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Margaret M. Condon and Evan T. Jones (eds.), ‘Henry VII’s letter to John Morton concerning William Weston’s voyage to the new found land’ (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2011)¹

The following letter was first published and discussed in 2009, in an article by Evan Jones.² Given the importance of this letter, which concerns the first English-led expedition to the New World, we decided to publish a fuller annotated transcription here. This is accompanied by a photograph of the letter itself, reproduced by permission of The National Archives, UK. The letter must have been written on either 12 March 1498, 1499 or 1500. Since the letter refers to the ‘new founde land’, it must post-date John Cabot’s discovery in the summer of 1497; since Morton died in September 1500, it cannot be later than that. Moreover, the years 1498–1500 are the only three during the chancellorship of Cardinal Morton (1494–1500) in which the king was at Greenwich on 12 March.³

¹ The National Archives: Public Record Office, UK [TNA:PRO], TNA:PRO, C82/332 piece 61, out of 74. The following conventions were employed when transcribing the documents: the line spacing, spelling, capitalization, underlining, deletions and punctuation follow the manuscript; reconstructions of suspensions are in italics; ’u’ and ’v’ have been rendered according to the document rather than to modern usage. Squared brackets indicate editorial additions – in this case to indicate reconstructions as a result of damage to the manuscript. As with other documents of the same type, the letter has been damaged: initially both by the physical act of filing and by the removal of the seal wax, with further damage occurring over time.
³ M. M. Condon, Itinerary of Henry VII (unpublished MS); TNA:PRO, E101/414/14 (1498); C82/188 (1499); E101/415/2 (1500). For March 1497 the record is incomplete, but the king appears to have been at Westminster throughout February and during the first part of March, moving to Sheen by 20 March: Condon, Itinerary, March 1497.
To the most reuerend fader in god our right trusty and right entierly welbeloued the Cardynall Archiebisshop of Canterbury Primat of all England and Chaunceller of the same

By the king

Mooste reueur[end] fader in god right trusty and right entierly welbeloued We grete you hertly wele And wher as we bee enfourmed that upon certain matiers of variance depending before you in the Court of oure Chauncery betwixt John Esterfelde of our Towne of Bristowe marchant on the oon partye and William Weston of the same marchant [on t]he other. A certain Inju uncio[n] lately passed out of our said Court ayenst the said Wi[ll]iam. Soo it is that we entende that he shall shortly with goddes grace passe and saille for to serche and fynde if he can the new founde land. Wherfor and for other causes and consideracions us specially moeving we wol and desire you to see that almaner processes and suytes concernyng the said matiers and Inju uncio[n] bee utterly put in suspense and d[el]aye till that the said William shalbe retourned from the said Journey Soo that by reason of the same he susteigne no losse ner dammage during his absence As our grete trust is in you Yeven under our signet at oure Manour of Grenewiche the xij:th day of Marche.
Land’, taken in conjunction with the king’s sign manual, suggests his direct intervention on Weston’s behalf, even if the final form of words is a product of the writing office. For a recent study of the late fifteenth century signet office, and a useful survey of the literature, see now T. Westerveldt, ‘Warrants under the Signet in the reign of Edward IV’, Historical Research, vol. 83 (2010), pp. 602-616.

15 ‘Manour of Grenewiche’: Greenwich Palace – one of the King’s residences, five miles downriver from London. It was one of the king’s favoured residences throughout the reign; and extensive building works were undertaken there between 1499 and 1506: The History of the King’s Works, ed. H. M. Colvin et al., Vol. IV (London, 1982), pp. 97-101.

16 No year is given: see above, n.3. The left hand margin of the document is annotated with a mark of process, applied by a Chancery clerk.
Henry VII's letter to Morton, re William Weston, c. 1499

TNA:PRO, C82/332 piece 61 out of 74

Photograph of the letter: reproduced by permission of The National Archives