

Acknowledgements

In August 2012, my friend Siem van Eeten secretly took a picture of me in the reading rooms of the National Archives London. He sent it to me right after my first research trip to London, which I spent together with Els van Eijck van Heslinga, the director of the Royal Library of the Netherlands at the time, and her team from the Sailing Letters project. I will be forever grateful to Els for inviting me to join the group in 2012 because this trip changed my life as a historian. I am also grateful to Siem for taking this photo because he captured the moment that would bring about this change, the moment when I first made contact with the Prize Papers collection. In the picture, I am sitting full of awe at one of tables in the reading room. I still have short hair, I am wearing white gloves, staring at a pile of old documents, full of amazement. I still feel that way today when I work with the documents at TNA. I actually feel that way already every time when we disembark the tube at Kew station and turn into the road leading to TNA, full of anticipation, especially now because of many long-standing colleagues working there whom I would count as close friends such as Amanda Bevan, Randolph Cock and Maria Cardamone. During the pandemic, I learned that I could even feel that way when opening digital images of the records or particularly when watching another brilliant video of original documents unfolded by Randolph and filmed by Maria. I even learned that I could feel that way when we worked together in the team at Oldenburg university, discussing for hours the characteristics of a new historical document type found in the collection. Today, I work at the Prize Papers Project that is digitizing the entire Prize Papers collection, a privilege I owe to Dagmar Freist, my supervisor and mentor, and to my dear colleagues and close friends Annika Raapke and Christina Beckers, who have walked this path with me right from the beginning.

The picture that Siem took of me is almost 10 years old now. It is 2021, and this is no typo. Finally, this book will be published in 2022. I cannot believe that I have finally made it. During the last decade, I moved three times, had five contracts, got married, became a father of two wonderful sons. Our younger boy was born during the pandemic. Even my little brother is a father now. I have taught over 1100 students and introduced them to the Early Modern Period. Many of them are teachers now. Time flies, many things have changed. The world has changed. In 2022, I guess as we all hope, finally for the better. I have also changed, and not only my hair style. I still have to comprehend that

this mammoth project is over and admittedly I also still have to process and find out whether it was all worth it in the end. My family and friends had to swallow many bitter pills during the last years.

What I can say today is that I am proud to have finished this project, not alone, but with the help of many and only through the constant support of my family and their understanding. And I still love to talk about Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, the merchant at the heart of the book, even after 10 years, which is a good sign. I never felt tired of doing the actual research, because it always led to surprises. These surprises are the reason why I became a historian in the first place and as I would learn from the Prize Papers, these surprises will never cease and will never stop to amaze me. Just when I was finishing the manuscript for this book, I found out that the cantata that Carl Friedrich Telemann composed for the consecration of Luetkens' brother Joachim in Hamburg will be performed for the first time at a concert in Bern in December 2021. The Luetkens story keeps on giving. I also still love to think back and remember the very first time that I sat in the archive opening the boxes containing the Luetkens archive and the wine that we drank in a wonderful small restaurant in London after this experience with Els, her husband Nico, Erik van der Doe, Perry Moree, Roelof Hol and Siem.

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To my brother, his wife and their daughter.

To my sons.

To my wife.

“What is a letter? If not simply a piece of paper that one can tear into pieces or crumple together, but that one can also keep as a treasure and make it yellow and weather.”

Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Höltz. Sämtlich hinterlassene Gedichte, edited by Adam Friedrich Geisler. Halle: Hendel, 1782.

“But letter writing is now a mere tossing of omelettes to me.”

Letter from Virginia Woolf to Gerald Brenan, December 1, 1923. In Virginia Woolf: The Complete Collection. Eugene: Oregon Publishing, 2017.

“We see from your letter, dear friend, that love on the one hand and the pursuit of profit on the other fight a battle in your heart. [...] But we very much wished for E.E., and for our interests, that the dear child will grant E.E. a bit more time to fill the bag with ducats, for which E.E. has the best opportunity at the moment.”

Letter from Jobst Henning Hertzer & Christopher von Bobartt to Nicolaus Gottlieb Luetkens, March 5, 1745, The Luetkens Archive, The National Archives, Kew, London, HCA 30/234.

All translations by the author.