanists, zoologists and cultural historians.

## Benefits of digitisation

### • Availability.

Scholars will no longer have to travel to the Society in order to access the papers. They will be freely available to anyone anywhere in the world.

### • Legibility

At a time when paper was a precious commodity, many correspondents adopted a minute script and made use of every available space on the page. This makes many of the letters very difficult for modern scholars to decipher. The zoom function on the digitised images enables them to be enlarged to make them far more legible than the originals.

### • Conservation

On-line availability will mean that demands for personal access to the letters will be kept to a minimum, thus ensuring that they can be stored in optimum conditions for posterity.

## Legibility

The Collection contains many letters, like the one illustrated here, where the author has striven to cover every square inch of the paper with his news and ideas.

Once it is available on-line, researchers will be able to enlarge the image until the hand-writing becomes legible and also rotate the image to read all the marginal notes and annotations.



Letter to Linnaeus from Jacob Jonas Björnsthål, dated February 8 1775.