‘Material Identities, Social Bodies’: Guidance on Transcription

The ‘Golden Rule’ in transcription is to transcribe exactly what is written in the letters (including any exact spelling, capitalization and punctuation). Try to retain line breaks as in the original.

Handwriting can be difficult to read and some letters are damaged. Sometimes you may not be sure what a word says. We have a system for noting this. Throughout, curly brackets indicate that the insertion is in the original and square brackets indicate that it is your comment and not in the original.

So, what to do if …

The text is illegible or unreadable because the handwriting is poor, the page is torn or the letter writer crossed out the word:
Use ‘[illeg]’ or ‘[damaged]’ or ‘[deleted]’

The letter writer has inserted some text above the line:
Use ‘{^text}’

I can only read some of the word but am fairly sure I know what it is:
Use ‘{?text}’

I can’t read the word at all but would make an educated guess:
Use ‘[?text]’

There is a change in handwriting during the letter:
Note ‘[change hand]’ where this starts.

Some of the writing changes direction or is written vertically in the margin:
Note the non-standard text position (eg. vertical margin) ‘[vertical left side]’

The writer has crossed through a word:
You can record deleted but legible text as follows:

- ‘My favorite color is ~~blue~~ red!’ (This produces ‘My favorite color is ~~blue~~ red!’)

The writer has underlined a word:
You can record this as follows:

- ‘<u>underlined</u>’ (this produces ‘underlined’).

The writer has used superscript or subscript text:
You can signal these as follows:

- ‘This text contains _{subscript} text’. [This text contains $_{\text{subscript}}$ text.]
- ‘This text contains ^{superscript} text’. [This text contains $^{\text{superscript}}$ text.]

We are grateful for your help and will acknowledge all contributors on the webpage. If you have any further questions, you can email the project team and we will get back to you as soon as we can: socialbodies@contacts.bham.ac.uk