Letter from Saint John Baptist de La Salle donated to the Generalate Archives by the District of Ireland, Great Britain, Malta

On 24 September 2026, following a decision by the District Council of that jurisdiction, an original letter from St. John Baptist de La Salle, which had been held in the Archives of the Provincial House in Oxford, was handed over to the custodians of the Generalate Archives.

The letter is dated 15 May 1701. Together with another letter dated 20 June 1682, these were the two letters selected for submission in the beatification process of John Baptist de La Salle. The postulator at the time, on the advice of Fr. Maure, chaplain to the Generalate, submitted the copies and originals in 1835 to the Commission investigating the heroicity of our Founder's virtues. Neither of the letters had returned to our archives at that time.

The letter of 1682 remained in the library of the Archbishop of Reims. The letter of 1701, however, followed a much more complicated path. It was discovered in 1955 by Fr. Bernard Payne, librarian at Ushaw Seminary in northern England, among a bundle of ancient manuscripts. Having obtained permission from the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, the letter was donated to the District of England.

It is an autograph manuscript measuring 110 × 163 mm. It bears neither an address nor a sender's name. It had been folded into quarters and, at some point, became damp, leaving a stain. The letter does not preserve the name of the addressee.

Nor does it bear an original date, as the date written on it was added by a hand other than the author's. It even displays two dates: 1710 and 1701. Some scholars have opted for one date, others for the other.

On the reverse of the letter, someone wrote: *'5 June 1701. A simple remedy for*

purpura: place some worms on the sole of the foot and crush them, for me… of… what is it called…’. According to a study by Brother Edwin Bannon, the recipient of the letter likely kept it in his pocket, perhaps inside the New Testament that every Brother carried. At some point, faced with this disease (exanthematic typhus) which claimed the lives of at least five Brothers at that time, and having no other paper at hand on which to note down his discovery, he wrote it there. Indeed, in the Galenic medicine prevalent at the beginning of the 18th century, worms—whether dried into powder or live—were used to treat purpura fever, as they were believed to reduce body temperature and humidity.

Known through printed copies, this letter has been assigned different numbers in various collections over the years:

The Collection of Brother Clair Battersby (1951):	It is dated 1710 and assigned the number II.4.
Collection of Letters compiled by Brother Felix Paul (1954):	Dated 1701 and assigned the number 102; it is included amongst the copied letters.
Study by Brother Edwin Bannon:	Dated 1701.
Complete Works in French (printed edition, 1993):	It accepts the information provided by Brother Félix Paul (102).
Collection of Br. Secondino Barbaglia (1993):	Dated as being from 1701, it bears the number 2.
Complete works in French (electronic edition, 2000):	It accepts the information provided by Brother Félix Paul but already includes it amongst the autograph letters (102).
Complete works in Spanish (2001)	It accepts the information from the French electronic Complete Works