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John Playfair in letters

This talk is a progress report on an effort to locate, transcribe, and annotate all of the surviving correspondence written by John Playfair (1748–1819), Professor of Mathematics and then of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh University. The letters reflect Playfair's wide-ranging interests in philosophy, geology, anthropology, chemistry, architecture, literature, and drama. They contain lists of his prominent friends: John Leslie, Dugald Stewart, William Robertson, John Rennie, Mary and Agnes Berry, Lord and Lady Minto, Archibald Constable, and so on. They share opinions on how the British government handled the American Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. And, woven throughout the correspondence, are references to Playfair's lifelong concern for mathematics and its history, including his analysis of observations made at Schehallien, papers prepared for the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, and his supplement to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.