

Ambition and Disappointment? Two New Sterne Letters of 1752¹

Abstract: This article identifies two previously-unknown Sterne letters of 1752, the first ‘new’ pieces of Sterne’s correspondence to be brought to light in over ten years. First, evidence is forwarded to demonstrate that just two years after delivering the assize sermon ‘The Abuses of Conscience’ at York Minster, Sterne wrote a letter of application (now lost) to serve Richard of Sykes of Sledmere, High Sheriff of Yorkshire for 1752 – an episode entirely unknown within Sterne studies. The second letter, to John Fountayne, Dean of York, provides a personal insight into Sterne’s activities as commissary in the peculiar courts of the diocese of York. A full text of this letter is presented from the original manuscript. These discoveries, it is argued, provide a crucial insight into a period in which Sterne was embroiled in disturbances in York chapter politics, domestic unhappiness, and an ongoing struggle to gain a foothold with both ecclesiastical and lay patrons in order to further his clerical career.

In the concluding volume of the Florida Edition, Melvyn New offered his motivations for pursuing the identities of the subscribers to Laurence Sterne’s works, suggesting that knowing more about the individuals behind the names might contribute ‘to the next scholarly biography of Sterne’ (*MW*, xxiii). This line of inquiry has quickly borne fruit in Paul Goring’s correlation of connections between Sterne’s subscribers, and known members of the Society of Dilettanti in *The Shandean*, 27, (2016), 59-84. Research of this kind holds great potential for further illuminating the author’s connections at the height of his literary fame, but there is no comparable research tool or impetus for expanding our knowledge of Sterne’s early life, and as a consequence reinterpretations of his pre-*Tristram Shandy* years have rarely been attempted in recent years. There is a sense that the biographical account of this period is ossified – or even, complete. This is largely owing to the thoroughness with which pathfinders such as L. P. Curtis and Arthur Cash trawled archival collections in Yorkshire (and beyond) for material for their monumental works on Sterne. Also important has been the completion of the *Miscellaneous Writings*, which brings greater scrutiny to the spurious assertions about Sterne’s political writings of the 1740s.²

And yet, digital projects which improve accessibility to Yorkshire archives hold great potential for bringing new material to light that might be utilised in new accounts of Sterne’s early life. Both the Borthwick Institute for Archives and York Explore (formerly York City Archives) have launched new digital catalogues in the past two years; these are still very much under development, but they hold great potential for providing new avenues for

research in the future.³ The York Minster Library has not yet reached this stage, but work is underway to improve access. Whilst new digital finding aids present one way forward, there is still a place, as the research for this essay has demonstrated, for the time-honoured approach to archival discovery; scholarly intuition. This essay puts forward evidence for two previously-unknown Sterne letters, one of which is presented in full transcription from a newly-identified manuscript. These are the first ‘new’ pieces of Sterne’s correspondence to be brought to light in over ten years, since *The Shandean*, 17 (2006).⁴ It is fortuitous that both discoveries date to 1752 (a year currently unrepresented in Sterne’s letters), providing a crucial insight into a period in which Sterne was embroiled in disturbances in York chapter politics, domestic unhappiness, and an ongoing struggle to gain a foothold with both ecclesiastical and lay patrons in order to further his clerical career.⁵

Sterne and the High Sheriff: Cock and Bull?

In 2011, I first encountered the claim that in 1752 Sterne was an unsuccessful applicant for the position of chaplain to Richard Sykes, High Sheriff of Yorkshire. This alleged application came just two years after Sterne was selected as assize preacher by Sir William Pennyman, 4th Bt., leading to his preaching of ‘The Abuses of Conscience’ at York Minster on 29 July 1750. Recognising that the connection with Sykes was entirely unknown within Sterne studies, the first task was to determine whether it had any historical basis.⁶ The claim appears in Christopher Simon Sykes’s *The Big House*, a lively family memoir charting the fortune of the Sykes family of Sledmere in the East Riding of Yorkshire.⁷ On its publication in 2004, Julie Myerson of *The Telegraph* deemed the book ‘absorbing and accessible’, written with a breezy confidence typical of Christopher Simon Sykes – magazine columnist, occasional television personality, and one-time tour photographer of The Rolling Stones.⁸ The notes to *The Big House* demonstrate that Sykes drew deeply from his family archives, but the book is not without its inaccuracies; the misspelling ‘Lawrence Sterne’ is a red flag.⁹ When referring to the episode involving Sterne, Sykes provides a citation, but frustratingly gives no key to the acronymic citation; ‘RS-JOTC p. 7’.¹⁰ An inability to decipher this citation, alongside Christopher Sykes’s proclivity for tall tales, and no supporting evidence from Sternean biographical works, inclined me to believe that Sterne’s supposed application was nothing more than a Yorkshire family myth: cock and bull.

However, further investigation into secondary works revealed that Sterne’s approach to Richard Sykes first appeared in print long before the publication of *The Big House*. John

Fairfax-Blakeborough made reference to the application in his *Sykes of Sledmere* of 1929, and the episode was repeated in other publications in the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ Whilst this did not debunk the ‘family myth’ position outright, these additional references suggested that the connection between Sterne and Sykes was derived from a common source. This prompted a return to the Sykes family archives at the Hull History Centre, and the adoption of new approaches to the collection.¹² Whereas my previous searches had focused on material explicitly described as dating to the eighteenth century, further exploration revealed a series of twenty-two typescript volumes created between 1917 and 1919, comprising copies and extracts from Sykes family manuscripts dating back to the 1600s.¹³ Fortuitously, these volumes are accompanied by a name index, and a search revealed two entries for Sterne. One of these entries refers to a volume titled, ‘Richard Sykes’s Journal on the Continent, 1730-1731’, finally enabling the citation ‘RS-JOTC’ in *The Big House* to be deciphered.¹⁴ The ‘Journal on the Continent’ is prefaced by a short biography of Richard Sykes, which includes the following episode from 1752:

The famous author of *Tristram Shandy*, then only known as the Rev^d Laurence Sterne wrote to him [Richard Sykes] offering his service as Chaplain & enclosing a Sermon preached by him on a similar occasion, as a sample, but was not accepted.¹⁵

Whilst this account fleshes out the nature of Sterne’s application to Sykes, it was the second indexed entry that excited real possibilities of locating a hitherto-unknown Sterne holograph letter. In another volume, titled ‘Sykes Family History (unfinished)’, the episode with Sterne appears again, although here it is phrased slightly differently, with the findings presented in the first-person by the author:

I find a letter from the famous Revd. Laurence Sterne Author of “*Tristram Shandy*” offering his Services as Chaplain to the High Sheriff - & enclosing a Sermon preached by him at the Cathedral on a similar occasion¹⁶

In this extract, not only is Sterne’s application reiterated, but the episode is tangibly linked to a manuscript letter and printed sermon (presumably *The Abuses of Conscience*) at one time in the possession of the Sykes family. This is further supported by the fact that both the ‘Journal on the Continent’ and ‘Sykes Family History’ refer to other manuscripts which are identifiable within the present Sykes family archives at the Hull History Centre.¹⁷ But as the

Sterne letter is not part of that collection, it raised the question - where is it now? The author of the 'Sykes Family History' had access to the original Sterne letter in the late eighteenth century, but there has been no record of its whereabouts since that time.

Sledmere House Library

Having determined that a holograph letter by Sterne is not among the Sykes papers at the Hull History Centre, in June 2017 I travelled to Sledmere House to consult books and manuscripts still in the possession of the Sykes family. The aim of this trip was to try to locate both the original manuscript letter, and a contemporary copy of a sermon by Sterne. There was also the secondary aim of investigating the collections at Sledmere in relation to other potential connections between Sterne and the Sykes family of the mid-eighteenth century. These searches centred on the library at Sledmere House, which was chiefly formed by Richard Sykes's successors, Sir Christopher Sykes, 2nd Bt. (1749-1801), and Sir Mark Masterman Sykes, 3rd Bt. (1771-1823). The latter was known as a keen bibliophile, whose collection was famed nationally for its strengths in fifteenth-century incunabula and Elizabethan literature.¹⁸ One such treasure of the late Georgian library at Sledmere was a 1469 vellum copy of the Rome Livy, purchased for £903 in 1815.¹⁹ Following Sir Mark Masterman Sykes's death in 1823, many of the most valuable volumes were sold raising almost £18,000.²⁰ Whilst this sale had a considerable impact on the significance of the library at Sledmere, the collection was not completely dispersed. The present library contains many volumes with pre-1750 ownership inscriptions, and a further 1500 volumes were acquired after 1850.²¹ At the turn of the twentieth century, the library was estimated to comprise approximately 15,000 volumes, although a recent computation places the total at less than half that figure.²² Around that time, a card catalogue of the collection was produced, although the compilers encountered difficulties in arranging the collection due to the irregular sizes of the bookcases.²³ It was only shortly after these efforts to organise the library that Sledmere House was destroyed by fire on 23 May 1911. Amazingly, due to the diligence of the staff and villagers of Sledmere, it is claimed that the entire contents of the house (including the library) were saved from the conflagration. Sledmere House was rebuilt over the following years, and the library was reconstructed to the exact specifications of the one that was destroyed, down to every detail of the bookcases, plasterwork, and parquet flooring.²⁴ This labour of love was such a success that the present library is barely distinguishable from a print of its predecessor issued in 1794 (Fig. 2).²⁵ As such, despite dispersal, reorganisation,

and near-destruction, Sledmere House library still holds many volumes contemporary to Sterne's lifetime.

As to the manuscripts at Sledmere House, it is apparent that those that remain are items that were retained when the bulk of the Sykes family papers were deposited at the local archives. Whilst the great majority of loose manuscripts in the family's possession were transferred, the search at Sledmere revealed a filing cabinet filled with twentieth-century documents and letters on various subjects. All other historic manuscripts that remain in the library are bound into volumes, and were collected together from other parts of the house in the early twentieth century. A 1905 inventory states that several manuscript volumes were formerly stored elsewhere in the house, but were grouped together in one bookcase in the library when the card catalogue was created.²⁶ Beyond that step towards reorganisation, no further attempt was made to catalogue the manuscripts at that time.²⁷ As such, it was necessary to inspect all manuscripts first-hand. The majority of the items retained at Sledmere House relate to local history and heraldry, and include valuable pieces such as a volume of manuscript notes compiled by Francis Drake of York for his 1736 *Eboracum*, given by the historian's grandson to Sir Mark Masterman Sykes in 1802.²⁸ Also located were some of the original papers copied into typescript volumes in 1917-1919, including the 'Journal on the Continent'. Inspection of the original manuscript revealed that the biography that prefaces the volume was added in the mid-nineteenth century, confirming that the information it contains relating to Sterne was likely sourced from the 'Sykes Family History'.²⁹

Ultimately, searches of both the printed works and manuscripts at Sledmere House did not uncover the Sterne holograph, or a printed sermon. Nor could the presence of these items be absolutely dismissed, as the card catalogue was dispersed and in no state to be consulted. As such, the search was limited to what could be determined through first-hand inspection. Indeed, there were reasons to be hopeful that future searches might reveal more links with Sterne. A manuscript catalogue drawn up following the death of Sir Tatton Sykes, 4th Bt. (1772-1863), recorded a 1760 second edition of volumes 1 and 2 of *Tristram Shandy*, which remains in the library to this day.³⁰ Also identified was a bound volume of religious tracts, including assize sermons preached at York in 1793 and 1794, but all dating to after Sterne's lifetime.³¹ It was also possible to confirm that other writings of Sterne were formerly at Sledmere House, but had since been disposed of. The 1824 auction catalogue of Sir Mark Masterman Sykes's collections records that a 1790 edition of *A Sentimental Journey* was sold at that time.³² It is also likely that there were other editions of Sterne's works in the collection, as a letter from the Sykes archive of 19 January 1911 describes a fruitless search

for copies of Sterne's fictions and sermons just six months before the destruction of the house by fire.³³ Further searches at Sledmere may reveal further connections with Sterne, but for the purposes of this essay, the failure to locate an original holograph letter does not disprove Sterne's application to Sykes in 1752. Evidence from the Sykes family archive strongly indicates that there was a letter from Sterne in the family's possession in the late eighteenth century, but its whereabouts is currently unknown. Furthermore, it is possible to investigate Sterne's application from documents relating to Richard Sykes's shrievalty, which is perhaps the best-documented in Yorkshire for the whole eighteenth century. Surviving evidence includes Sykes's diary for 1752, accounts of expenses incurred as High Sheriff, and associated correspondence, which allow for a contextual exploration of Sterne's application, and the potential reasons for its failure.

The Reluctant High Sheriff

Richard Sykes (1706-1761) was born into a successful Yorkshire merchant family who were influential in the prosperous port town of Hull.³⁴ Sykes entered into the Baltic trade, and his status as a prominent gentleman in the town soon led to public office.³⁵ In 1740, he was elected Sheriff of Hull 'by a great Majority' whilst still in his thirties.³⁶ Sykes soon discovered, however, that the shrievalty conflicted with his business interests, but the Corporation of Hull were notorious for compelling the town's eminent citizens to undertake their civic duty.³⁷ When Sykes was subsequently elected as an alderman, he refused the office, and was fined £300 - a sum that could have ruined a lesser merchant.³⁸ Like Sterne, at the county election of 1742, Sykes was as a supporter of the Whig ministry, polling for Cholmley Turner.³⁹ In 1747, he considered offering himself as a candidate in Hull, in order to intervene in a suspected scheme of Sir William Pulteney to manage the borough alongside that of Hedon in the East Riding.⁴⁰ Whilst Sykes did not eventually stand on that occasion, the ministry's candidate considered Sykes's interest in the town to be 'of the greatest consequence'.⁴¹ A year later, Sykes entered the upper echelon of Yorkshire society when he inherited a large estate centred on the Wolds village of Sledmere.⁴² When Sykes attended a meeting at Beverley on 14 November 1749 concerning the better preservation of game, together with thirty-nine other prominent landowners, he was no longer merely a successful Hull merchant, but one of the wealthiest gentlemen in the county.⁴³ At Sledmere, Sykes commenced work on a home that reflected his new status, and developed an estate where he could pursue his interests in field sports, and the improvement of the land.⁴⁴ It is in this guise

that Richard Sykes is chiefly remembered by his descendants; as a ‘bon vivan’ country gentleman who built the first Sykes house at Sledmere, and laid the foundations of the great estate there.⁴⁵

Sykes’s emergence among the chief landowners in the East Riding, alongside his loyalty to the Whig ministry, placed him in contention for higher public office, and rumours that he might be nominated as High Sheriff of Yorkshire first circulated in 1749. In December of that year, Sykes was alarmed to be approached for favour on the basis of his supposed appointment, and wrote to a friend that he might intercede with Lord Galway to ‘prevent’ his nomination.⁴⁶ Sykes was anxious to discover the truth of the report, insisting that he had ‘no ambition to precede my Superiours’, and would be willing to pay his duty to another.⁴⁷ Whilst Sykes avoided nomination on that occasion, it was only a temporary reprieve. On 2 January 1752, George Crowle, Member of Parliament for Hull, informed Sykes that his name had been mentioned ‘by a person in power’ in relation to the shrievalty.⁴⁸ Sykes’s hopes of being discharged for another year were finally disappointed. Writing on 13 January he lamented,

I did not think my Services would have been rewarded with a Pockett Sheriff when there are so many Gentlemen in Yorkshire who sh^d preceed me & more worthy of so great a Trust than I ever desired or thought to attain to⁴⁹

When the appointment was publicly announced in the *London Gazette* on 17 January 1752, Sykes set out on the same day from Hull to York to begin the formalities of his shrievalty year.⁵⁰ Despite his initial reluctance to accept the nomination, at the end of January 1752 Sykes reflected that he had been ‘thoroughly employed’ since being sworn into office, and was committed to honouring the ministry, and ‘the High Opinion they Entertain of my Character’.⁵¹

Solicitations and Sermons

Whilst we do not have evidence of the timing of Sterne’s application to Sykes, the annual appointment of a High Sheriff was highly anticipated, and initiated a flurry of solicitations for patronage, with the majority of applications coming from people offering their services in support of the Lent and summer assize meetings.⁵² The first applications often came prior to the public announcement of the appointment, as those already within the High Sheriff’s

existing kinship and patronage networks learned of the nomination through private channels. In Sykes's case, as early as 17 December 1751 he received an application from his cousin Mann Horsfield, on behalf of William Preston, a brewer who wished to serve him during the shrievalty year.⁵³ Preston had served Sir Griffith Boynton as High Sheriff the previous year, but Horsfield's particular recommendation to Sykes was made on the grounds that he and Preston had been 'educated together'.⁵⁴ The application was ultimately successful.⁵⁵ In April 1752, Sykes demonstrated his reciprocal duty towards his kinsman by making enquiries for a travelling companion that 'had seen the World' to accompany Horsfield on a tour of Britain and abroad, the young man having recently come into 'a very affluent Fortune'.⁵⁶ The second wave of solicitations came after New Year 1752, as rumours of Sykes's appointment became more widely known.⁵⁷ Following the public announcement of the appointment in the *London Gazette* on 17 January 1752, Sykes's diary records a whirlwind of social engagements in York, with daily appearances at the Assembly Rooms, dinners, concerts, and plays.⁵⁸ The expenses incurred in fulfilling these social obligations and making preparations for the pomp and ceremony of the assizes were considerable – surviving vouchers for expenses for Sykes's expenses total in excess of £400.⁵⁹ Anticipation of these expenses undoubtedly contributed to Sykes's reluctance to accept the shrievalty on previous occasions.

As there was no prior relationship between Sterne and Sykes (as far as we know), it is likely that his application to the High Sheriff came in either the second wave of general solicitations in January 1752, or at another occasion prior to the York assize meetings of that year. The Sykes manuscripts claim that Sterne applied for the position of 'chaplain', but the formality of that designation in the mid-eighteenth century is unclear. The appointment of chaplains to noblemen and other office-holders was legally defined by acts passed under Henry VIII, but these make no mention of High Sheriffs.⁶⁰ As such, it must be inferred that the appointment of shrieval chaplains was customary, rather than a result of legal process. Nevertheless, the term 'chaplain' was adopted by some, such as John Burton, vicar of Mapledurham in Oxfordshire, who in 1742 wrote to his diocesan requesting that his preaching of a consecration sermon might be postponed, explaining, 'I am to be tried & hung up in a Pulpit at the Assizes at Rochester, (...) being appointed Chaplain to the pres[en]t high Sheriff'.⁶¹ It is uncertain, however, how widely this term was used. Printed assize sermons from this period noted only the ecclesiastical preferments of the preachers, rather than any particular association with the shrievalty. It was not until the 1770s that a sermon was published attributing authorship to a 'Chaplain to the High Sheriff'.⁶² The specific duties of a clergyman serving a High Sheriff were similarly undefined; whilst they were notionally

required to offer spiritual support to the High Sheriff on public occasions, their responsibilities typically amounted to preaching one, or both sermons at the Lent and summer meetings of the assizes.⁶³

Whatever the nature of Sterne's application to Sykes, it is apparent that there were numerous obstacles to his selection. Firstly, it was highly uncommon for a clergyman to be appointed on multiple occasions by High Sheriffs of Yorkshire. One of the few clergymen to be appointed more than once during the eighteenth century was Thomas Clarke, whose connections with Kirkleatham and Escrick in the North Riding saw him nominated by Cholmley Turner and Bielby Thompson in 1724 and 1731, respectively.⁶⁴ In 1841, at the death of Francis Wrangham, Archdeacon of the East Riding, it was remarked that his having been appointed as assize preacher three times was thought 'a circumstance very rare, if not unparalleled'.⁶⁵ These clergymen owed their multiple appointments to their ability to cultivate interest with numerous lay patrons. By contrast, in the early 1750s Sterne was still struggling to gain a foothold towards further ecclesiastical preferment having rejected his first clerical patronage network in the aftermath of the election of 1742.⁶⁶ One person who might have sought to influence the success of Sterne's application was his uncle, Jaques Sterne. Richard Sykes's diary records ominously that on 26 January 1752 he dined with Dr Sterne in York.⁶⁷ In itself, this meeting should not be considered unusual; the High Sheriff and Jaques Sterne had many shared interests. Dr Sterne was a fellow loyalist during the '45, a supporter of the ministry, and was at that time Archdeacon of the East Riding, where he had long associations with the gentlemen of both the county, and the port of Hull.⁶⁸ Whilst it is tempting to infer further significance from this meeting, it is impossible to determine whether Jaques had any bearing on the outcome of Sterne's appointment without knowing the timing of his application to Sykes.

What is clear, however, is that Sterne's chances of appointment were primarily governed by Sykes's inclination to select an assize preacher from able clergyman within his own kinship network. A letter of 5 June 1752 reveals that Sykes first intended to bestow the honour on his brother, Mark Sykes, rector of Roos in Holderness, and future 1st Sykes Baronet of Sledmere.⁶⁹ Some hint of Mark Sykes's aptitudes as an assize preacher are given in his response to Archbishop Herring's visitation queries of 1743, in which he informed the archbishop that he believed churchwardens' oaths were frequently flaunted, so as to 'cast an Odium on Our Discipline, and to make Oaths cheap'.⁷⁰ Whilst this sensitivity to the laws of the Church, and particularly the swearing of legal oaths, suggests Mark Sykes was well acquitted to deliver an assize sermon, as the Lent meeting approached he was rendered

incapable by ill health. This unexpected disappointment prompted the High Sheriff to turn to another relation, James Torre, vicar of Rothwell.⁷¹ Sykes hoped that his brother would regain his strength in order to preach at the summer assizes, but he showed no signs of recovery. Sykes was forced to acknowledge that his brother was a ‘broken reed’, and again invited Torre to provide a sermon in his place.⁷² Whilst Sykes was clearly determined to appoint his own relations to preach the 1752 assize sermons, familial connection was not sufficient recommendation in itself to warrant selection on significant public occasions. An inadequate performance in the pulpit would reflect poorly on the High Sheriff, so it must be assumed that both Mark Sykes and James Torre were more than capable preachers. And whilst neither of Torre’s sermons was subsequently printed, he could hardly have embarrassed Sykes at the Lent assizes to be invited again the following summer. It is also apparent from Sykes’s diary that in the unlikely event that both Mark Sykes and Torre were unavailable to preach, he was on social terms with many of the clergy of the Yorkshire Wolds who might have had a greater interest with the High Sheriff than Sterne.⁷³ One of those named in the diary was George Hicks Paul, a young clergyman who frequently undertook services at Sledmere, and frequently dined with Sykes.⁷⁴ In light of these other interests, it is perhaps less surprising that Sterne was unable to persuade Sykes through the quality of one of his own sermons.

Sterne and the Sykes of Sledmere

In the existing biographical accounts of this period, Sterne’s preaching of the ‘Abuses of Conscience’ in July 1750 is framed as a brief moment of success amid ongoing struggles (EMY, 234) – plaudits for the quality of the sermon were still in the distant future. Cash argues that the honour of Sterne’s selection ‘was somewhat dimmed’ by an advertisement that copies of *The Case of Elijah* were still available for sale, and that another sermon preached at the end of the year was poorly attended (EMY, 234-235). This is followed in Campbell Ross’s account, which claims that Sterne could have had ‘few grounds for optimism’ at this time.⁷⁵ The identification of Sterne’s application to Sykes in 1752 allows us to question this narrative. The experience of preaching the assize sermon in 1750 must have been sufficiently encouraging to Sterne that he felt confident enough to approach Sykes for the same honour two years later, despite his apparent lack of interest with the High Sheriff. That Sterne enclosed a copy of the *Abuses of Conscience* with his application also presages the strategies of self-promotion that he later utilised in support of his works of fiction. Had Sterne been selected to preach in 1752, it is unlikely the experience would have been

comparable with that of two years earlier. In March of that year, Judge Thomas Burnet was struck down with illness on the road from Lancaster, forcing an adjournment of the assizes in York.⁷⁶ This postponement placed the rescheduled assizes meetings at odds with the great social occasion of the race week with which it usually coincided. *The Protestant York Courant* reported that as a result, the crowds in the city were ‘much lessen’d’, despite the ‘grand appearance’ by the High Sheriff and his retinue.⁷⁷

Whilst until now, Sterne’s 1752 application to Richard Sykes has been completely unknown within Sterne studies, it is apparent that this episode has exerted an increasing influence over the Sykes family of Sledmere and their biographers. This is in part because Richard Sykes’s nomination as High Sheriff is recalled with pride within the family, despite his initial reluctance to accept the position. A draft epitaph composed by Sykes’s brother at his death in 1761 gave particular prominence to the shrievalty:

—He served in the Office of Heigh[sic] Sheriff for this County in the Year 1752 and Supported that trust with becoming Dignity and Spirit. —⁷⁸

During Sterne’s lifetime, the author’s association with the Sykes began and ended with his failed application. No members of the family were subscribers to his fiction or sermons (*MW*). In the later eighteenth century, however, the Sykeses recognised Sterne’s fame, and added editions of his works to the library at Sledmere. Perhaps the discovery of a letter from ‘the famous Revd. Laurence Sterne’ (referred to in the ‘Sykes family history’) provides a clue to the fate of the original holograph, if it did leave the Sykeses possession sometime thereafter.⁷⁹

From the turn of the twentieth century, Sterne once again began to loom large in the imagination of the Sykeses. By this time, the family had become the most considerable landowners in the East Riding of Yorkshire.⁸⁰ Accounts of the childhood of Sir Mark Sykes, 6th Bt. (1879-1919) relate Shandean anecdotes of a fascination with the works of the military engineer Vauban, and delight in building miniature fortifications on the lawns of Sledmere House.⁸¹ As a young man, Mark Sykes was enchanted by the collections of his eighteenth-century ancestors, and in 1900 described searching the books at Sledmere House as ‘like going back 100 years’.⁸² It was during his youth that Sykes first encountered Sterne, and a letter of c.1900 captures his passion for *Tristram Shandy*.

I have been reading and roaring over *Tristram Shandy* again, its rather improper, but a truly whimsical book, and how I love dear Uncle Toby, what a true to life character, Gad! they could write in the 18th century... had Thackeray lived in those days he'd have written ten times better and ten times less⁸³

The extent of Sterne's influence on Mark Sykes deserves further attention, as during his university years he developed a reputation as a cartoonist and satirist that lingered into his political career (*Oxford DNB*). Following Sykes's premature death from Spanish Influenza in 1919, T. E. Lawrence remarked, 'His instincts lay in parody: by choice he was a caricaturist rather than an artist, even in statesmanship'.⁸⁴

Sterne as a Judge in the Spiritual Courts: New Evidence

For all the difficulties Sterne faced in the early 1750s through his troubled domestic life, and the hostility of his uncle Jaques, there were reasons he could be hopeful about the direction of his clerical career. The appointment of John Fountayne as Dean of York in 1747 provided Sterne with an opportunity to cultivate the favour of a new ecclesiastical patron, and by 1751 he had been rewarded with the role of commissary of the deanery peculiar courts of Pickering and Pocklington, in addition to oversight of Alne and Tollerton received from Lord Fauconberg the year before. Unlike the 1752 application to Richard Sykes, which was completely unknown within Sterne studies, the context of Sterne's roles in the peculiar courts of the diocese of York (particularly in relation to the composition of *A Political Romance*) have been described amply elsewhere, and further sign-posted in the final instalment of the Florida Edition (*MW*, 88). As such, it is not necessary to repeat that information here. New evidence relating to this period of Sterne's life does, however, provide an opportunity to revisit and reorient the relative importance of Sterne's appointments as commissary to other aspects of his early clerical career. For Cash, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, Sterne's career as a spiritual judge began with his appointment to the small prebendal court of North Newbald in 1742, and continued unbroken until the publication of *Tristram Shandy* (*EMY*, 132-133).⁸⁵ This must be revised, however, in light of information gleaned from surviving visitation files at York Minster Library. In 1742 and 1743, the churchwardens of North Newbald directed their presentments in Sterne's name, but from 1744, the returns were given in the name of the surrogate, Anthony Almond, who oversaw the small jurisdiction for the remainder of Sterne's life.⁸⁶ In this light, Cash's inference that the North Newbald court

was well-managed still appears correct, but not because Sterne himself was a ‘lenient and fair judge’ (*EMY*, 133). As such, it was not until the 1750s that Sterne began to take a consistently active role presiding over peculiar courts in the diocese of York. This further enhances the importance of a newly-identified holograph letter from June 1752 (see, below), which provides a personal insight into Sterne’s activities as commissary, and demonstrates that he was active and diligent in his ecclesiastical duties soon after the disappointment of his failed application as assize preacher to Richard Sykes.

Hidden in Plain Sight

To date, my searches for unacknowledged Sternean material have largely concentrated on the regional archives services of the North of England.⁸⁷ New discoveries from these collections have provided fresh insights into the dynamics of Sterne’s first professional network, under the patronage of Archbishop Blackburne’s administration.⁸⁸ Given the geographical focus of this work, it was somewhat surprising that real hopes of discovering a new Sterne holograph letter were raised when browsing Clapinson and Rogers’s *Summary Catalogue of Post-Medieval Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford, Acquisitions 1916-1975*. The following entry seemingly referred to a letter unknown to both Curtis, and the editors of the *Florida Letters* – the late acquisition date perhaps contributing to it having been missed on previous occasions.

37839 Autographs and letters, 18-19th cent., collected by William Spence, printer and bookseller of York, early 19th cent., and continued by George Lawton, c. 1832-1855, including a letter from Laurence Sterne to John Fountayne, 1752, and three receipts for payments to schoolmasters at Methley, Yorks. 1642, 1649. 610 leaves. Bequeathed by William Spence to George Lawton; bought from Winifred A. Myers, 1974.

MS. Autogr. D. 38. 79-80.⁸⁹

MS. Autogr. D. 38 at the Bodleian Library is a voluminous collection, chiefly comprising excised autographs and franks rather than entire letters.⁹⁰ The great majority of the autographs belong to individuals with connections to Yorkshire, and are contemporary to the compilers’ lifetimes (1780s-1840s). Of the earlier examples, the collection features autographs of persons known to Sterne, such as the York printer Thomas Gent.⁹¹ The items

relating to Sterne are found at ff. 79-81, and include (in addition to what is stated in the summary catalogue description) an autograph of 1748 butchered from a Stillington tithe receipt, and an inferior print of the Reynolds portrait, a frontispiece to the sermons taken from a later collected edition of Sterne's works.⁹²

The newly-identified holograph letter [Fig. 3] runs to three sides of a single-folded folio sheet, and was composed by Sterne at Sutton-on-the-Forest on 3 June 1752, the day following the conclusion of his first visitation as commissary of the deanery courts of Pocklington and Pickering.⁹³ This is the first letter between Sterne and John Fountayne to be identified, and represents a rare survival of what was in all likelihood a more extensive correspondence between the former college acquaintances (*EMY*, 58). By 1752, Sterne had assisted Fountayne in the residentiary dispute at York Minster, and composed a *clerum* for the dean to deliver at Cambridge (*EMY*, 222-240), which must (we might assume) have entailed an exchange of correspondence more extensive than the single letter presented here. Whilst Cash has drawn attention to the manner in which Sterne and Fountayne 'opened themselves to criticism' through their habit of 'falling into the rowdy talk of undergraduates', there is little trace of this in the letter (*EMY*, 223). Indeed, our efforts would be misplaced in trying to identify traces of the Shandean style in what is a diligent account by Sterne of the issues arising during the course of his visitation. Until now, it has only been possible to reconstruct Sterne's activities as commissary from surviving administrative records, and the contents of *A Political Romance* and associated pamphlets. The resulting discussion has centred on the contention between Sterne's own moral failings, and his role in passing judgement on those lay persons accused of crimes such as bastardy, fornication, and Sabbath-breaking.⁹⁴ This letter demonstrates, however, that in reporting the successful completion of the visitation to John Fountayne, Sterne was chiefly concerned with matters relating to the clergy within the dean's jurisdiction.

The main body of the letter concerns the payment of petty dues to Fountayne in the parish of Pickering, but Sterne mentions another matter in passing that is much more illuminating of his authority as commissary. Sterne was evidently eager to assure Fountayne that the majority of clergy under his jurisdiction were 'regular & decent Men', but one exception was a 'rascally Curate' who had been in deacon's orders for over twenty years, 'to the great detriment of the Parish'.⁹⁵ Whilst clergymen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were occasionally left 'stranded' in their progress to the priesthood by the changing politico-religious complexion of England and Wales, an extended diaconate was much less common in the eighteenth century.⁹⁶ In Sterne's day, the primary motivations for remaining a

deacon were religious scruples. To give a notable example, in his early career the theologian Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) was willing to subscribe to the thirty-nine articles, but in later life found he could not, and refused higher preferment (*Oxford DNB*). Sterne's use of 'rascally' suggests that the curate was anti-subscription, or perhaps suspected of being an evangelical. In the 1750s, the rise of Methodism was of concern to many churchmen, and John Wesley preached in Pocklington just a month before Sterne's visitation – although he received little encouragement from the local people.⁹⁷ The 'detriment' caused to the parish by a curate who did not take priest's orders came through their inability to perform certain clerical functions. Deacons were permitted to baptise infants, bury the dead, and provide morning and evening prayers for the congregation, but could not solemnise marriages, or celebrate the Eucharist.⁹⁸

It has been possible to identify the curate in question by cross-referencing the clergymen named in the call list for Sterne's 1752 visitation at Pocklington, with the published episcopal visitation returns of archbishops Herring (1743) and Drummond (1764).⁹⁹ Of the eleven men named, only one fits Sterne's description. Michael Lythe (d. 1768) was ordained by the Bishop of Carlisle in 1724, and served as curate to Thomas Lovett, vicar of Pocklington, from around 1740.¹⁰⁰ Lythe's reluctance to progress to the priesthood between 1724 and 1752 represents one of the longest diaconates in the diocese for this period. Whilst no firm evidence of Lythe's motivations for remaining a deacon has been identified, a clue is provided by his ordination records. Lythe held an M.A. from Edinburgh University, a strongly Presbyterian institution not subject to the formal religious tests applicable at Oxford or Cambridge.¹⁰¹ Whatever the reason for Lythe's determination to remain a deacon, it is apparent that Sterne played an active role in ensuring that he conformed to the established norms of the Church. In 1753, Lythe was priested by Archbishop Matthew Hutton and continued to serve Pocklington until his death in 1768.¹⁰² Lythe's belated entrance into the priesthood came shortly before the Marriage Act came into force, and the registers for Pocklington reveal that he subsequently officiated at all 128 marriages in the parish between 1754 and his death.¹⁰³ Lythe reappears in the historical record in the 1760s, when he appealed to Archbishop Drummond for financial assistance on the basis of his meagre curate's salary. In Jago's discussion of this event, she states that the archbishop ultimately rejected Lythe's request at the intervention of Dean Fountayne, inferring that the 'correspondent's record was tainted'.¹⁰⁴ Sterne's letter supports this view, and further demonstrates that despite Lythe's progression to the priesthood in 1753, his perceived transgressions against the dean and Sterne as his commissary were not forgotten, or excused.

The full text of the letter is presented below in accordance with the style of the Florida Edition, with further explanatory notes.

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NOTES

- 1 Archival research in support of this piece was made possible by grants from Oxford Brookes University, and the Royal Historical Society. The author is grateful to all at Sledmere House for permission to consult the collections there, and for the advice and guidance of W. B. Gerard, William Gibson, Paul Goring, and Peter de Voogd in the completion of this essay.
- 2 See also Melvyn New, 'An Examination of Kenneth Monkman's Attributions to Sterne, 1745-1748', *The Shandean*, 21 (2010), 46-80.
- 3 The online catalogue for the Borthwick Institute for Archives can be found at, <https://borthcat.york.ac.uk/>; York Explore's catalogue at the less memorable https://cyc.sdp.sirsidynix.net.uk/client/en_GB/default [both accessed 23 August 2017].
- 4 The last 'new' transcription of a Sterne holograph letter was presented by Melvyn New and Peter de Voogd in *The Shandean*, 21 (2010), 81-83.
- 5 If entered into the *Letters* volumes, the items presented in this essay would fall between letters 13-14.
- 6 At this time Peter de Voogd was also on the trail of this claim, but his searches in the Sykes family archives and communications with Sledmere House had yielded no firm leads.
- 7 Christopher Simon Sykes, *The Big House: The Story of a Country House and Its Family* (HarperCollins, 2004).
- 8 Julie Myerson [review], 'Christopher Simon Sykes, *The Big House: The Story of a Country House and Its Family*', *The Daily Telegraph* (2004) [accessed online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3623023/A-house-ablaze.html>, 25 August 2017].
9. Sykes, *The Big House*, 18.
10. Ibid, 387-404.

11. John Fairfax-Blakeborough, *Sykes of Sledmere: The Record of a Sporting Family and Famous Stud* (Philip Allan, 1929), 26; Christopher Hussey, 'Sledmere, Yorkshire – I', *Country Life*, 106: 2750 (30 September 1949), 974; Shane Leslie, *Salutation to Five* (Hollis & Carter, 1951), 135-36.
12. Hull History Centre (HHC). DDSY, papers of the Sykes family of Sledmere. The collection was first deposited at East Riding Record Office, before being transferred to the University of Hull alongside numerous other estate collections in 1974. Several additional deposits were made between 1975 and the 1990s. Further material relating to the Sykes family was deposited by a local solicitors' firm, and is located at DSY.
13. HHC. DDSY(3)/10, typescript volumes containing copies or extracts from Sykes family manuscripts, 1917-1919.
14. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/23, list of volumes 1-22 and index of names, 1919.
15. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/10, *Journal of a Continental Tour* (Germany, Holland, France), by Richard Sykes, 1730, 7. Typescript copy, 1918. The journal is prefaced with a short biography of Richard Sykes (1706-1761).
16. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/12, Sykes family history (unfinished), [18th cent.], 56. Typescript copy, 1918.
17. Other identifiable documents referred to in the 'Journal of a Continental Tour' and the 'Sykes Family History' include: HHC. DDSY3/1, Letters to Richard Sykes about the Rebellion, 1745-1746; DDSY/100/24, High Sheriff receipts, 1751-1752; DDSY/1/102/2, Diary of Richard Sykes esq., 1756.
18. Karen Attar, ed., *Directory of Rare Book and Special Collections in the UK and Republic of Ireland*, third edition (Facet Publishing, 2016), 64; Alan Bell, 'Sykes, Sir Mark Masterman, third baronet (1771–1823)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*Oxford DNB*), 2004 [accessed at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26869>, 1 July 2017].
19. Ibid.
20. Bell, 'Sykes, Sir Mark Masterman, third baronet (1771–1823)', *Oxford DNB*.
21. Attar, ed., *Directory of Rare Book*, 64.
22. HHC. DDSY2/9/9, report on the library at Sledmere House, [20th cent.]; Attar, ed., *Directory of Rare Book*, 64.
23. HHC. DDSY2/9/9, report on the library at Sledmere House, [20th cent.].

24. David Neave and Susan Neave, eds., *A History of the County of York: East Riding, Volume XIII, East Buckrose: Sledmere and the Northern Wolds* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008), 205.
25. Thomas Malton the Younger, *The Library at Sledmere*, 1794, engraving, aquatint on paper, 600mm x 456mm. Copies in the Royal Collection; Gott Collection, Wakefield, etc.
26. HHC. DDSY(2)/9/9, report on the library at Sledmere House, [20th cent.].
27. Ibid.
28. Volume at Sledmere House labelled on spine 'History & Antiquities of York, M.S.S.'. Inscribed by the historian Francis Drake on the fly-leaf, 9 July 1737: 'Some collections for my history of York, made on single quires, but now bound together. This was not the Copy from which the book was printed that consisted of many more quires of paper, all wrote with my own hand, but cut to pieces for the use of the press'. A later note adds that the volume was presented to Sir Mark Masterman Sykes by Francis Drake (grandson to the historian) on 3 August 1802.
29. There is also at Sledmere House a duplicate series of the twenty-three typescript volumes found at HHC. DDSY(3)/10.
30. Volume at Sledmere House titled 'Catalogue of the Library at Sledmere' [1860s].
31. Bound volume of religious tracts at Sledmere House. Includes: Thomas Beaumont, *A Sermon Preached In the Cathedral Church of York, At the Assizes... March 24th, 1793* (Leeds, 1793); Thomas Collins, *An Assize Sermon Preached In the Minster at York, On Sunday, 16th March, 1794* (York, 1794).
32. *A Catalogue of the Splendid, Curious, and Extensive Library... of the late Sir Mark Masterman Sykes* (London, 1824). Also sold were copies of the Fisher print of Sterne, the frontispiece portrait of Lydia Sterne de Medalle, and plates to *A Sentimental Journey*. See *A catalogue of the highly valuable collection of prints... which ... will be sold by auction by Mr. Sotheby ... March-[December] 1824* (London, 1824).
33. HHC. DDSY(2)/1/15/582, letter from H. Thelwell to Mr Wilson, 19 January 1911.
34. Robert Carrington Ward, 'Political Correspondence Relating to Kingston-upon-Hull, 1678-1835', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds (1989), 13.
35. Neave and Neave, eds., *A History of the County of York... Sledmere and the Northern Wolds*, 23.
36. HHC. BRB/18, draft Bench Book, 16 Nov 1738-18 Oct 1756, 853; HHC. DDSY(3)/7/40, Quietus of Richard Sykes as sheriff of Hull, 1741.

37. Edward Gillett and Kenneth A. MacMahon, *A History of Hull*, second edition (Hull: The University of Hull Press, 1989), 259-60.
38. HHC. BRB/18, draft Bench Book, 16 Nov 1738-18 Oct 1756, 8-10.
39. *The Poll for a Representative in Parliament for the County of York... Begun... 15th of January, 1741* (York: Ward and Chandler, 1742). Sykes's brother, Mark Sykes, also polled for Turner.
40. Ward, 'Political Correspondence Relating To Kingston-upon-Hull, 1678-1835', 54-55.
41. Ibid, 247.
42. Barbara English, *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire, 1530-1910* (Howden: Hull Academic Press, 2000), 26-29; The Sledmere estate was founded by the wealthy Hull merchant Mark Kirkby (1682-1748), who added to his family's considerable properties in the East Riding of Yorkshire by purchasing all but a few acres in the township of Sledmere between 1721 and 1745. At Kirkby's death, his estates were divided between several relatives, including Richard Sykes and Jane Torre (a niece). Kirkby also served as High Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1737-1738. See Neave, *A History of the County of York: Sledmere and the Northern Wolds*, 23; W. Mark Ormrod, *The Lord Lieutenants & High Sheriffs of Yorkshire, 1066-2000* (Barnsley: Wharncliffe Books, 2000), 159.
43. HHC. DDSY(3)/7/50, memorandum of a meeting at Beverley for the preservation of game, 1749; English, *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire*, 26-29.
44. The foundation stone of the first Sykes house at Sledmere was laid on 17 June 1751. See Neave, *A History of the County of York: Sledmere and the Northern Wolds*, 203.
45. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/10, Journal of a Continental Tour, 1730. Typescript copy, 1918.
46. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/4, copy letter from Richard Sykes, to, Joseph Wilson, 19 December 1749.
47. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/4, copy letter from Richard Sykes to Joseph Wilson, 28 December 1749; copy letter from Richard Sykes to Sir William St. Quintin, December 1749.
48. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/10, Journal of a Continental Tour, 1730. Typescript copy, 1918.
49. HHC. DDSY/101/91, letter from Richard Sykes, 13 January 1752.
50. HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752; the announcement was made in the local newspapers a few days later. See *York Courant* (Tuesday 21 January 1752), 1372.
51. HHC. DDSY/101/91, letter from Richard Sykes to George Crowle, 27 January 1752.

52. For the range of services provided to a High Sheriff, see HHC. DDSY/100/24, High Sheriff receipts, 1752.
53. HHC. DDSY/101/91, letter from Mann Horsfield to Richard Sykes, 17 December 1751.
54. East Riding of Yorkshire Archives & Local Studies Service (ERYAS). DDGB/4/2/3, Accounts relating to the High Sheriff, 1751; HHC. DDSY/101/91, letter from Mann Horsfield to Richard Sykes, 17 December 1751.
55. HHC. DDSY/100/24, High Sheriff receipts, 1751-1752.
56. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/4, copy letter from Richard Sykes to Robert Nettleton, 10 April 1752. Mann Horsfield (1728-1796) came into his fortune at the death of his mother. Horsfield resided at Thorp Green Hall in the West Riding (known for its nineteenth-century associations with the Brontë family), and also served as High Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1774. He was not a subscriber to Sterne (*MW*, 412). See Peter Holmes, 'The Robinsons of Thorp Green', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 76 (2004), 189-91.
57. See, HHC. DDSY/101/91, letter from William Hammond to Richard Sykes, 9 January 1752.
58. HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752.
59. HHC. DDSY/100/24, High Sheriff receipts, 1752. This sum does not appear to have been extraordinary. Sir Griffith Boynton's shrievalty expenses in 1751 amounted to £437 3s 9d. See, ERYAS. DDGB/4/2/3, Accounts relating to the High Sheriff, 1751.
60. William Gibson, *A Social History of the Domestic Chaplain, 1530-1840* (University of Leicester Press, 1997), 4-5.
61. A. P. Jenkins, ed., *The Correspondence of Thomas Secker, Bishop of Oxford 1737-58*, The Oxford Record Society, 57 (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), 78. Letter from John Burton to Thomas Secker, 18 July 1742.
62. John Lever, *A Sermon Preached at the Assizes Held at Lancaster, the Eleventh Day of August, 1771.... By the Rev. John Lever, Curate of Buxton, and Chaplain to the High-Sheriff of Lancashire* (Manchester, 1771).
63. Seventeenth-century sources give evidence of other duties of High Sheriff's chaplains, such as taking the confessions of prisoners. See *Boteler's Case: being an impartial narrative of the tryal, & penitent behaviour of Master William Boteler, executed September 10th at Chelmsford...* (London, 1678).

64. Thomas Clarke (1676-1756) gained favour with the High Sheriffs as rector of Escrick, and Master of the Free-school at Kirkleatham. Clarke was installed as a prebendary of York in December 1742, and was present at a chapter meeting on 13 March 1744 when Sterne was instituted to the vicarage of Stillington. See York Minster Library (YML), Chapter Act Book. Clarke's printed assize sermons are *The True Foundation of a Nation's Greatness... A Sermon preached at the Assizes at York, March 7th, 1724* (York, 1724); *The Divine Institution of Government... A Sermon Preach'd at the Assizes Held at York, August 1, 1731...* (York, 1731).
65. 'Memoir of the Rev. Francis Wrangham, M.A. F.R.S. Late Archdeacon of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Prebendary of York, and of Chester, etc.', in *The Church Times*, 3: 30 (June 1841), 162.
66. Daniel Reed, 'The Diocese of York, 1724-1743: Laurence Sterne's First Professional Network'. Paper presented at the BSECS Annual Conference, Oxford, January 2017. Text available at <https://oxfordbrookes.academia.edu/DanielHReed> [accessed 25 August 2017].
67. HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752. The collection level description for the DDSY collection at the Hull History Centre mistakenly claims this meeting was with Laurence Sterne, rather than Jaques.
68. Daniel Reed, 'A New Historical Perspectives on Jaques Sterne in the East Riding: The Account Book of Hugh Bethell of Rise, 1725-1752', *The Shandean*, 23 (2012), 98-105.
69. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/4, copy letter from Richard Sykes to James Torre, 5 June 1752.
70. S. L. Ollard and P. C. Walker, eds., *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns, 1743*, III, The Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series LXXV (Wakefield: The Society, 1929), 33.
71. James Torre (1723-1788) was ordained by Archbishop Herring at Bishopthorpe on 23 February 1746, and became vicar of Rothwell in 1749. Lambeth Palace Library. Herring 1, An Account of Ordinations held at York, & of Letter Dimissory for Orders granted by His Grace Thomas Lord Arch Bishop of York, 1743-1757. See also HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752. Entry for 24 March 1752 reads 'accompanied the Judge to the Minster Mr Torre preacht the Assize Sermon the Grand Jury dined with me at Kettlewells...'.
 72. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/4, copy letter from Richard Sykes to James Torre, 5 June 1752.

73. HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752. Between January and June 1752, Sykes records social engagements involving fourteen local clergymen. Correctly identifying each of these individuals is problematic as Sykes refers to them by surname only, prefixed with 'parson'.
74. George Hicks Paul (1725-1799), ordained in 1749, became vicar of Sledmere in 1755. For his social engagements with Sykes, see HHC. DDSY/102/1, Diary of Richard Sykes, 1752.
75. Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life* (OUP, 2001), 183; Melvyn New has recently emphasised the occasion of Sterne's preaching of *The Abuses of Conscience*, but little has been written about how Sterne came to be selected in the first place. See Melvyn New, 'Reading the Occasion: Understanding Sterne's Sermons', in W. B. Gerard, ed., *Divine Rhetoric, Essays on the Sermons of Laurence Sterne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2012), 106. The only surviving document among the Pennyman family papers relating to Sir William Pennyman's shrievalty is a voucher for Pipe Office expenses. See Teeside Archives. U.PEN/5/196, estate vouchers, 1715-1764.
76. HHC. DDSY(3)/2/10, copy letter from Thomas Burnet, 13 March 1752; letter from Thomas Parker to Richard Sykes, 22 March 1752.
77. *The Protestant York Courant* (York: Tuesday 24 March 1752), 331.
78. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/10, Journal of a Continental Tour, 1730. Typescript copy, 1918, 17. Similarly, the 1752 obituary of Hugh Bethell of Rise in the *Protestant York Courant* drew particular attention to his term as High Sheriff. Bethell had provided funds to Jaques Sterne to help set up the newspaper in 1745/1746. See *The Protestant York Courant* (York: Tuesday 31 March 1752), 332; Reed, 'A New Historical Perspectives on Jaques Sterne in the East Riding', *The Shandean*, 23 (2012), 98-105.
79. HHC. DDSY(3)/10/12, Sykes family history (unfinished), 1918.
80. Barbara English, *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire, 1530-1910*, 26-29.
81. Sykes, *The Big House*, 214.
82. DDSY(2)/1/2a/23, letter from Mark Sykes, 13 April 1900. Sykes remarked of his time in the library at Sledmere: 'If I stayed in it too long I should come out like this', accompanied by a caricatured self-portrait in eighteenth-century dress. It was undoubtedly Sykes's affection for his family's history that inspired him to order the transcription of many of the Sykes manuscripts shortly before his death in 1919. See fn. 13.

83. HHC. DDSY(2)/1/2a/77, letter from Mark Sykes, c. 1900.
84. T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, new ed. (Poole: New Orchard, 1986), 57. Mark Sykes is remembered for his role in the negotiations of the infamous Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement that defined the boundaries of the Middle East in the aftermath of the First World War, and continues to affect the region to the present day.
85. This assumption is also followed in Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne, A Life*, 149.
86. YML, C1/76-78, peculiar visitation files, 1742-1744. Cash had previously argued that there was ‘no doubt’ that Sterne held court in North Newbald prior to the 1760s, as the churchwardens directed their presentments to Sterne, having grown ‘accustomed’ to his personal attendance. Further consultation with the visitation records reveals however, that unless the associated papers refer specifically to courts being conducted ‘before’ a particular individual, it can be difficult to identify who actually presided. This information was not always included in churchwardens’ presentments, nor is the particular court always specified – this sometimes has to be inferred from the chapelry or parish in question. For example, the 1742 visitation presentment for Little Driffield in the East Riding makes no reference to the jurisdiction of the Precentorship to which the township belonged, or to Jaques Sterne as the dignitary addressed. See Arthur H. Cash, ‘Sterne as a Judge in the Spiritual Courts: The Groundwork of *A Political Romance*’, in John H. Middelndorf, ed., *English Writers of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 28.
87. The search for new archival material has not been restricted to the North of England. The identification at Cornwall Record Office of the correspondence and papers at of Lewis Stephens (1689-1747), chaplain to Archbishop Blackburne in the 1720s, have proven to be highly illuminating of diocesan affairs in York in the first half of the eighteenth century. Stephens was also a prebendary of York from 1726 to 1747, and knew many of Sterne’s contemporaries. His description of Jaques Sterne from the 1740s is one of the most lurid yet discovered. An essay about Lewis Stephens by the author is due to appear in the *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* in 2018.
88. Reed, ‘The Diocese of York, 1724-1743: Laurence Sterne’s First Professional Network’. BSECS Annual Conference, Oxford, January 2017. Text available at <https://oxfordbrookes.academia.edu/DanielHReed> [accessed 25 August 2017].
89. Mary Clapinson, and T. D. Rogers, *Summary Catalogue of Post-Medieval Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library Oxford, Acquisitions 1916-1975* (SC 37300-

- 55936), vol. I (Oxford, 1991), 38. William Spence, bookseller of York, was made a freeman of the city in 1806. I have been unable to trace any further information about Spence. See Robert Davies, *City of York. The Freeman's Roll...* (York, 1835), 65. George Lawton (1779-1869) was a solicitor and antiquary from York. His published works include *Collectio rerum ecclesiasticarum* (2 vols., 1840). He served in the ecclesiastical courts under five archbishops of York, and was registrar of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding under Archdeacon Wilberforce (*Oxford DNB*).
90. Bodleian Library. MS. Autogr. D. 38, 18-19th cent. Other items include prints, and the seventeenth-century receipts mentioned in the catalogue entry.
 91. Ibid.
 92. The autograph is identifiable as having been cut from a tithe receipt to Stephen Croft of Stillington, comparable to those in the custody of the Laurence Sterne Trust at Shandy Hall. Four such receipts were exhibited at York Minster Library during the 1968 Sterne Bicentenary Conference. See Kenneth Monkman and J. C. T. Oates, 'Towards a Sterne Bibliography: Books and Other Material Displayed at the Sterne Conference', in Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond, eds., *The Winged Skull, Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference* (Methuen, 1971), 286-87.
 93. Sterne had been appointed in the summer of 1751. The earliest document addressed to Sterne as commissary is a set of presentments from the churchwardens of Kilham, dated 15 October 1751. See YML. C1/85, 1751. The annotation on the rear of the letter is possibly in Fountayne's hand.
 94. Cash, 'Sterne as a Judge in the Spiritual Courts', in *English Writers of the Eighteenth Century*.
 95. I am particularly grateful for the advice of William Gibson on this issue.
 96. Francis Young, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015).
 97. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journals and Diaries, III, The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 20. In 1756, Archbishop Hutton annotated the 1743 visitation returns of Archbishop Herring, observing that he had found no 'material variation' from the answers received by his predecessor aside from the 'increase of Methodism'. See Borthwick Institute for Archives (BIA). Bp. V. 1743/Ret. By 1764, there was a Methodist meeting house in Pocklington. Cressida Annesley and Philippa Hoskin, *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns 1764, II:*

- Yorkshire H-R*, Borthwick Texts and Calendars 23 (York: University of York, 1998), 172.
98. For an eighteenth-century delineation of a deacon's clerical functions, see Edmund Gibson, *Codex juris ecclesiastici Anglicani: or, the statutes, constitutions, canons, rubricks and articles of the Church of England...*(London, 1713), 150.
 99. YML. C1/85, 1752. There are no annotations on the call list itself to suggest an issue with the status of any of the clergy summoned.
 100. Annesley and Hoskin, eds., *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns 1764, II: Yorkshire H-R*, 172-173. Lythe's son, Thomas, was buried in the parish church in 1741. See BIA. PR/POCK 2, register of baptism, marriages, and burials, 1707-1778. Lythe also certified to having published in the parish church at Pocklington Sterne's process for his visitation of 1753. YML. C1/87, 1753.
 101. Ollard and Walker, eds., *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns, 1743*, III, 12-13; John Gascoigne, 'The Universities and the Enlightenment' in J. Gascoigne, ed., *Science, Politics and the Universities in Europe 1600-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 7. A prominent Edinburgh graduate of the eighteenth-century was Isaac Maddox (1697-1759). Raised by a dissenting family following the death of his father, he attended the University of Edinburgh and was awarded an M.A. in 1723. Thereafter, Maddox conformed to the Church of England, and was subsequently appointed as clerk of the closet to Queen Caroline, and bishop of St. Asaph. See W. M. Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1680-1840* (OUP, 2007), 39-40.
 102. Annesley and Hoskin, eds., *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns 1764, II: Yorkshire H-R*, 172-73.
 103. BIA. PR/Pock 4, register of baptism, marriages, and burial, 1754-1812. Curiously, on the inside front cover of this register, Lythe made a note of the execution of Eugene Aram at York in 1759, following a sensational trial for murder. Aside from the infamy of the case, no further connection between Aram, Lythe, or Pocklington can be identified. For Aram, see <http://goodhumour.laurencesternetrust.org.uk/exhibition/year-1759/the-trial-of-eugene-aram/> [accessed 27 August 2017].
 104. Judith Jago, *Aspects of the Georgian Church, Visitation Studies of the Diocese of York, 1761-1776* (Associated University Presses, 1997), 234-35. Archbishop Drummond's rejection of Lythe's plea for assistance came in spite of a note from the

churchwardens of Pocklington, stating that they believed he was underpaid. See, Annesley and Hoskin, eds., *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns 1764, II: Yorkshire H-R*, 172.

*

To John Fountayne, Dean of York

Text: Ms.

Sutton [on-the-Forest]. [Saturday], June 3^d. 1752

Dear M^r Dean

I write this to meet You at Melton, & wish you wellcome into Yorkshire;¹ Tho' If I had known where a Letter would have found You Out, should have wrote directly to You more than Once, since the Favor of your Last.² I was last Week to hold your Visitation at Pickering³ where, amongst other Matters of Enquiry from M^r. Dodsworth⁴ the Vicar, I Learn, That You have the eighth Part of a Pipe of Madera safely arrived at Scarbro'⁵; which He desired I would give You Notice of; He will take care of the Bottling and safe Packing of y^r. Share, & sending it to York, which I will give Taylor⁶ orders about, In Case I do not hear any orders from you ab^t. it before.— M^r. Dodsworth, desired me to lay before You another affair, which is this. The Mortuaries⁷ in the Parish of Pickering belong to the Dean of York [being I suppose reserved in the Lease] But, in Consideration of the smallness of the Living, The Vicars have held them by special Grace from the respective Deans. Now The Late Vicar⁸, M^r. Dodsworth's Predecessor, having either disoblged the late Dean,⁹ or not meritting such a Kindness from him, He withdrew the Mortuaries from him, & gave them to a poor Curate in the Parish: This Curate is now dead,¹⁰ & M^r. Dodsworth humbly sues that you w^d. please to let them revert, [with the same power of Revocation] to Him as Vicar. I went to pay a Visit to the Bishop of Carlisle,¹¹ & enquired whether this was not the true State of the Case, Which he says, it is.— He was for setting out for Rose Castle¹² in a Week or less,— so is gone by this Time.—

I held your Other Visitation at Pocklington¹³ Yesterday, But there is nothing to lay before You from that Quarter, But a Point which will keep cold till I see You, & in which I

want a little of your Council or rather your Directions — 'tis in relation to a rascally Curate,¹⁴
<w^{ch}> ~whom~ I once told you of; -- He has been near 20 Years in Deacons Orders, & will
not make application for Priests Orders to the great detriment of the Parish.—

All your Clergy besides, are regular & decent Men, & hope to have the Honor of
being known to You next year, by your Personal Visitation;¹⁵ which I hope nothing will
divert You from. —

We have little or no news from York worth filling a Letter with. My Wife joins in her
best Resp^{ts}. to you & M^{rs}. Fountayne.¹⁶

I am dear Sir.

most faithfully Y^{rs}.

L: Sterne

MS: Bodleian Library. Autogr. D. 38, 79-80.

NOTES

1. meet you at Melton] High Melton, near Doncaster in the West Riding of Yorkshire, seat of the Fountayne family.
2. since the Favor of your Last... wellcome into Yorkshire] this confirms that there were other letters between Sterne and Fountayne that have not yet come to light. The dean had evidently just arrived back in the country. The previous summer when Sterne was appointed commissary, Fountayne had been at Cambridge (*EMY*, 245).
3. Visitation at Pickering] Sterne's visitation at Pickering was held on 25 May 1752, for the parishes and chapelries of Allerston, Ebberston, Ellerburne, Goathland, Newton, Pickering, and Wilton. Both the process and call list survive, although the latter appears to have been incorrectly dated, 25 June 1752. YML. C1/86, 1752.
4. M^r. Dodsworth] George Dodsworth (1720-1791), non-resident vicar of Pickering. In May 1748, Richard Osbaldeston interceded with Fountayne for favour in allowing Dodsworth to be absent from Pickering to serve cures in the vicinity of Scarborough, where he lived until his death in 1791. YML. B1/2a/52, letter from Richard Osbaldeston to John Fountayne, 8 May 1748. Despite handing the everyday care of the parish over to a curate, Dodsworth still undertook official business as incumbent of Pickering. A surviving certificate of February 1752 demonstrates that Dodsworth's

nomination of a new parish clerk was dealt with expeditiously by the Deanery court. See YML. C1/86, 1752. Not to be confused with William Dodsworth (d. 1754), who succeeded Sterne as prebendary of Givendale in 1742, and gave testimony of Sterne's good behaviour in support of his presentation to Stillington in 1744 (*EMY*, 138).

5. Pipe of Madera arrived safely at Scarbro'] I.e., Scarborough. In the eighteenth century, a pipe of Madeira wine equated to 92 gallons, making Fountayne's one-eighth share 11.5 gallons. As the letter states, from his station in Scarborough, George Dodsworth intended to receive the Madeira by the barrel and take care to have it bottled, packed, and sent on to Fountayne in York (see University of Nottingham, 'Research Guidance - Wine, Spirits, Cider, Vinegar, Oil and Honey measurements' [accessed at <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections>, on 22 August 2017]).
6. Taylor] Identity not clear. Taylors mentioned by Cash in relation to Sterne include John Taylor of Fulford, and Thomas Taylor, keeper of the Minster Library.
7. Mortuaries] A gift made at death as recompense for personal tithes unpaid during life.
8. The Late Vicar] John Samuel Hill, vicar of Pickering from 1740 to 1751.
9. the late Dean] Richard Osbaldeston (1691-1764), dean of York from 1728 to 1747, when he was raised to the See of Carlisle.
10. a poor Curate in the Parish... now dead] Identity not clear. Previous curates of Pickering include John Walker, licensed 1743; William Langhorne, licensed 1749, and travelled to South Carolina in 1751. See Ollard and Walker, eds., *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns, 1743*, III, 5-6; Frederick Lewis Weis, *The Colonial Clergy of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina*, reprint (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2001), 82.
11. I went to pay a Visit to the Bishop of Carlisle] Richard Osbaldeston continued to interest himself in diocesan affairs in York following his elevation to the episcopal bench, and frequently returned to his seat at Hutton Bushell in the North Riding. He visited Sterne at Coxwold in 1760 (*Letters*, 60).
12. Rose Castle] a fortified house in Cumbria, the episcopal residence of the bishops of Carlisle from the thirteenth century until 2009.
13. your Other Visitation at Pocklington] Sterne's visitation at Pocklington was held on 2 June 1752, the day before he wrote this letter. The call list survives. YML. C1/86, 1752.

14. a rascally Curate] Michael Lyth (d. 1768), curate of Pocklington. See discussion, above. Whilst the term ‘rascally’ might refer to the specific nature of Lythe’s reluctance to enter the priesthood, there is some comparison with a phrase used by Richard Osbaldeston in 1729. In the first year following his appointment as dean, Osbaldeston consulted Archbishop Blackburne in chapter affairs, and offered thanks for his approval in ‘the method taken to humble the Insolence of a saucy Vicar’. The malefactor on that occasion has not yet been identified. See BIA. Bp C&P XIX, letter from Richard Osbaldeston to Lancelot Blackburne, 26 May 1729.
15. by your Personal Visitation] Having been so recently appointed as commissary to Fountayne, this seems like a professional platitude from Sterne. He presided again in 1753. See YML. C1/87, 1753.
16. My Wife joins in her best Resp^{ts}. to you & M^{rs}. Fountayne] This must refer to Elizabeth Fountayne (1688-1768), the dean’s mother. Despite being still in his thirties, Fountayne had been twice widowed following the deaths of his wives Ann and Frances Maria, in 1745 and 1750 respectively (*Oxford DNB*). This was a similarly fraught time for Sterne and his wife Elizabeth, who miscarried in 1751 (*EMY*, 255-56).



Engraved by J. H. B. in 1791

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Sutton. June 3. 1752 240.
79

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L: Herne