

The Mind of Margaret Cavendish



WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between the Department of Philosophy, University of York, and English Heritage

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

Project summary

Margaret Cavendish was a seventeenth-century philosopher, scientist, novelist, playwright, biographer and celebrity aristocrat. She published widely across a range of different subjects, writing in a variety of different genres. This project seeks to reconstruct, contextualise and analyse Margaret Cavendish's theory of mind, situating her work on the senses, imagination, and emotions in relation to Bolsover Castle (English Heritage). The Cavendishes' 'pleasure palace', Bolsover was devoted to the senses and sensual pleasures, and was a fertile training-ground for Cavendish's febrile imagination.

PhD Project description

After centuries of neglect, recent years have seen increased philosophical interest in Cavendish's work, including her work on issues in philosophy of mind. But this often focuses on her account of the metaphysics (or nature) of mind, rather than particular types of experience. At the same time, there is emerging interest in feminist approaches to philosophy of mind; Cavendish's work provides a lens through which to critically develop this approach. A woman writing in a male-dominated milieu, Cavendish self-consciously wrote for a female readership.

Bolsover Castle was a source of inspiration for Margaret: she described it in verse before even visiting (*Poems and Fancies*); it features in



Blazing World; and it would have been Margaret's home as a dowager, had she outlived her husband. To understand Bolsover from Margaret's perspective the project will explore three key themes in Cavendish's philosophy in relation to the site.

The Senses: the Pillar Parlour in the Little Castle contains depictions of the five senses. The senses are central to Cavendish's work, both her criticisms of the Royal Society and her own positive philosophy. How should we understand and situate her positive theory of perception (as involving 'patterning') and her realist theory of sensible qualities (like colour) in her contemporary context?

Imagination: Bolsover is represented in a number of Cavendish's fictional works and was conceived as a place for art, performance and creativity. What is Cavendish's theory of imagination? What role does imagination, including the imagination of fictional worlds, play in her philosophical method?

Emotions and sensual pleasures: Bolsover was used for entertaining, the Elysium closet depicts earthly pleasures, and love and marriage are key themes in Cavendish's fictional work. Can we reconstruct a wider philosophical theory of pleasure and emotion from her works?

There is scope for the student to develop the project within these broad themes drawing out specific examples or pulling on specific strands within the themes. Research will involve reconstructing and reimagining Cavendish's views, expressed across the full range of her works; situating them in relation to historical sources to which she had access (either in print or in discussion); putting them into dialogue with her contemporaries; and relating Cavendish's work to contemporary discussions, including feminist approaches to philosophy of mind.

The research will be predominantly text- and idea-based, combining both historical and rational reconstruction. Part of the project will involve reflecting on the challenges of presenting Cavendish and her philosophy to contemporary audiences, both academic and in heritage contexts. How does interpreting aspects of Bolsover through the lens of Cavendish's philosophy - as opposed to, for example, art historical approaches - shed new light on Bolsover, its possible use and meaning to the Cavendishes? Is it possible to recover or add to understanding of how Cavendish related to the site through in depth understanding of her philosophy? How can this help visitors not only to step back into the spaces people occupied in the past, but also their beliefs and ways of thinking?

About English Heritage

[English Heritage](#) is a registered charity which cares for over 400 historic monuments, buildings, and places, and their collections. Spread across England and spanning six millennia, sites range from prehistoric monuments

to medieval castles to country houses. The charity researches, protects and conserves these important historic sites and opens them to members of the public to share their rich and diverse histories. In doing so, the charity brings the story of England to life for over 10 million people each year. Research is at the heart of what English Heritage does and enables the charity to tell authentic, engaging, and representative stories in imaginative and inspiring ways. The student will become part of a vibrant research community of staff and fellow PhD candidates.

Cared for by English Heritage, [Bolsover Castle](#) in Derbyshire is a spectacular seventeenth-century aristocratic retreat created by the Cavendish family. The 'Little Castle' is decorated with rare surviving early 17th century wall paintings; the ruined terrace range hints at the grand entertaining which took place there; and the riding house is the earliest complete surviving example in England. This studentship will build on past work by English Heritage to increase visibility and understanding of Cavendish both onsite and online. This has included the introduction of costumed volunteer storytellers exploring Cavendish's life and the creation of online resources such as an English Heritage podcast: '[Bolsover Castle's Philosopher Duchess](#)'.

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

The student will work closely with English Heritage throughout the course of their PhD. They will contribute to and develop an ongoing programme of activities on Cavendish and explore ways English Heritage can share the life and works of Cavendish with members of the public. Activities may include working with volunteers, designing and delivering onsite engagement activities, extending work currently being undertaken by English Heritage's Youth Engagement Team, and creating new digital assets. We also anticipate the student will disseminate their work to academic audiences via relevant conferences and publications, and to public audiences via events such as the York Festival of Ideas.

The student will also have the opportunity to undertake a placement at English Heritage, which will include time within the curatorial department.

Financial support

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2024; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a tax and national insurance free maintenance grant. The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of York for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time

basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time under the terms of their visa.

Funding schemes are available to help support conference attendance, fieldwork and training, where appropriate.

To support this studentship English Heritage are offering a contribution of £1000 per annum for the three years of the studentship (£3000 total) towards research and travel expenses associated with the partnership.

Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Master's degree or professional experience relevant to the scope of the project.

Applicants must be able to demonstrate an interest in the heritage sector and potential and enthusiasm for developing skills more widely in the areas of *heritage/ community engagement/ built environment*

As a collaborative award, students will be expected to spend time at both the University of York and English Heritage properties and offices.

Requirements of the Studentship

WRoCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and to engage with Internationalisation.

All WRoCAH students must submit their thesis for examination within the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WRoCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

Before applying for any WRoCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WRoCAH webpages about the WRoCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>

How to apply

By 12 noon Wednesday 6 March 2024, applicants are required to submit to WRoCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
- How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
- How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.

Applications must be submitted via [this Expression of Interest form](#).

- 15 March 2024: decision on short-listing. The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Friday 15 March 2024.
- ***Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.*** If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of York. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.
- Interviews: Thursday 11th April

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

For more information about this project contact

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