



Transcriptions of more Livingstone Materials from the NLS (24 March 2008)

This release sees the publication of the transcripts of 55 letters held in the NLS (National Library of Scotland). The letters published here only form a small proportion of those held by the library and we shall publish more in future. The Livingstone letters in the library were not obtained as a single collection but were acquired piecemeal since the late 1930s. Reflecting this, those published here span the years 1840 to 1866 and were sent to various recipients including family, friends and people with scientific and medical interests. These include a [letter to Richard Owen in 1858](#) at the start of the 'Zambesi Expedition' and the following year a [letter to the geologist Richard Thornton](#) in which he is discharged from the expedition. In a [letter to Lord Palmerston](#) Livingstone describes the local fevers and his hopes for the Zambezi region.

Of particular notice are the four transcriptions of the seven letters contained in MS 656. The letters we have published cover the period July 1842 to February 1846, two are to James MacLehose a Glasgow publisher and two to Margaret Sewell, a widow with whom Livingstone boarded while he was a student in London. Each of the letters in MS 656 is accompanied by a typed transcript. What makes them unique is that they are bound in a single volume described as "Presented, 1937, by James MacLehose, LL.D., a Member of the Board of Trustees of the National Library, and Miss MacLehose to whose father five [actually four] of the letters are written". How letters from two quite different recipients came to be bound together into what was clearly a MacLehose family treasure is not known to us. One of the [letters to Margaret Sewell](#) is of particular note since it suggests Livingstone's relationship with her was not simply that of boarder and landlady, a fact not remarked on or ignored by his biographers. Many thanks to Murray Simpson and Shelia Mackenzie of the Manuscripts Division of the NLS.



*Map of David Livingstone of his explorations south and west
of Lake Malawi, 1859-63.*

Credit: Trustees of the National Library of Scotland