Networking Archives: 
Early modern letters and the promise of connected collections

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Letter networks from archives

Reconstruction and analysis of:

1. An underground Protestant communities from 272 letters, and their description of communities of faith
2. Tudor government communications and intelligence networks, from c.137,000 letters in the State Papers (funded by AHRC).

Tudor Networks

The Tudor government maintained a communication network that crisscrossed the globe. This visualisation brings together 125,850 letters connecting 20,024 people from the United Kingdom’s State Papers archive, dating from the accession of Henry VIII to the death of Elizabeth I (1509–1603).

On this page we can see all people who sent or received letters from two or more people, arranged chronologically left-to-right.

A project by Ruth Abbott, Sebastian Abbott (Research) and Kim Abbott (Visualization).
The letter, by design, is a technology of both connection and dispersal.
Efforts to re-assemble the oeuvre of specific letter writers (the impetus behind the tradition of the ‘collected correspondence’) creates a person- or ego-centred view of intellectual communities.
But what if we overlap hundreds or thousands or millions of these ego networks?
About the project.

Networking Archives provides a working model for a meta-archive, by bringing together:

- Existing content from Early Modern Letters Online (EMLO, PI Hotson)
- The letters from the Tudor State Papers (supplied by State Papers Online, SPO), already cleaned as part of AHRC-funded project Tudor Networks of Power (PI R. Ahnert)
- A further body of letters from the Stuart State Papers (SPO II and III, 1603-1714), now in the final stages of being cleaned
- Totalling approx. 450,000 letters
Outcomes from Networking Archives

- A central repository for early modern correspondence metadata (hosted by EMLO; data also shared through data publications, forthcoming)
- A suite of tools developed for data cleaning, reconciliation, and analysis
- A co-authored book sharing the outcomes of how this data can be harnessed with our tools and methods
- Related articles
- A three-part training school and colloquium to build capacity in the application of network analysis to early modern letters and related materials
  - Teaching materials
  - An edited collection of essays
Networking Archives - the book

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
- Chapter 2 - The Shape of the Archive
- Chapter 3 - Letters as Ego Networks
- Chapter 4 - Mutual Acquaintances: Intersection within the Archive
- Chapter 5 - Clusters and Communities
- Chapter 6 - Networks in Time
- Chapter 7 - (Im)mobile Networks: News Gathering and Itineraries
- Chapter 8 - Conclusion: Networking Archives
Intersections of Ego Networks

The case of Samuel Hartlib and Gerardus Vossius
Indirect Intersection

Toy figure showing intersection between two networks
# Direct and indirect intersection: the case of Hugo Grotius

Groot, Hugo de[900019]

direct and indirect intersection: the case of Hugo Grotius

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Wrote to each other?</th>
<th>Shared correspondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vossius, Gerardus Ioannes [21237]</td>
<td>True</td>
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<tr>
<td>Huygens, Constantijn [11527]</td>
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<td>Vossius, Isaac (Dr) [9478]</td>
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<td>Unknown [903934]</td>
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<td>Scaliger, Joseph Justus [18308]</td>
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<td>Barlaeus, Casper [1328]</td>
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<td>Pontanus, Johannes Isacius [16714]</td>
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<td>Petresco, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de [16232]</td>
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<td>Polyander van den Kerckhoven, Johannes [16707]</td>
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<td>Bernegger, Matthias [2157]</td>
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<td>Mersenne, Marin [300610]</td>
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<td>Ussher, James [14763]</td>
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<td>Kircher, Athanasius [300115]</td>
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<td>Selden, John [6016]</td>
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<td>Descartes, René [300075]</td>
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<td>Rivet, André [17572]</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsonia, Claude de [18042]</td>
<td>True</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Case Study: The Dutch Dimension of Hartlib's Circle

Distribution of correspondence by place of sending and receipt
Case Study: The Dutch Dimension of Hartlib's Circle

Origins of Hartlib’s Correspondents residing in the Netherlands
Indirect Intersections with Hartlib's Network:

1. Gerardus Joannes Vossius (20)
2. Constantijn Huygens (14)
3. Isaac Vossius (10)
4. William Sancroft (9)
5. Athanasius Kircher (9)
6. Johannes Coccejus (9)
7. André Rivet (8)
8. William Lenthall (8)
9. Johannes Polyander van den Kerckhoven (6)
10. John Wilkins (6)
Indirect intersections with Vossius’ network:

1. Samuel Hartlib (20)
2. Jan Amos Komenský (19)
3. Marin Mersenne (19)
4. Anna Maria van Schurman (18)
5. René Descartes (15)
6. Athanasius Kircher (14)
7. Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia (13)
8. Johan de Witt (13)
9. Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc (12)
10. Joachim Jungius (9)
Correspondents of Vossius and Hartlib, Scaled by Number of Letters.
John Dury to Samuel Hartlib, 27 Feb. 1645

‘Mr. Rulice told me that Mr. Vossius at Amsterdam told Monsieur Hotton that hee hadde given order to his freind at London that hee should for the procurement of a settlement of his prebend by the Parliament upon him give to any that might bee instrumentall to advance it a due proportion out of the summe which should bee due unto him; a tenth a ninth a sixt part &c. this I give yow notice of that if Mr. Sadler know his friend who hee is & should recommend yow to him in this respect, hee may by Vossius order give yow some Consideration for the good offices done unto him'.
Some initial thoughts

- Locating ‘bridges’: mobility and betweenness
- Adjacent communities
- Location of networks

Battle of Solebay (Second Anglo-Dutch War), 1665, Dirk Stoop, Rijksmuseum
Geography and Networks

Williamson’s Network During the Third Anglo-Dutch War
Joseph Williamson in the *State Papers Online*

- Our data contains almost 20,000 letters, from 2,000 correspondents. Largest number of letters and connections in SPO.
- Under-Secretary of State in 1660s and 70s, and superintendent of the *London Gazette*
- Williamson was ‘de facto head of a government intelligence system’
- Together with James Hickes he ran a newsletter service/news gathering operation

Williamson’s incoming letters per month in *State Papers Online* data
The Third Anglo-Dutch War, 1672-4

- Last of three sea wars between England and the Dutch Republic in the second half of the 17th century
- Began in March 1672 and ended with the Treaty of Westminster, February 1674
- Arose from rivalry over trading interests and competition for overseas colonies
- England was keen not to see a repeat of humiliating attacks on its fleet

*The Battle of Texel, by Willem van de Velde the younger (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich)*
‘Report of H. Ball’ (Ball’s List)

- Lists subscribers to Williamson’s news service.
- Each received a handwritten letter of news from the office plus printed *London Gazette*, up to three times per week.
- Non-paying subscribers promised to send weekly news to Williamson and/or James Hickes in exchange.
- Variety of individuals - not all on coast.
Linking Ball’s List to State Papers Online

- We have found 90 individuals on the list in the State Papers database.
- Between them sent over 8,000 letters to Williamson and Hickes.
- This is the core of Williamson’s network of ‘intelligencers’.
- Charting these letters shows clear ‘peaks’ in the volume—these correspond to the second and third Anglo-Dutch wars.
Mapping State Papers Online

- State Papers Online contains 90,000 records with place information
- Over 8,000 locations are being disambiguated and linked to Wikidata entities by the project team
- Still work in progress but so far mostly England, Wales Ireland, plus clusters in Low Countries, Portugal
The Geography of Intelligencing

- Mapping the individuals on Ball’s list can show us the ‘shape’ of the network and how it reacted to events.
- During the third Anglo-Dutch War, intelligence gathering was particularly important along the most threatened coastlines.
- The data shows that Williamson’s network expanded significantly during times of crisis. How?
What kind of intelligence was being sent?

John Carlisle to Joseph Williamson. Dover, 26 May 1672 [SP 29/309, f. 182]

This day by express from deal we here our fleet Layes in the soal [sc: Sole] bay & the dutch fleet Layes att Kentish Knocke 20 miles distance from each other the winde is att East & a fresh gale I suppose we may expect action in a little time God give us victory not els.

Col. John Strode to Joseph Williamson. Dover Castle, 8 May 1672 [SP 29/307, f. 219]

Since I wrote this afternoone here is come in from the East 6 men of war to Joyne with the Duch fleete & 4 more I see at a Distance [...] Just now Mr Carlil brought mee upp several letters for the fleete which as soone as its possible to send to our fleete they shall goe.
How did Williamson's intelligence-gathering network expand?

- New informants were sometimes found centrally through Williamson's office and sometimes by existing members of the network.
- By this means, the network could grow fast, even exponentially, as during 1672 (Slide 24).
- Importantly, the Williamson network could expand (and contract) as circumstances demanded; it was a responsive intelligence system, as shown here for the first time.
How did Williamson's intelligence-gathering network expand?

Sir,
(unknowne) I am requested by Mr Carlile of dover to give you what Intelligence our Towne & parte adjacent may weekly afford & the which as he informes me may be of concernment in order to the good of his Majestie & kingdome & being satisfied that theire needs to greater obligation upon me I shall as occasion serves give you a just & continuall accompt of what these parts will afford: & if you send to me I had rather that you will send your letter by wensdays post then any other for a fridays I hae other Intelligence & therefore shall not so much desire it on that day. […]

John Smith to Joseph Williamson. Margate, 27 February 1664/5 [SP 29/113, f. 124]

Sir,
My service promised I am desired by Mr Carlyle of Dover to give you notice of what Duch Ships or any other passages concernenige them or any thinge else I can which happeneth about us at the north foreland in Kent, The which godwillinge I shall accordingly doe soe often as any thinge shall present, As yett ther is nothinge worthy of the remittinge […] soe that at present I cannott give you any accomptt of any Dutch Ships that have lately bin seene about us, soe remembring my service rest […]

Thomas Moore to James Hickes. Bristol, 11 May 1672 [SP 29/308, f. 57]
How did Williamson's intelligence-gathering network expand?

Ultimately, effective surveillance required creating an intelligence network both sides of the Channel:

John Carlisle to Joseph Williamson. Dover, 28 April 1672 [SP 29/306, f. 140]

I have againe wrote to Mr La force junior att Callis to Desire him to Keep a Correspondence with you he is a Marchant & I know noe fitter person if he will under take itt allose I have sent to one Mr Baade a Marchant in Boulogne, to & hath promised them they shall have the newes att Whitehall from you & that if they have any occasion att Whitehall you will be their friend & the Charges that they disburst for the post of Letters I have promised to see them paid. Sir, If you will have me get a Corresponder att Dunkirque I will write to Mr James Deserine a Marchant & if all those will undertake wee are well enough on that Cost, Mr Vandepeer att Newport & Mr Moor att Ostend, soe Sir, I hope you will not thinke I have neglected any of your Commands.
Combining geography and networks...

- Geography/space informs our understanding of these networks - for example we have seen a correlation between the tendency of nodes to act as a bridge, and their mobility.
- We can map the locations of these ‘bridges’ and look for geospatial patterns.
- Other methods we’re looking at include Named Entity Recognition to digitally ‘read’ the contents of the abstracts and map them. Can we find not just where the letters were sent from but where, roughly, the news contained in them was about?
Conclusions

- The power of network analysis for the analysis of letter collections has been established.
- Its true potential will only be realised by the aggregation of reconciliation of data across multiple collections and archives.
- It is here that we can understand the important intersections (or absence of connections) between individuals, communities, collections and archives that are usually studied by separate communities of scholars.
- This will allow us to find the links between two cultures usually thought of as separate: intelligencing/news, and intellectual exchange.
- In so doing we hope to recover the significance of individuals and groups previously situated at the peripheries of the official record, but who we will come to realise were in fact the vital bridges between different worlds.
Thank you!