BRACERS and Beyond

Enhancing the Digital Presence of the Bertrand Russell Archives

Sparking Innovation Symposium

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May 14, 2025

Brighter World | McMaster University

William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections

- One of Canada's preeminent special collections libraries
- Holds nearly five kilometers of archives
- More than 100,000 books and manuscripts
- Open to McMaster students, faculty, and staff, external researchers, and the public!

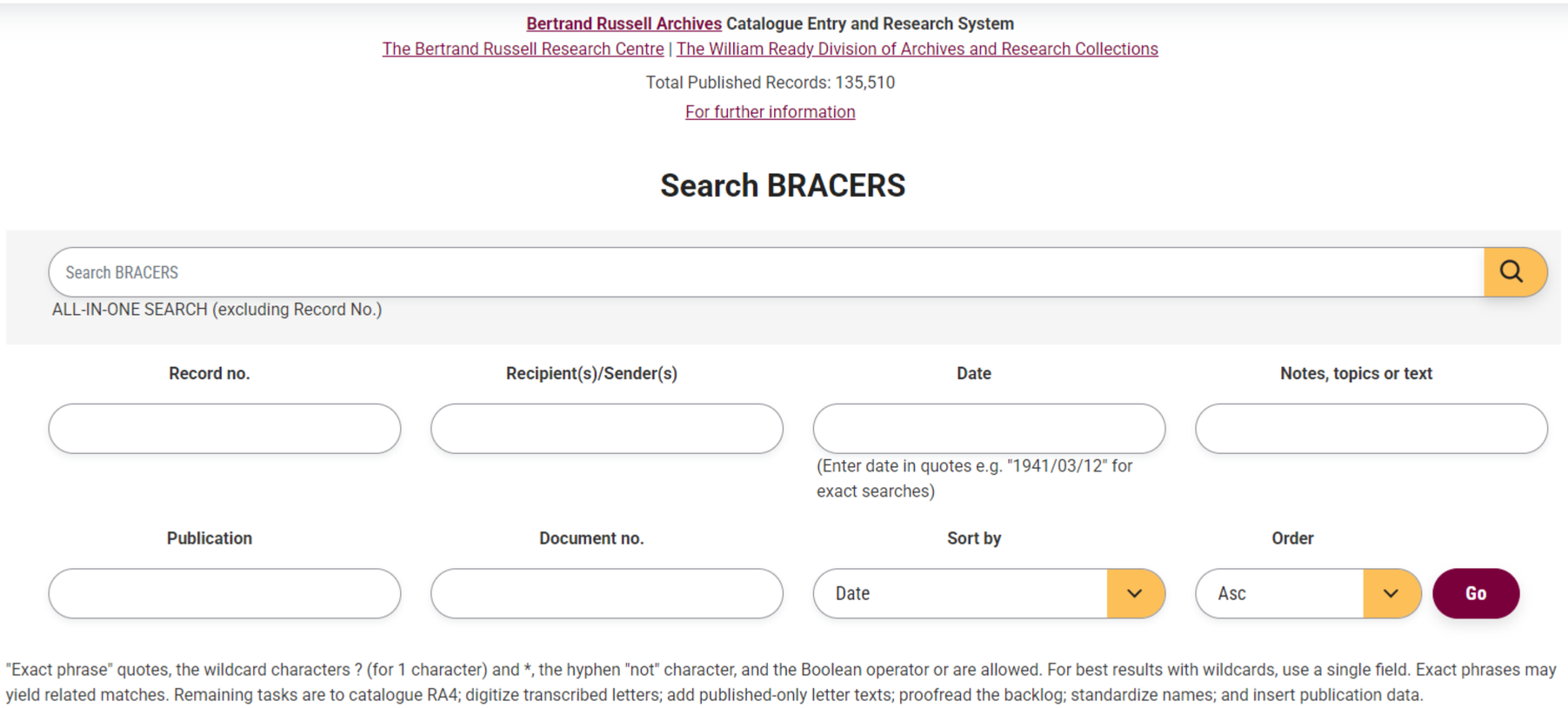
Ulisse Aldrovandi. *Naturalis Historia*. Bologna, 1599-1668.
Image: Ron Scheffler

The Bertrand Russell Archives

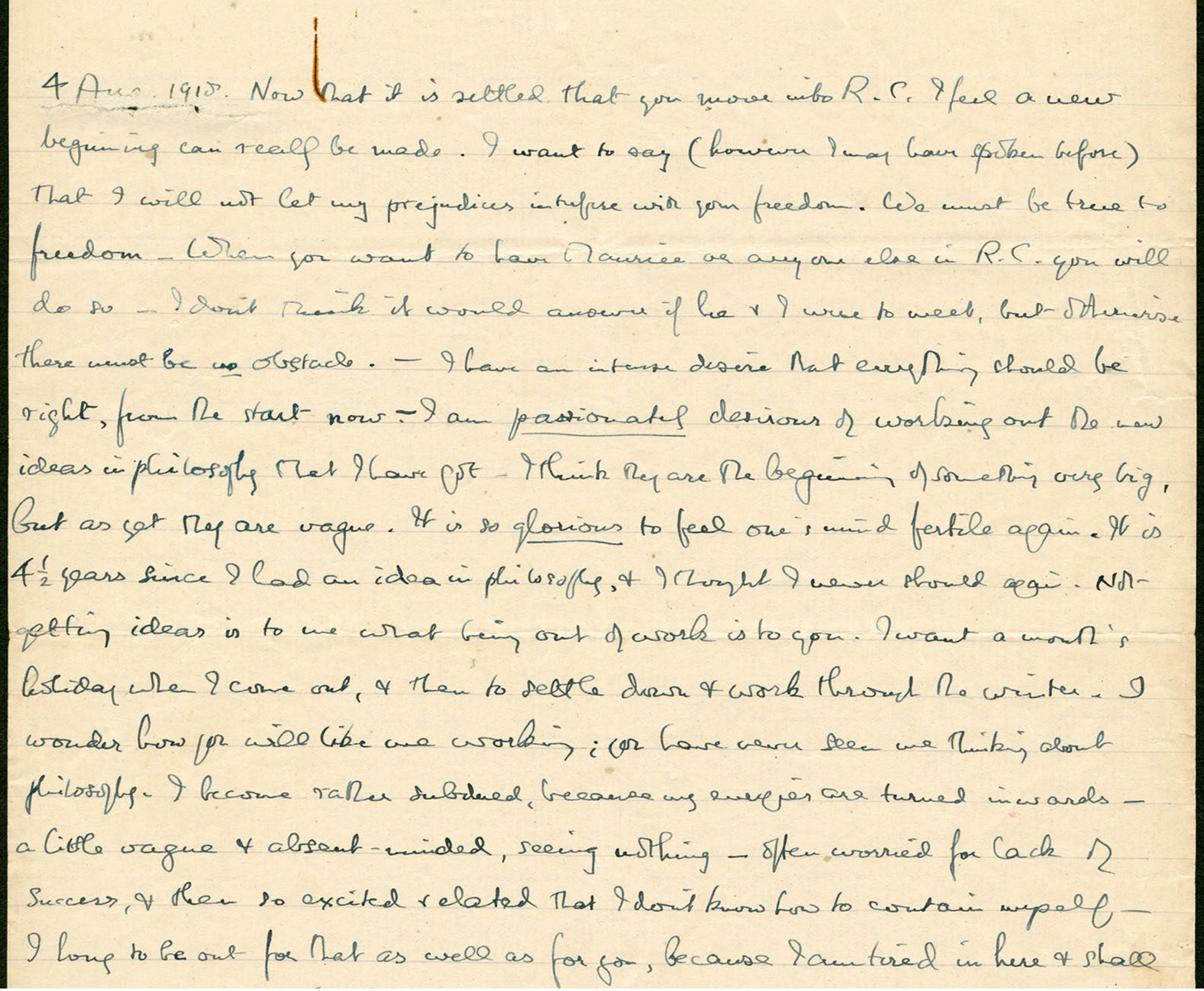
- A foundational archive for McMaster
- Over 1,000 boxes (147 meters) of textual materials, photographs, audiovisual materials, and more
- 3,800 books from Russell's personal library
- Open to McMaster students, faculty, and staff, external researchers, and the public!

Russell's Nobel Prize (Literature, 1950), glasses, and a copy of one of his landmark works, *Principia Mathematica*.

BRACERS and the Russell Archives



- BRACERS
  - An item-level database of Russell's correspondence
  - Initially developed in the late 1980s
- Remains a very important tool, but also seeing its limitations:
  - Developed for correspondence
  - User experience
  - Transcriptions, digital images, and integration with other digital sites



4 Aug. 1918. Now that it is settled that you move into R.C. I feel a new beginning can really be made. I want to say (however I may have spoken before) that I will not let my prejudices interfere with your freedom. We must be true to freedom — When you want to have Maurice or any one else in R.C. you will do so — I don't think it would answer if he & I were to meet, but otherwise there must be no obstacle. — I have an intense desire that everything should be right, from the start now — I am passionately desirous of working out the new ideas in philosophy that I have got — I think they are the beginning of something very big, but as yet they are vague. It is so glorious to feel one's mind fertile again. It is 4½ years since I had an idea in philosophy, & I thought I never should again. Not-getting ideas is to me what being out of work is to you. I want a month's holiday when I come out, & then to settle down & work through the winter. I wonder how you will like me working; you have never seen me thinking about philosophy. I become rather subdued, because my energies are turned inwards — a little vague & absent-minded, seeing nothing — often worried for lack of success, & then so excited & elated that I don't know how to contain myself — I long to be out for that as well as for you, because I am tired in here & shall

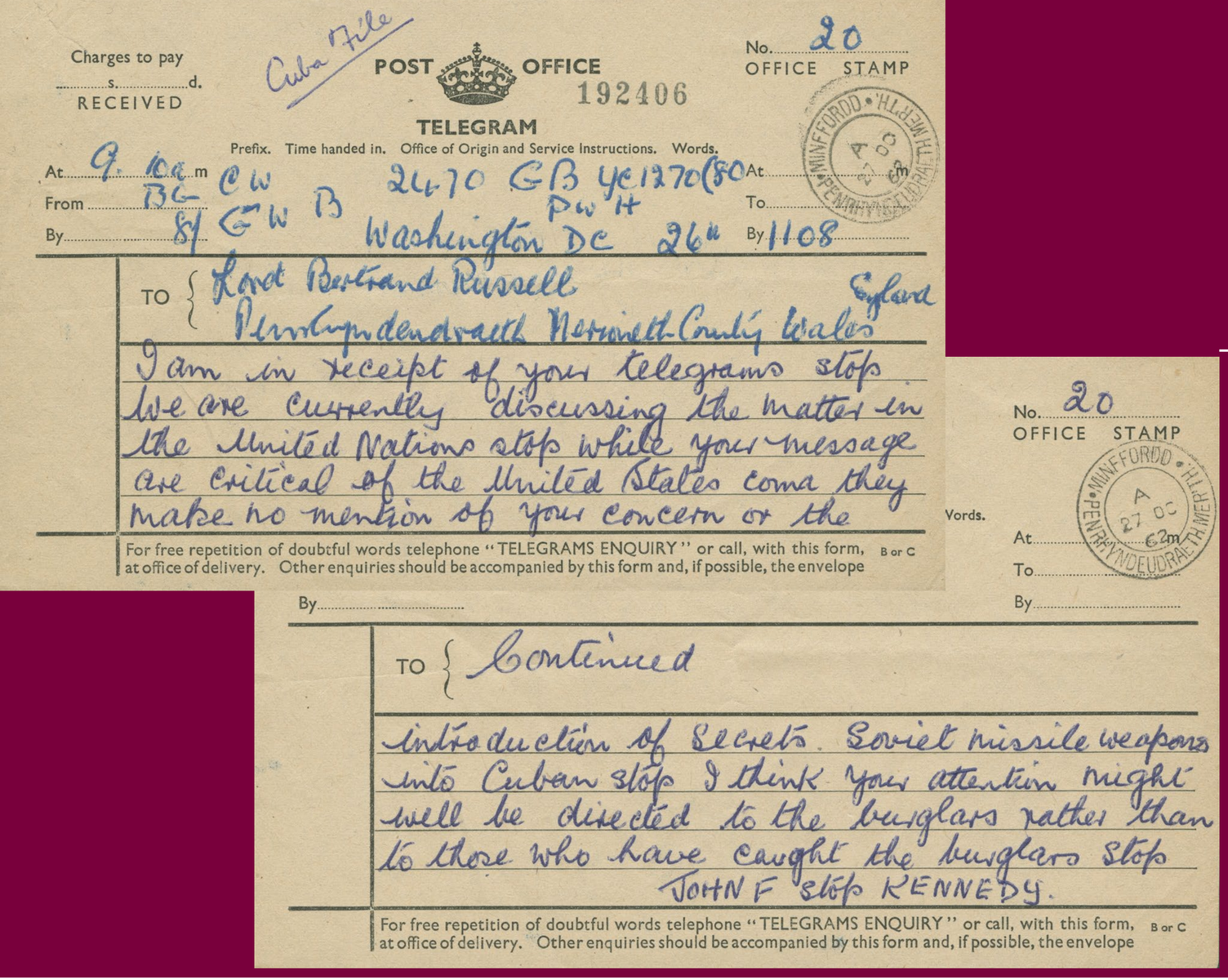
Letter, Bertrand Russell to Constance Malleson, August 4, 1918.

BRACERS project & outcomes

- Shared Business Analyst position with UTS to conduct a review and stakeholder meetings
- Review included data structure and entry, database scope, and user experience
- Leading us toward a new vision for the Russell Archives discovery tool

Digitization project & outcomes

- Determined best approach to capture high-resolution images
- Successfully extracted and transformed descriptive data from BRACERS
- More than 3,000 pages of Russell's correspondence digitized



Charges to pay ..... s. ..... d.
RECEIVED

Cuba file

POST OFFICE 192406

No. 20
OFFICE STAMP

TELEGRAM

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words.

At 9. 10a m CW 2470 GB YC1270(80
From BC GW B PW H
By 81 Washington DC 26th

At
To
By 1108

TO { Lord Bertrand Russell
Plas Penrhyndeudraeth Merioneth-Caerdy Wales England

I am in receipt of your telegrams stop
We are currently discussing the matter in
the United Nations stop while your message
are critical of the United States coma they
make no mention of your concern or the

Words.

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form, at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope B or C

No. 20
OFFICE STAMP

At
To
By

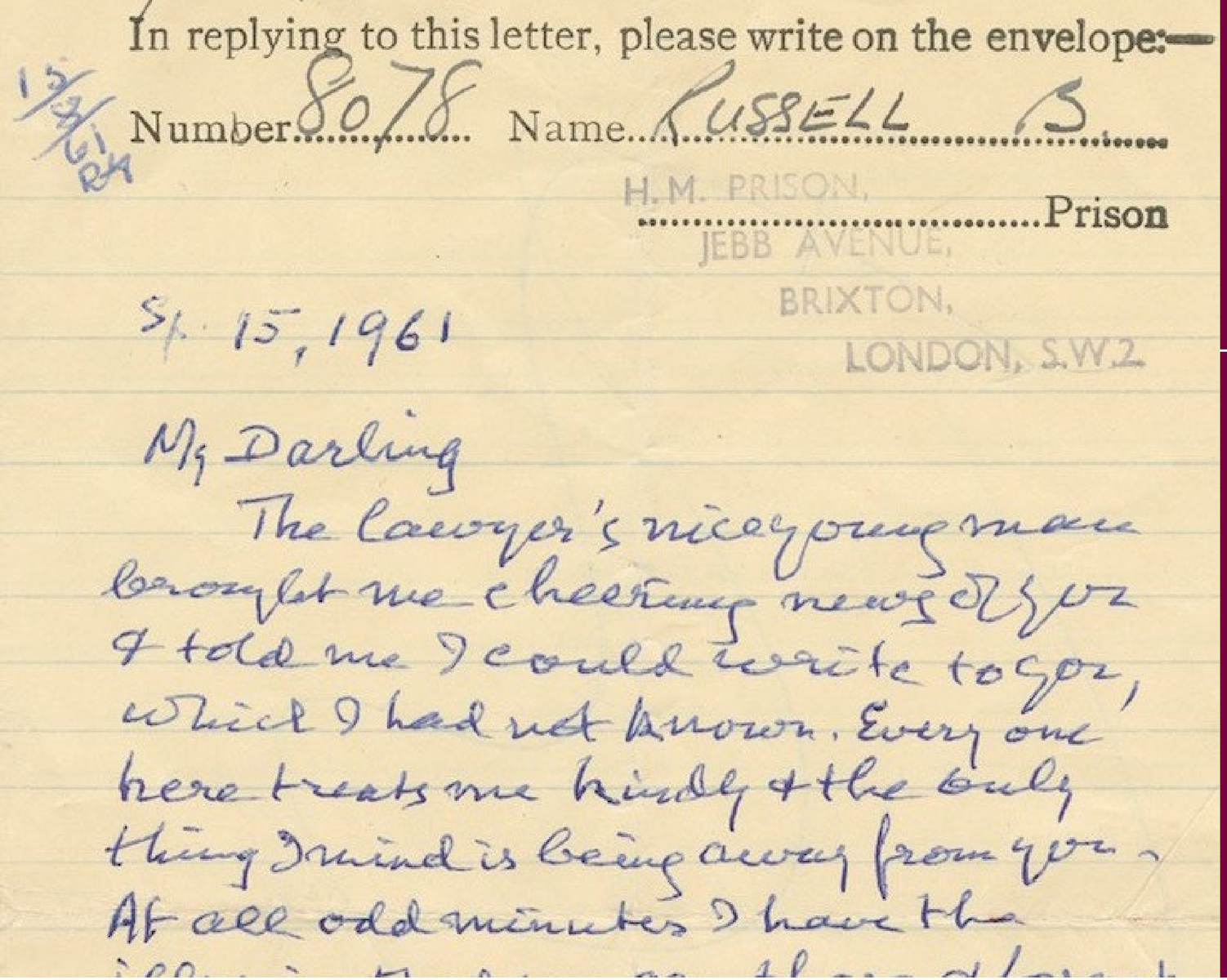
By

TO { Continued

introduction of Secrets Soviet missile weapons
into Cuban stop I think your attention might
well be directed to the burglars rather than
to those who have caught the burglars stop
JOHN F stop KENNEDY.

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form, at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope B or C

Telegram, John F. Kennedy to Bertrand Russell, October 26, 1962.


In replying to this letter, please write on the envelope:—

Number 8078 Name RUSSELL B

H.M. PRISON,
JEBB AVENUE,
BRIXTON,
LONDON, S.W.2.
.....Prison

Sp. 15, 1961

My Darling

The lawyer's nice young man brought me cheering news of you & told me I could write to you, which I had not known. Every one here treats me kindly & the only thing I mind is being away from you. At all odd minutes I have the

Letter, Bertrand Russell to Edith Russell, September 15, 1961. (During his second stint in Brixton Prison at age 89!)

What's next?

- Finalizing recommendations for future development of the Russell Archives database
- Integrating Russell Archives digitization with the larger digitization program
- Experimenting with new tools to support transcription of the Russell letters
- Lots of new online content!

Thank you!