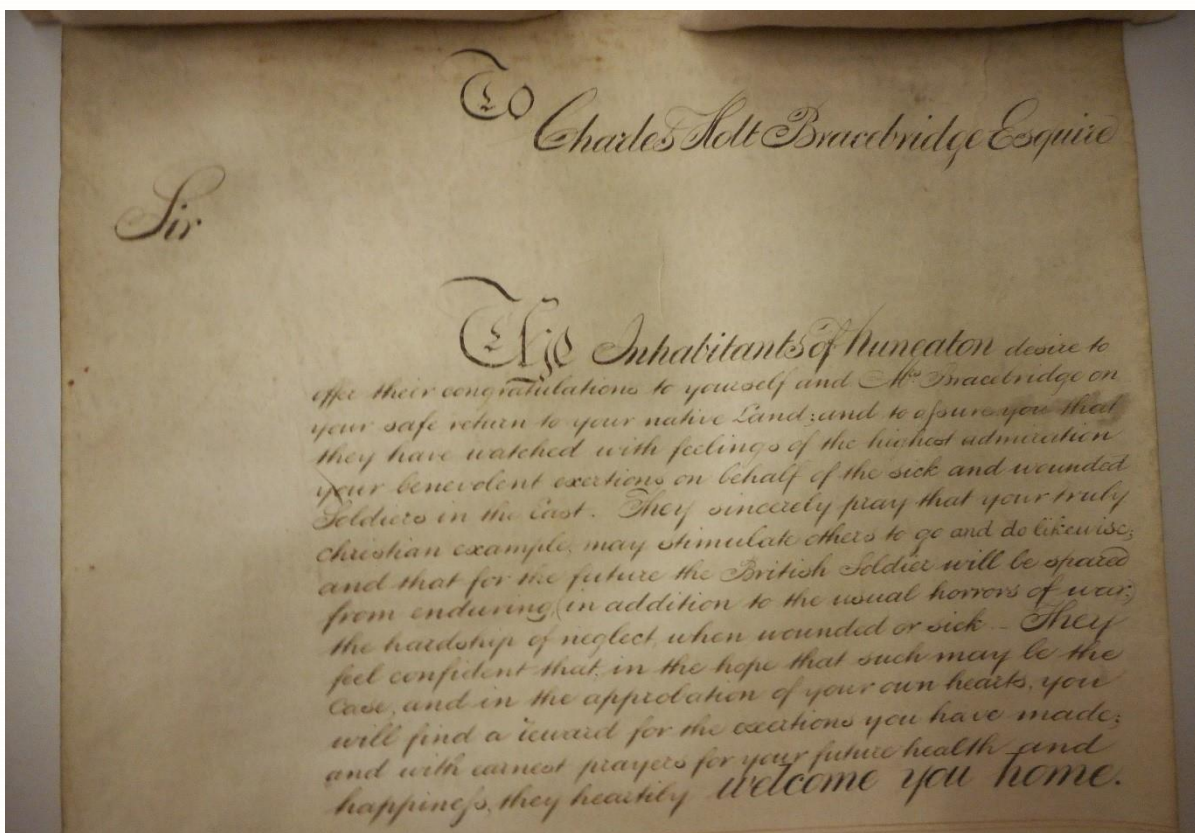


**Congratulatory welcome home address from the people of Nuneaton to
 Charles Holte Bracebridge**

CR3009/488

December's Document of the Month is a congratulatory welcome home address to Charles Holte Bracebridge upon his and his wife's return from the Crimean War. A transcription for the address is provided separately.

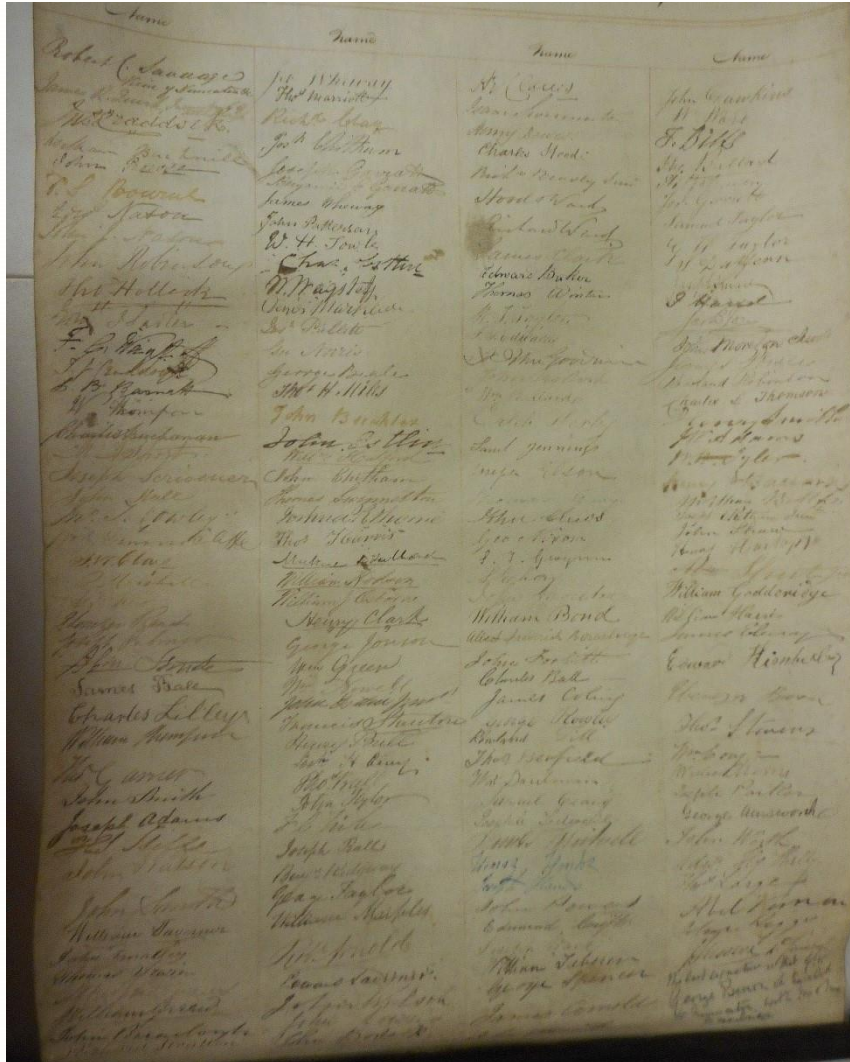


Congratulatory welcome home address from the inhabitants of Nuneaton to Charles Holte Bracebridge, esq on his return to England after his work tending to the sick in the east during the Crimean War, Nuneaton Library Collection, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR3009/488.

In the address, written on a scroll, the inhabitants of Nuneaton congratulate Charles and his wife Selina on their efforts tending to the sick 'in the east', referring to their work alongside Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War. While he was not a doctor or nurse himself, Charles advocated strongly for improving the care of patients and the general conditions in the British army hospitals.

While Charles had spent years travelling abroad, he was a native of Atherstone, neighbouring Nuneaton, with Bracebridge being a well-known name in the local area. The Nuneaton residents note in the address that they have witnessed the

Bracebridges' efforts 'with feelings of the highest admiration' and hope that their 'Christian example' will inspire others to do the same.¹ At the end, the residents have signed their names in four long columns.



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The Bracebridges in the Crimea

In Britain, the poor sanitation, overcrowding and scarcity of supplies afflicting the makeshift hospitals in the Crimea had been widely reported. Florence Nightingale

¹ Congratulatory welcome home address from the inhabitants of Nuneaton to Charles Holte Bracebridge, esq on his return to England after his work tending to the sick in the east during the Crimean War, Nuneaton Library Collection, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR3009/488.

had likely already risen to prominence when the address to Bracebridge was written; the iconic image of 'The Lady with the Lamp' was born in February 1855 following a report on Nightingale in the *Times* and an engraving depicting her in the *Illustrated London News*.² As friends and associates of Florence, the Bracebridges' participation in the attempts to improve the conditions in the Scutari hospitals would have been notable to Nuneaton residents, as is demonstrated by their heartfelt praise in the address, due to the local ties of the couple- Charles's family had long lived in the neighbouring Atherstone Hall.

As the document is dated c.1855, Charles Holte Bracebridge would have been returning to England before the war ended in March 1856. Upon his return, Bracebridge gave a lecture in criticism of the medical treatment and conditions at the Scutari hospital, which has been interpreted as exaggerating Nightingale's role in the improvements made in the Crimean hospitals. The lecture was recounted in *The Times* on 16th October 1855, and is understood to have angered Florence, who expressed her fury in a letter home.³ It seems she thought her position in the Scutari hospital had been compromised: "It has set all the medical staff in the Crimea in a blaze and, besides being utterly untrue, it was not our business to say it. And, if you read my letter to him you will see that I have told him so".⁴ She also says that, following his lecture and its publication in the *Times*, he could not return "without greatly injuring the work".⁵

The Bracebridges' relationship with Florence Nightingale

Despite this apparent moment of friction with Florence Nightingale, Charles and Selina Bracebridge were among her closest friends and mentors. Florence went as far as to call Selina "more than a mother" and described the Bracebridges as "the creators of my life".⁶

The couple did afford Florence many opportunities; as keen travellers, they took her on trips to Italy, Greece, Egypt and Germany, the latter of which included a visit to the Deaconess Institute at Kaiserwerth, where she saw women devoting themselves to the care of the sick and needy.⁷

² Information gathered from [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 'Nightingale, Florence'](#)

³ Information gathered from *Florence Nightingale: Letters from the Crimea*, Sue M. Goldie and Florence Nightingale (Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 188-9.

⁴ *Florence Nightingale: The Crimean War*, Lynn McDonald and Florence Nightingale (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), p. 269.

⁵ *Florence Nightingale: The Crimean War*, Lynn McDonald and Florence Nightingale (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), p. 268.

⁶ Information gathered from [The Florence Nightingale Museum](#)

⁷ Information gathered from [Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 'Nightingale, Florence'](#)

Through their travels, the Bracebridges also fulfilled their own intellectual and creative pursuits. Charles wrote a letter to the *Daily News* on contemporary Greek politics, having lived in Athens for several years, while Selina now has a reputation as an artist, having depicted the scenes she saw during her explorations of Europe.⁸

The Bracebridge family and Atherstone Hall

Charles Holte Bracebridge took his name from two Warwickshire families: the famous Holtes of Aston Hall, and the Bracebridges of Atherstone Hall. The two families were joined when Mary Elizabeth Holte, Charles's mother and the daughter of the last Holte baronet, married Abraham Bracebridge, Charles's father. It is unsurprising that the Bracebridges decided to adopt the Holte name alongside their own given the Holtes' status as one of the wealthiest landowning families in Warwickshire.

Atherstone Hall was, for a long time, one of the grandest houses in the town, and is understood to have been in the ownership of the Bracebridge family from 1690 until it was demolished in 1963. The respect the family held in Atherstone was preserved by Charles Holte Bracebridge, and not only through his work during the Crimean War; as a keen liberal, Bracebridge helped to improve the education provision in Atherstone, donating land and buildings to aid the expansion of the local schools.⁹

⁸ Information gathered from 'A Letter from Charles Holte Bracebridge, esq. of Atherstone Hall on the Affairs of Greece', and the [Victoria and Albert Museum](#)

⁹ Information gathered from B.ATH.Jen(P), *The Bracebridge Family and Atherstone Hall* (2000), by Christine Jenking, Warwickshire County Record Office.