

**10 November 1812 William Lincolne in Witham to Mary Napier at Grand
Junction Wharf**

Witham Nov. 10th 1812

My dear Miss Napier

I again present myself before you thru the only medium at this time within my reach. From what has taken place since I just sat down on such an occasion it is with renewed hopes and elevated expectations; and I trust I am not presuming too much on the avowal you made to me that "I was not wholly indifferent to you." The many anxious hours that I passed since I first saw you at Braintree till my visit to your Father's are now counterbalanced by the pleasure with which I reprise on that declaration and the hope it has given birth to. What additional happiness has my journey to London conferred upon me in having seen you at home, to possessing a Parent, from whose piety and benevolence what may not be expected? From the influence of such an example what may not be hoped for? Oh that felicity were mine. Never did any alluring object of pursuit the World has got to offer supercede the delight with which I always contemplated the sweets of domestic life; nor have I been less uniform in the persuasion that personal religion is essentially necessary to constitute true happiness; and on this ground I am well content to make a stand, affections grounded on this basis will be immoveable and the most endearing results may be confidently anticipated. It is not only the source of the purest joys here but will lead to the consummation of bliss in the everlasting enjoyment of God hereafter.

I exceedingly regret that the distance at which you reside precludes me the pleasures of more frequent personal intercourse, being well convinced that the mind as well as Character of a person should be developed before he has a right to expect that his affections should obtain full credence or his pretensions a cordial acceptance; being thus unfortunately situated I rely upon your candour for pardoning the request which I am about to make and upon your goodness in granting it. It is that you will commence a correspondence with me. Perhaps I am asking more than I ought; if I am, I trust I am not from presumption – attribute it to the importance and interest which you will believe I feel on this subject, and had I not more hopes than fears such a state of hesitative uncertainty could hardly be borne. I do hope shortly, again to pay my personal respects to you, but in the mean time what gratification and joy should I experience if by writing you further confirmed my hopes and abated my fears. There is a fullness in my heart which as you alone are the cause you only can (*paper torn here*) ...osom.

I conclude for the present with requesting you will tender my respectful compliments to Mr. & Mrs. Napier, whose cordial and friendly reception will be ever gratefully remembered by me, and also to Mrs Reeve if still with; my dear dear Girl believe that I am & confide in me as

Your sincere, affectionate, faithful friend

W. Lincolne

Letter was handwritten on 3 sides of a large, folded sheet of paper in a clear, cursive script, then folded twice more and sealed with red wax. Addressed to Miss Napier, Grand Junction Wharf, Whitefriars, London and postmarked 11 November 1812.

William Lincolne had met Mary Napier earlier that year, in Braintree. He was 23 years old and Mary was 19. His old friend Joseph Reeve had recently married Mary's sister, Sarah Napier, and they met first at the Reeve's house. William had first broached the subject of a proposal of marriage about a fortnight before writing this letter, in Ipswich where Mary was staying. She was surprised, but told him that he may write to her when she returned home to London. Since then he had made the journey to Grand Junction Wharf, just up the river from Blackfriars Bridge, to visit her and her father and step-mother at home.

William seems to have hit it off with her father, William Napier, straight away. They were both devout men who took their religion seriously, but both seem to have been real family men as well. William's own father had died when he was only 9 and he had been brought up by his mother and his grandfather, Thomas Isaac.

Mary must have agreed to the correspondence, which indicated that William had good grounds to hope. Many years later she was horrified at the thought of their eldest son writing to a single woman before they were formally engaged.

Transcribed from the original letter by Helen Wolvey, 3 x great granddaughter of William and Mary, in 2018.