

## ADDENDUM

### Ellen Terry's letters to Alex Ridley

Ellen Terry bought Smallhythe Place in 1899 but did not make use of the house until some essential works had been completed a couple of years later. From then until her death in 1928 Ellen Terry was a customer of Mr Ridley and wrote to him on numerous occasions, usually about her outstanding bills or photographs that he had taken in his studio in Tenterden or at Smallhythe Place. In 2016, Tenterden and District Museum donated to the National Trust at Smallhythe Place nearly two dozen letters and notes written by Ellen Terry to Alex Ridley. They are mostly brief and to the point but reveal the nature of the woman and, I think, show that she was perhaps not the easiest of clients. Unfortunately, Ridley's replies to her letters have not survived so we can only speculate as to what he might have written in response to her missives. Few of Ellen's letters are fully dated but it has been possible to sort them into an approximate chronological order based on their content and known dates of photographs in the Smallhythe Place collection. The correspondence came to an end in 1928 when Ellen Terry passed away and, co-incidentally, Alex Ridley retired from his business. Initially, the relationship seems not to have started well - if her forthright two-page letter of December 1902, written from her home in King's Road, Chelsea is any guide.

215, KING'S ROAD,  
CHELSEA.  
31 Dec. 1902.  
Dear Sir - I recd the photo-graph cards but am much disappointed in them. They are so common-looking compared with the few my daughter sent me about a month ago -

31 December 1902

*Dear Sir, I received the photograph cards but am much disappointed in them. They are so common-looking compared with the few my daughter sent me about a month ago.*

*The sort of frame you have to the picture now is dreadful. I'm sending you back half the order as I cannot possibly use any of them. The verse too is most unfortunate. I am so much disappointed.*

E. T.

The sort of frame you have to the picture now is dreadful. I'm sending you back half the order as I cannot possibly use any of them. The verse too is most unfortunate - I am so much disappointed -  
E.T.

**Mr Ridley must not have been too dejected by this because he continued to photograph her and Smallhythe Place. At the same time, Ellen Terry continued to be quite demanding of him.**

*Dear Mr Ridley,*

*I want some post cards and I want them at once please. Chiefly groups in which my son and his family appear. Also some of the little girl holding up my dress in the garden - and groups of me with Miss Marion Terry - and me at home with Mr Carew - and the groups of Mr Carew, Miss Neilson-Terry and me with a friend and the dogs. Just 5 shillings worth in all. It would be rather nice to have one card of every one you have taken of me - of us - and number each one and you retain also a numbered set.*

In the following two letters she implied that the cost of post cards and photographs was too much for her to bear and, having been shocked at the size of her bill (equivalent of about £1,250 today), she tells Mr Ridley to limit her credit with him to the cost of newspapers delivered to her home in Smallhythe. She also asks him to tell her how he charges her “differently” to other customers (i.e. charges her more).

Ellen Terry was not averse to using Mr Ridley to provide occasional banking service such as cashing a cheque and asking for some “silver” (coins). Note the speed by which communications between Smallhythe and Tenterden were conducted. Ellen’s letter was written and sent up to Tenterden with the intention that the requested cash would be entrusted to the newspaper boy before he set out from Tenterden to deliver the morning newspapers.

At one point, there seems to have been some confusion between Ellen’s and her daughter Edith’s accounts with Mr Ridley. Ellen asked him to make sure he kept the accounts separate. Mother and daughter at this time had the same initials – EC Ellen Carew and Edith Craig – and there was tension between the two ladies because Edith did not approve of her mother’s third marriage, to James Carew. On the second page of her letter, Ellen Terry reveals that she was not shy about asking Mr Ridley to perform a little photo magic to improve her image.

Ellen Terry amassed a vast collection of photographs (over 7,000) during her lifetime. 20 years after coming to Smallhythe, Ellen Terry appears to have looked through some of them when she moved her London home from Kings Road, Chelsea, to St Martin’s Lane and found some of Alex Ridley’s photographs that she had inadvertently retained. When sending them back to Mr Ridley in April 1921 she appears to enjoy a little sarcasm her note to him

25 June

*I return you 6 of the 9 you sent. These are not the right pictures but scribbled on the enclosed piece of cardboard you will see what I want.*

*Looking at your bill I see I must neither buy PCs [postcards] nor photographs at the pace I appear to have been buying. Will you please tell me how you charge me differently to other people (not professional).*

*E.C.*

30 September 1916

*Dear Sir,*

*I enclose cheque for £17-17-0 together with your account to date. From now, I will ask you to give me no further credit except for my newspapers, for which I should like to pay each time my visits to Small Hythe cease.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Ellen Carew*

4 January 1912

*Dear Sir,*

*Will you kindly cash the enclosed cheque (£5) for me (giving me some silver) and send it back by the boy when he brings the newspapers this morning.*

*I go up to London this afternoon and have no change.*

*I should like my gardener to have either the Standard or Morning Post every day – from me please. The Gardening Paper he takes in himself.*

*Please stop sending my papers after this morning,*

*Yours, Ellen Carew*

27 September

*Dear Mr Ridley,*

*Please be careful to keep our accounts separate – Miss Craig’s and mine – and be sure to let me have my account every 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.*

*I enclose proof of the picture you took of Mrs Jamieson & me – On reflection I give you leave to print it for her privately but not to publish it or enlarge it.*

*Could you in the future printings of me in the garden with my grandchild (which I enclose) cut off (by throwing in deeper shadows) a part of the thickness of the figures?*

*Yours truly,*

*E.C.*

*Dear Mr Ridley,*

*I enclose 7 photographs which should have been returned to you years ago! I am sorry. I have marked with a little cross + one of the photographs and should like you to tell me some day who it is supposed to be.*

*In haste, yours sincerely*

*April, 1921. Ellen Carew E.T.*

*My new address*

*34, Burleigh Mansions*

*St Martin’s Lane*

*London*

It is difficult to determine what constituted a good photograph for Ellen Terry. She clearly had her likes and dislikes and seems to have conveyed these to Mr Ridley in a rather strident tone. In this two-page letter she instructs him not to publish two of the photographs that he had taken at Smallhythe the previous week whilst at the same time commanding him to send to family members copies of other photographs taken at the same time.

Sunday 11 June

215 KINGS ROAD  
CHELSEA

Dear Sir

You will please not publish the 2 pictures taken last week of Miss Phyllis Neilson Terry & myself standing together but the tea-parties in the Garden are so nice that Mr Fred Terry (Miss Phyllis's father) gives his permission, along with mine, to your publishing any of them.

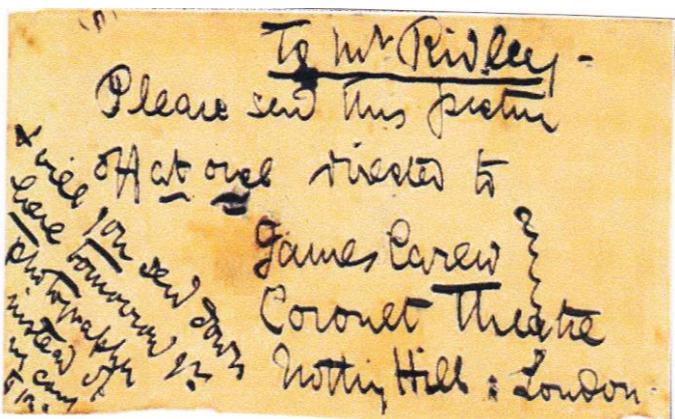
If I were you I would send a set of the pictures to him Fred Terry as soon as possible (New Theatre, St Martin's Lane, London) and a set to Mrs Fred Terry, and a set to Miss Phyllis Neilson-Terry.

Mr Carew and I are amused and pleased with the pictures of the Doggies – a pity “Joy” (the Sheep Dog) was not in all of them. He is our pet!

Yours truly  
Ellen Carew

Ellen Terry used any available piece of paper and card for her letters and notes to Alex Ridley. She seems to have expected - and no doubt received - immediate attention to her demands and requests, even when they may have caused inconvenience for Mr Ridley or his staff.

In this note she instructs Mr Ridley to send a photograph to her husband in London and then, almost as an after-thought, writing across the corner of the scrap of paper, tells Ridley to send his photographer to Smallhythe the following day instead of her going to Tenterden as previously arranged.



To Mr Ridley –  
Please send this picture off at once directed to  
James Carew  
Coronet Theatre  
Notting Hill, London  
and will you send down here tomorrow your  
photographer instead of my coming to you.

Perhaps it was because Ellen Terry gave Alex Ridley considerable business that he tolerated her demands. In an age when photographs were the only portable form of an image of a person and a key means of publicity for the notables of the day, the quantity of photographs required could be quite considerable.

Here in this letter marked “Private” she asks Mr Ridley to send her 5 dozen (60) copies of photographs that he had recently taken at Smallhythe, in the form of postcards. These would be sent to fans, sold to the public from coin operated machines or used even used as postcards.

20 June

Private

215 KINGS ROAD,  
CHELSEA

Dear Mr Ridley

Please send me soon as possible 5 dozen pictures (and tell me when) of the last you took at the Farm, 3 doz of these to be me stooping forward and one doz each of the picture with little Togo in my lap (seated on steps) and the last doz, various: I mean these to be postcards of course: but I should like 2 each of my favourites on paper as before.

Yours truly,  
E. C.

