

Constructing Elizabeth Isham

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The Isham family crest

Introduction

Elizabeth Isham's manuscript, written in the early seventeenth century, was recently discovered in Princeton library. The text is now being prepared for publication in an undergraduate edition. My role was to modernise spelling and punctuation for the printed edition, and to suggest points at which undergraduates would require explanatory notes. I was also invited to attend a two-day conference on the project.



The church at Lamport

Spelling

As many words in Isham's text are spelt differently from today, I had to develop a system for standardising variant forms. Many words could immediately be changed, as they were relatively close to our modern-day spellings:

sumtimes → **sometimes**
dayly → **daily**

However, I came across some difficulties, because certain verbs were identified as obsolete grammatical forms, rather than variant spellings. After consultation with the project team, it was concluded that selected words would remain, e.g.:

writ (wrote)
brake (broke)

[5r] in this time of my Granmothers sicknes I comming dayly to see her lighted upon her Bookes (which lay in her windor) wherein she much delighted and I gathered spirituall flowers out of the garden of her sweetnes wherein one booke I found of the nessissity of Repentance and in another the effects of faith (\and how/ far without faith it is impossible to please God) and I afterwards lighting upon prayes for this purpose writ them downe for my owne use, for at \this/ time, as I remember I learned to writ having a natureall inclinacion thereunto,

Before modernisation

After modernisation

Punctuation

As is obvious from the extract below, Isham's writing either lacks punctuation or uses it incorrectly. Indeed, her use of semi-colons, colons and commas is inconsistent and arbitrary, and full-stops often signal a short pause, rather than the end of a sentence. In order for undergraduates to understand Isham's meaning, the project team decided that modern punctuation would need to be added. I therefore

completed this task, being careful to adhere to the guideline agreed by the team:

- Commas and full-stops to be added, but only to ease understanding, without impeding Isham's meaning

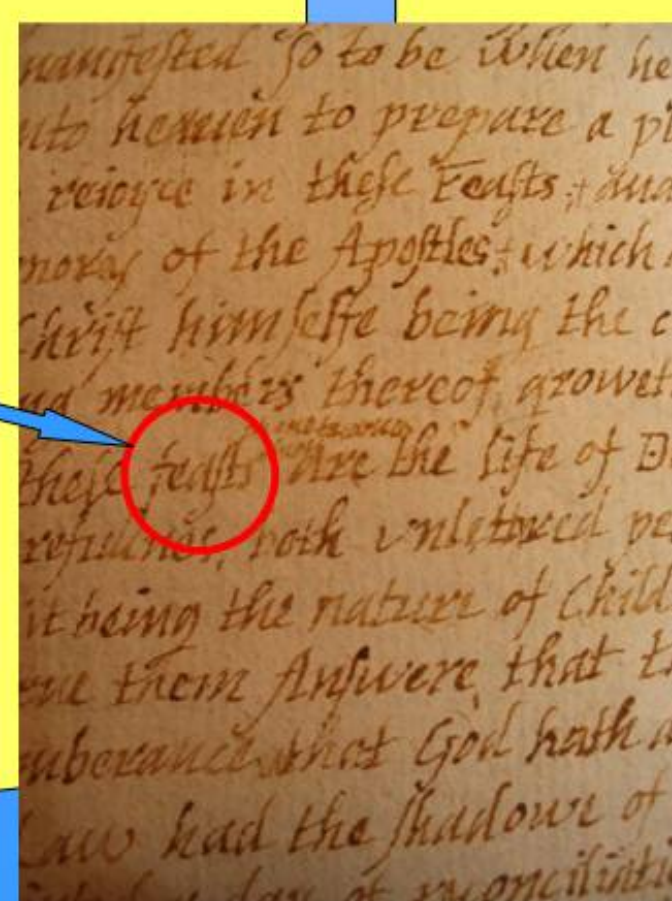
[5r] In this time of my grandmother's sickness, I, coming daily to see her, lighted upon her books (which lay in her window), wherein she much delighted. And I gathered spiritual flowers out of the garden of her sweetness, wherein one book I found of the necessity of repentance, and in another the effects of faith (and how far without faith it is impossible to please God). And I afterwards lighting upon prayers for this purpose writ them down for my own use, for at this time, as I remember, I learned to write, having a natural inclination thereunto.

Annotation

The team was interested to find out which words and concepts would be difficult for a student to interpret, so notes and a glossary could be added to the undergraduate edition. I used the *Oxford English Dictionary* website to look up complex words, before deciding whether it would be reasonable to expect an undergraduate to establish the meaning without any help. As a result of this work I recommended certain words for glossing, including:

dole (sorrow)
tane (taken)

As well as individual words, it was important to bring theological references to the attention of the team. I added comments to the document to explain why Isham's discussions of **feasts**, sin and Calvinism – amongst other references – would require annotation. This analysis furthered my knowledge of such issues.



The Princeton manuscript

Conference

In my second week of work, I spent two days at a conference in Warwick. During

this time, I participated in a trip to Northampton Records Office, where I had the chance to look at Isham's second manuscript, which also is being researched by the team. I then attended a visit to Lamport Hall, which was the home of the Isham family. There, I contributed to the work being carried out in the library: the team is seeking to establish which books referred to in the manuscript are in the library. I searched the catalogue and noted the bibliographic details of the texts I found.

Conclusions

The URSS experience has allowed me to:

- Gain an insight into the nature of research work and develop my skills in this area
- Work as part of a project team and demonstrate my ability to work independently

Acknowledgements

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