

Livingstone Online News

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

Dundee Central Library Letters Published

Dundee is home to one of the oldest public library services in the world. It contains a collection of classical and theological works originally maintained for use by the monks of Lindores Abbey. During the Reformation when Dundee became known as 'the Geneva of the North', the Reverend William Christison, Protestant Minister of St Mary's, presented a number of his books to the library, 1560 - 1597. After a fire in 1841 the collection was restored by local wealthy benefactors. Today the library holds priceless treasures including the Wedderburns' 'Compendious Book of Godly Psalms' [1567?] and a 1476 Bible from the early Bavarian press of Sensenschmidt and Frisner. The library has probably the most extensive collections on the Tay Bridge Disaster of 1879 and the works of its most famous 'poet' and chronicler William McGonagall. The library also houses the Wighton Collection, one of Scotland's finest national and traditional music resources.



Dundee Central Library possesses two letters from David Livingstone. The earliest (**21 November 1857**) is one of two known to have been sent to George Rough, a glove manufacturer and Lord Provost of Dundee. Writing from London, Livingstone thanks Rough for a contribution from the

people of Dundee to a testimonial fund. The second (**3 April 1858**) is one of three letters known to have been sent to Francis Skead the Royal Navy's Surveyor at the Cape of Good Hope. Writing from the steamer "Pearl" off the West coast of Africa, Livingstone requests a second sextant for the 'Zambesi Expedition'. The connection with Dundee is not entirely clear but the endorsement of the letter's authenticity suggests the letter was given to the library by N. L. Spindle (not traced but possibly a Dundonian), a friend of Skead. There was also a contemporary vessel, the 'Pearl', which was a Dundee registered ship although there may have more than one vessel registered at that time as 'Pearl'.



In 1857 Livingstone was granted the freedom of Dundee. He was elected a Burgess of the First Class 'in admiration of the energy and perseverance manifested by him as a traveller and missionary in Africa'. At the British Association Dundee conference in 1867, at which time Livingstone was missing, believed dead, Sir Roderick Murchison expressed the belief that 'my valued friend was not killed' and that Livingstone 'who can overcome obstacles that not a man in a million can face, may emerge from all his difficulties'.

Many thanks to David Kett, Team leader, Reference Services, Dundee Central Library,

for all his help and enthusiasm.
Photographs:

Tay Bridge - credit: David Kett

David Livingstone - credit: Wellcome Library, London

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About Me



[Livingstone Online](#)

Livingstone Online is an ongoing project that provides access to the manuscripts of the missionary, doctor and African explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873). We currently offer images and detailed transcriptions of many of Livingstone's letters, and we aim to make all of his manuscripts - including his diaries and journals - freely available online. We also run a transatlantic collaboration to apply spectral imaging and processing to restore a series of faded, illegible texts produced by Livingstone during his last travels (1866-1873).

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