

Feminising the Archive and the Women of Derbyshire's Country Houses, c. 1700-1850



**WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between
Department of History at the University of Sheffield and
Derbyshire Records Office**

Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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Project summary

This project aims to contribute to the fields of women's history, public history, and archival science. It centres on a largely unknown collection of women's letters at Derbyshire Record Office, uncovering for the first time the domestic lives and experiences of women at Derbyshire's country houses. Alongside completing a PhD thesis, which will be based on this archival material, the successful candidate will carry out important cataloguing and indexing work at the Record Office, taking new steps to 'feminise' the archive and finding aids that have traditionally prioritised male lives and experiences. The project will also involve outreach and engagement activities with the project partners.

PhD Project description



The project sits at the intersection of women's history, public history and archival science, and aims to make significant contributions to those fields, while also equipping the successful candidate with the research expertise and professional skills to pursue an

independent career in academia and/or public history.

The studentship centres on rich, but largely unknown archival collections to offer the first study of the women of Derbyshire's country houses c.1700-1850. The material comprises letters written by, to, and about women. The collections include those pertaining to the Miller Mundy family of Shipley Hall: this collection's contents was only listed in the catalogue in 2021, but female family members are well represented, including the sisters of Edward Miller Mundy MP and his teenage ward, Mary Victorine Fielding (b.1787), whose misdeeds are detailed in correspondence from 1802-6. Another key collection relates to the Harpur-Crewe family of Calke Abbey, which includes - among other rich material - seven bundles of correspondence (dated 1792-1833) of Nanette Hawkins, a lady's maid who married 7th Baronet, Henry Harpur. Other relevant collections are those of the Gell family of Hopton Hall, the Turbutt family of Ogston Hall, the Wrights of Eyam Hall, the Fitzherberts of Tissington Hall and the Coke family of Brookhill Hall.



The studentship has two dimensions. First, the successful candidate's PhD thesis will be based on this archival material, with the precise scope, historiographical intervention and research questions to be shaped by the student's interests and findings. It may, for example, be guided by the following research questions:

- What opportunities do letters present as source material for investigating the lives of gentry women in Derbyshire?
- How did the women of Derbyshire's country houses conceive of their role(s) within the household?
- What were their responsibilities, interests, and aspirations as gentry women?
- How were their experiences shaped by different life stages, from childhood and adolescence into adulthood, marriage and widowhood?

This research will yield important new insights into female experience in the gentry – a section of society that still receives little scholarly attention between studies of elite aristocracy and the lower social orders. The research will also contribute to new directions in the study of English country houses: while enjoying a long tradition in scholarship, the field has overwhelmingly neglected female inhabitants and relations. In earlier work, women were side-lined in pursuit of what David Cannadine deemed 'masculine assets':

'wealth, status [and] power'. Gender historians challenged this, but the work of Elaine Chalus and Judith Lewis, for example, still conceived of the home as a 'container' of women: the stories worth telling were those that contravened feminine norms of domesticity. In contrast, this project takes seriously women's domestic lives, bringing new understandings of female perspectives, activities and agency, thereby contributing both to women's history and the history of the English country house.

The studentship's second dimension concerns archival science and public history. The candidate will receive training and supervision at Derbyshire Record Office, supporting them to conduct crucial work to catalogue, describe and index archival collections, often for the first time. Much material is presently hidden from public view and academic research – undescribed at catalogue level, with notes such as 'bundle of letters' rendering the contents of collections undiscoverable in finding aids. The candidate's work holds strategic relevance by developing knowledge of Derbyshire Record Office's collections, and especially by 'feminising' the archive: making women visible in the catalogue and in finding aids that have traditionally prioritised men and male activities. This will secure a legacy for the project beyond its immediate findings by assisting researchers into the future.

The studentship also involves outreach and engagement activities at the partner institutions. This will provide the candidate with experience in public history, while engaging wider publics in both the project's historical research and the process of 'feminising' archives. The studentship's different facets will enable the successful candidate to develop research and professional expertise in the interdisciplinary field between women's history, public history and archival science, setting them up to pursue an independent career in academia and/or the heritage industry.

About the Derbyshire Records Office

Derbyshire Record Office, which is based in Matlock, is the county record office for Derbyshire, England. It is part of Derbyshire County Council, and it provides the archives and local studies services for the county, the city of Derby, and the Diocese of Derby. Along with an extensive local studies library of books and resources, the Record Office cares for a vast collection of original documents. This collection spans 900 years of Derbyshire history and includes maps, prints, photographs, newspapers, institutional records, manuscript archives, and more. Along with preserving and conserving the collection, the Record Office has a guiding purpose to support access to these materials, both for public and academic audiences, enabling researchers to find information and to identify materials relevant to their interests. The Record Office also maintains an ongoing programme of outreach work – including public-facing blogs, talks, exhibitions, and other events – which aims to fulfil its ambition to support

heritage tourism, engage new audiences, and enable historic sites to be reinterpreted.

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

The successful candidate will work closely with the project partners on several kinds of outreach and engagement activities. They will, for example, be involved in the development of exhibitions, galleries and interpretation boards at Derbyshire Record Office and supporting country houses. It is also envisaged that they will be able to present their findings to scholarly and non-scholarly audiences at relevant conference and through public history talks. This is in addition to contributing to the project partners' routine outreach activities, such as writing for Derbyshire Record Office's blog (<https://recordoffice.wordpress.com/>), and the University of Sheffield History Department's internationally recognised History Matters blog (<http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/>). Ultimately, the longer-term impact of this project will be secured by the work the student will carry out to 'feminise' Derbyshire Record Office's collections. This work will make women, their voices and lives visible in the catalogue and in finding aids, assisting academic researchers, public historians, and the general public for years to come.

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 maintenance grant (£18,622 in 2023/24). 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 Sheffield 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 by the terms of their visa.

Qualifications

Strong applicants will have a good first degree in an appropriate subject, as well as a Distinction at Master's degree (or be working towards one) and/or professional experience relevant to the scope of the project.

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 Sheffield. 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: April, date tbc

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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