

Hidden in Plain Sight: Women in Archives, Libraries, Museums and Personal Collections

4-5th September 2025
Online

Thursday 4th September

Welcome and introduction by Professor Sarah Richardson, WHN Chair

Keynote 1: Online

'They Used to Hide the Cigars in their Curlers': Thirty Years of the Women's Archive Wales,
Dr Mary Thorley

This lecture will give a history of the work of the Women's Archive of Wales (Archif Menywod Cymru). It will trace the origins of the movement, which began in the 1990s, when a group of historians, archivists and other interested women got together having realised how poorly women were represented in the written histories of Wales. All those involved shared a deep commitment to researching, promoting and preserving women's history. From this small group there emerged the organisation that, today, has over three hundred members.

AMCWAW has undertaken several major projects including a study of the history of working women in Wales, the history of protest groups and, currently, the story of Welsh women in sport. The lecture will include excerpts from the films and sound recordings of the Archive.

PANEL 1

'Anna of Denmark: The originator of Stuart Style'

Julia Hamilton

A predicament shared in the historiography of early modern women is that little archival material of their commissions and acquisitions survive. However, this can be overcome through a blended analysis of inventories, warrants, eye-witness accounts and spatial layouts. A close study of the Stuarts' Privy Lodgings from 1603-1688 reveals the significant role Anna of Denmark played in the development of a Stuart style of interior decoration. Anna's spatial and decorative patterns gave new meanings to the Tudor spaces she had inherited. They were later adopted by Stuart monarchs and queen consorts. Hence, Anna influenced men as well as women. Multiple warrants were pieced together to reimagine Stuart space more accurately. This paper demonstrates how an examination of material and visual culture can reformulate the way in which historians interpret accessibility to seventeenth-century English royal interiors. Warrants are a necessary component in analyzing historic spaces to illuminate the influence of women. Connections are drawn between Stuart queen consorts to identify a clear thread of influence and agency throughout the dynasty. This paper explains how royal interior decoration evolved in England between the Tudor and late Stuart periods and credits Anna of Denmark and her successors for that development.

‘“In the manner of heir loomes”: Matrilineal pedigree at Doddington Hall, and its expression in material culture’

Leah Warriner-Wood

This paper will explore how Lincolnshire heiresses Elizabeth and Sarah Hussey shaped dynastic identities at Doddington Hall during the eighteenth century, despite societal constraints. Notwithstanding their marginalised legal status as femme covert, recent research into Doddington’s eighteenth-century interiors has uncovered previously overlooked evidence for the sisters’ active engagement with estate management. Through analysis of their will-making practices, the paper will argue for the women’s deliberate mobilisation of the house and its goods to disseminate their keen sense of pedigree through their bloodline. Furthermore, and responding to the challenges posed by the limited archival visibility of Elizabeth and Sarah, I will demonstrate how an imaginative research methodology exposed the sisters’ enduring influence. Blending conservation practice with archival research, interpreted through the lens of gender studies, the paper will propose that Sarah’s descendant, John Hussey Delaval, built on his grandmother and great-aunt’s legacy by projecting an elite male identity through engagement with the Hall he had been carefully bequeathed by his female ancestors. In highlighting these previously hidden narratives, the paper will contribute to dialogues that challenge assumptions about early modern women’s roles, by emphasising their agency in maintaining dynastic continuity through engagement with the house and its goods.

‘Warmth for a Man and Work for a Woman’: The Hidden Women Behind the Hatchlands Waistcoat’

Helen Antrobus

In 2019, a waistcoat, constructed from fifty leather gloves, came into the collection of Hatchlands Park (National Trust). With a questionable provenance, the story attached was that I was worn by navy signaller, Harrie Joseph at Gallipoli, before he convalesced at Hatchlands. His daughter would later wear it during her firewatch duties during the Second World War. After persistent, deep and often frustrating archival research, the discovery was made that the waistcoat was a rare survival of those made by the Ladies’ Territorial Committee during the First World War. Founded by archivists Ethel Stokes and Mary Cox, the committee used recycled goods and materials to create garments to send to the front. The Waistcoat and Glove Appeal was a national campaign that collected leather goods and between the winter of 1914 and 1917, over 11,000 waistcoats were made.

This paper would examine the multi-faceted power of fashion and dress to explore hidden and forgotten histories of women in social history collections, questioning the survival of domestic craft, of the many dimensions to women’s patriotism and activism, and will explore how the National Trust challenged the ease of accepting anonymity, and brought the story of the women behind the waistcoat to life.

A life in the library: The life and intellectual world of Molly Lepell (1700-1768)

Emily Deal

Mary “Molly” Lepell, Lady Hervey, was one of the most celebrated women of the early Georgian court. A society favourite, muse and intellectual, Lepell was part of the circle of Caroline of Ansbach, whose cultural programmes have been considered in detail by Joanna Marschner (2002; 2014; 2017). Cast aside by her husband to a rural life at Ickworth, Suffolk, Lepell continued to engage with political, intellectual and cultural material, maintaining a wide network of correspondence. Evidence of this survives across several collections, however, in the interpretation of her marital home, now in the care of the National Trust, she fades into insignificance.

Lepell's life has been relatively underexplored and, aside from several biographical entries, often relegated to the subject of antiquarian pursuit (Kilburn, 2004; Stuart, 1936). Her library of over 650 volumes has never been studied in detail. Using examples from this library and other material culture, alongside her correspondence, this paper argues that Lepell presents an opportunity to understand the life and intellectual agency of elite women in the eighteenth century. By foregrounding Lepell's interaction with these items, traditional narratives are decentred to build understanding of her beliefs, interests and networks, with wider significance for gender and court studies.

PANEL 2

'From Private to Public to Virtual Spaces: The Paper Collections of Sarah Sophia Banks'

Arlene Leis

Academics and specialists continue to recover women's contributions to the wider culture of collecting during the 18th and 19th centuries. Such scholarship elucidates our understanding about how collections and collecting practices enabled women to carve a place for themselves in society. This paper will focus on the fascinating archive of printed materials garnered and curated by the avid collector, Sarah Sophia Banks. Her massive collections of over 19,000 printed articles, which are now housed in the British Museum, British Library and Royal Mint, include numerous items relating to fashionable society like fashion plates, pocket-book imagery, newspaper clippings, visitor cards, trade cards, admission tickets, and satirical prints. The massive collection Sarah Sophia built offers new perspectives for examining women's agency, status, and identity during a specific time.

This paper discusses Sarah Sophia Banks as a collector, how her collection was organized and the social spaces and contexts that facilitated her collecting practices. Beginning with its arrangement at 32 Soho Square, it will follow the collection's path to its transfer to the museum following Sarah Sophia's death. It will consider some of the challenges, past and present, the museum faces when integrating such a massive collection into its archives. The paper will also examine the museum's online database and question the necessity to reorganize, or not, the collection in future digital spaces.

'Visible in Detail, Absent in Voice: Reading the Diaries of Anne Rushout (1791–1846)'

Jon Breton

Anne Rushout, an unmarried aristocratic woman writing between 1791 and 1846, left behind more than five decades of diaries—factual, observant, and rich in everyday detail. She recorded society life, travel, weather, landscape, and events of national significance, yet omitted emotion, commentary, and self-revelation. Her life, like many women's, is both hidden and revealed in plain sight.

This paper explores what it means to encounter a diarist who is visible in action but silent in voice. Drawing on my transcription of the diaries, research into the wider Rushout family archive, and a developing public-facing engagement strategy, I reflect on how Anne's self-effacing record-keeping complicates assumptions about personal writing, authorship, and women's voices in the late Georgian and early Victorian period.

The paper also considers the ethical responsibilities of working with inherited private archives, the imaginative work required to interpret silences, and how public history practitioners might approach lives documented in fact but not feeling. It contributes to

ongoing discussions about voice, erasure, and the presence of women in overlooked collections.

[‘Margaret Armstrong: Recovering the life and agency of Cragside’s co-creator’](#)

Clara Woolford and Amy Craig

Cragside in Northumberland was widely celebrated by contemporaries as ‘The Great Work of a Great Man’. Such praise for William Armstrong, the revered nineteenth-century Newcastle inventor and engineer, has continued to shape how the story of Cragside is told to the public today. This paper seeks to address a critical gap within the story of this iconic home, illuminating the agency and influence of its other creator: Lady Margaret Armstrong. It forms part of a wider research placement in collaboration with the National Trust that aims to revise interpretation at the property through accumulating and sharing deeper knowledge of Margaret’s activities.

Overshadowed by her husband in historical accounts and modern-day studies alike, there is a striking silence surrounding Cragside’s co-creator. In the primary material, Margaret’s life is frequently reduced to a passing remark, and her agency obscured by her repeated characterisation as William’s ‘help-meet’. Overcoming these archival gaps has necessitated a ‘patchwork’ approach. By stitching together snippets of textual, visual and material evidence, retrieved from a diverse array of repositories, it is possible to reveal and re-centre Margaret’s story. A skilled gardener, ‘hearty’ hostess, and ‘powerful’ public figure, Margaret played a formative role at Cragside, Newcastle, and beyond.

PANEL 3

[‘“We shall never know the full extent of their assistance”: Identifying the archival records of Vally Lasker’s contribution to the music and legacy of Gustav Holst’](#)

Philippa Tudor

Musician Vally Lasker (1885-1978) wasn’t a composer, she wasn’t a man, and she wasn’t British by birth. She wasn’t wealthy and although much of her work was with church music, including the first BBC broadcast communion service, her family was Jewish and she was nearly 70 when she was baptised. All these factors influenced the dispersal of records about her. Imogen Holst’s biography of composer Gustav Holst has only four references to Vally, explaining that she was one of three “scribes” who helped Gustav “more than anyone else in his constant struggle with neuritis”.

What that help was has been unclear. Imogen identified Vally’s handwriting on the original score of the Jupiter (I vow to thee my country) theme of *The Planets*. It is on many more manuscripts of Gustav Holst’s music, in the Royal College of Music (which houses some of her personal papers) and British Library. Over 90 letters from Gustav Holst to Vally have survived, and 48 from Ralph Vaughan Williams. This paper draws on family memorabilia from her great-nephew, BBC recordings and uncatalogued manuscripts at St. Paul’s Girls’ School, Lambeth Palace Library and Holst Victorian House to identify her contribution to Gustav Holst’s music and legacy.

[‘Hollywood’s Vanishing Lady Act: Finding Mary C. McCall Jr. with or without the archives’](#)

J. E. Smyth

Mary C. McCall Jr. was the most influential woman in the Hollywood studio system between 1934 and 1952. The first woman elected president of the Screen Writers Guild, she drafted and negotiated the screenwriters' first contract which included pay rises and credit arbitration. Film historians, critics, fans, and contemporary screenwriters are often stunned to learn that McCall was first elected in 1942, not in the new millennium. Though she would serve on the guild's board for years, chair dozens of industry committees, and write some of Hollywood's key films, few today remember her name.

'Golden age' Hollywood was not strictly a man's business, but the history and criticism written about Hollywood—appearing everywhere from academic journals to the tabloids—is all about men. McCall isn't included in the massive libraries devoted to stars and directors. Until recently, she's never been more than a footnote in media, labour, and women's history. For decades, libraries and archives sourced and celebrated male achievement in the film industry, while rejecting the papers of McCall and her female colleagues. Archives will never offer more than fragments about Hollywood's women. This paper explores the challenges faced researching and writing the biography of Hollywood's 'Madam President'.

['In the Spotlight, Out of the Archive: Black Women Performers in Morecambe's Entertainment History'](#)

Kirsty Roberts

Black women performers have long been excluded from the entertainment histories of British seaside towns, and Morecambe is no exception. Despite their remarkable contributions entertaining locals, many have been left out of mainstream narratives, resulting in an incomplete and distorted picture of the town's performance heritage. Morecambe played host to a range of talented Black women entertainers, including those who performed with ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association) during the Second World War.

Among these overlooked figures are international stars such as Adelaide Hall and Evelyn Dove, trailblazers connected to the Harlem Renaissance and acclaimed for their performances across Britain and Europe.

These performers brought global prestige to the stages they graced, including seaside venues like Morecambe. This erasure not only does a disservice to these performers but also deprives Morecambe of a fuller understanding of its vibrant entertainment heritage.

Their absence reflects a broader pattern of Black women artists shaping British popular culture and routinely being omitted from local histories.

Sharing instances of accessibility issues arising from private collectors and costly image license fees, curating an exhibition is an engaging way to reclaim and celebrate these stories, which is essential in recognising the town's true entertainment history and performance legacy.

[Hidden in Plain Sight: Re-evaluating Marion Scott's Creative Legacy in British Music](#)

Christina Guillaumier

Marion Margaret Scott (1877–1953), British violinist, critic, composer, and musicologist, played a significant yet largely unrecognised role in shaping early twentieth-century British musical life. A co-founder of the Society of Women Musicians and the Royal College of Music Student Union magazine, she was deeply embedded in London's musical landscape—as a performer at chamber concerts, a writer for publications such as *The Music Student* and *The Christian Science Monitor*, and a respected figure in critical and intellectual circles. Despite this visible presence, Scott's contributions have been marginalised in historical narratives.

This paper repositions Scott as a creative force whose wide-ranging work illuminates a broader network of women's intellectual and artistic engagement in the capital. Drawing on feminist musicology and recent scholarship on creative labour (Epstein, 2022), it interrogates the mechanisms by which musical memory is constructed and who is excluded from official accounts. It also challenges dismissive portrayals of Scott as a marginal figure, reframing her not as an accessory to male genius but as an intellectual and cultural agent in her own right. By recovering Scott's creative impact, this paper contributes to the conference's theme by exposing the structures that render women's cultural work both foundational and invisible.

PANEL 4

'An Exploration in Print and Plaster: Recovering Women Sculptors and their Networks in Toronto and Abroad'

Melissa Alexander

In 1983, the estates of sculptors Frances Loring (1887-1968) and Florence Wyle (1881-1968) were donated to the Art Gallery of Ontario. Along with photographs, correspondence, and personal papers, this gift also included 189 pieces of their sculpture, which now comprises over 60% of the Gallery's modern Canadian sculpture collection.

Loring and Wyle first met at the Art Institute of Chicago and made Toronto their permanent home in 1912. In their studio, "The Church," they lived and worked together for over 50 years, drawing around them a culture of bohemianism that made their home a meeting place for artists, musicians, writers, and academics. They were members of the Royal Canadian Academy of Art, the Ontario Society of Artists, and co-founders of the Sculptors Society of Canada.

Despite their prominence, Loring and Wyle have received little scholarly attention, and early twentieth-century Canadian sculpture, even less so. This paper will centre on an in-depth review of the Gallery's extensive holdings, which has revealed a vibrant and thriving network of women with whom they worked. From private collections to social media, artist autobiographies to early issues of *Canadian Homes and Gardens*, the lives and careers of sculptors, journalists, artists, and landscape architects emerged.

'Life after Liverpool School of Architecture: Exploring women and architecture in the mid-20th century'

Emma Curtin

Opening Liverpool School of Architecture's records, immediately revealed women alumni in the 1920s. As Elizabeth Darling describes, rather than hidden, they weren't seen. Eunice Blackwell and Feridah Y Krajewski; both moved abroad. Norah Dunphy; Doris Musker; and Thelma Silcock (RIBA Silver Medal); practised in the UK after graduating.

Typically, alumni are celebrated reflecting on high-status achievements, in what Nancy Stieber describes as the 'inherited forms' of architectural history. In contrast my research began with women's architectural education, careers unknown, and papers lost. Privileging the social history of women's relationship with architecture would require Stieber's new forms of storytelling.

In this paper I will discuss how my methodology addresses this. Mapping lives with public records, relying on speculation and attention to detail I found mentions in newspapers, and archives connected to women's contexts, revealing work of everyday importance. Conducting oral history recordings illuminated characters, but not insight into work or decisions.

Frustrated by the absence of women's own interpretations, and curious about parallels with

careers today, I sought alternative voices including in fiction, and women architects' 1972 letters to Doris Cole. Amongst these varied sources and missing pieces emerge stories of women's relationships with the built-environment professions in the mid-20th century.

'Art + Feminism on Wikipedia: Alternative Routes for Knowledge Activism'

Sophie Fitzpatrick

Movements such as 'The Guerrilla Girls' have highlighted that, unfortunately, in the art world, it is very common that women artists are not as celebrated as their male counterparts. For as long as written history, women — especially Black, Indigenous, and women of color — have been left out of the record. This is also true for gender minorities.

Wikipedia offers an alternative route to access knowledge and history that has traditionally been tied up in institutions or behind paywalls. It has become the first port of call for finding information and is currently the 7th most visited website globally. It offers a place for us to write and right the stories of those who have been marginalised. It offers an empowering opportunity for change. However, it is not without its problems.

As of January 2025, only 18.9% of the content in all Wikimedia projects, including biographies on Wikipedia, is about women. Furthermore, only 15% of Wikimedia contributors are women. Strikingly, editors who are women are also more likely to get their edits reverted.

Taking a feminist approach to making the internet a more equal, collaborative and safe place to be also means amplifying the voices of anyone who has been marginalised from the canon of knowledge. This is where Art+Feminism comes in. Today, the vision of Art+Feminism extends to amplifying the work and stories of artists from gender minorities and indeed all underrepresented groups. This paper will explore the challenges and opportunities that lie in using Wikipedia as an alternative route for digital activism.

'Piecing the Paintings Together – The Search for the Life of Artist Betsy Graves Reyneau'

Francesca Seni Pardo

Betsy Graves Reyneau was much more than a portraitist. This paper weaves together a series of sources from digital collections across the United States, correspondence with journalists, curators, and archivists, and notes tucked away in biographies, to explore Reyneau's personal life as an activist. She was a suffragist, anti-fascist, and civil rights champion—a legacy I argue needs further recognition. Reyneau's name is preserved in popular memory through a series of portraits of notable African Americans she painted, honoring their success in a range of fields including business, science, music, and more. This collection of work sprung from Reyneau's desire to use her artistic skill to challenge white prejudice, and while mass acclaim still surrounds these paintings today, knowledge of the artist behind them is relatively scant. To both explore and recover Reyneau's history, I collected a series of primary sources that spoke to and emerged from Reyneau's history, often relying on outreach to professionals across fields and using broad and copious search terms to turn up results. This paper details those research strategies I employed and the challenges which resulted in a patchwork biography of the life of the woman behind immortalized canvases.

PANEL 5

'The Economic Life of Women in Early Nineteenth Century Bombay'

Sukriti Issar

This talk will explore wealth, consumption and economic practices of women in turn of the nineteenth century Bombay. Social history for this period remains underdeveloped in the

South Asian literature, and my research focuses on developing new methods and sources. Using unexplored data including probate inventories, lists of stolen goods, judicial documents, criminal and civil cases, with a focus on the middling sort – that is, women who appeared to have some economic independence (housekeepers, dancing girls, sailors’ wives, toddy tappers, even enslaved women). Drawing on specific cases, the talk will explore the horizon of possibilities open to women in early colonial Bombay. Examples include a sailor’s wife investing money in property while he was at sea, a ‘slave’ woman countersuing for her freedom, a housekeeper leaving her estate to her sister, and an agriculturist who adopted a child to carry on her business. As little is known about women of the middling sort in this period in South Asia, these cases help to locate women’s agency. The goal is to explore economic strategies and material consumption of women, and open new avenues for social history in the South Asian archive.

‘Feminist Forewords: Documenting Second-Wave Feminist Experiences of Publishing’

Ellen Barth

The introduction to the 1970 feminist classic *Sisterhood is Powerful* begins with editor Robin Morgan declaring that the book was published solely by women. However, a few pages later, Morgan reveals that this is not entirely accurate, writing that actually “neither of [her] editors had any real power in the male-dominated hierarchy of the house.” This behind-the-scenes glimpse into the publishing business is one of many examples of second-wave feminists using the preliminary paratextual space of the introduction or foreword to record and discuss the operations, challenges, interventions, and aesthetics of feminist publishing. The proposed talk will look to a number of such examples from feminist texts, addressing how feminist writers used these marginal spaces to challenge publishing practices and resist informal censorship (Russ 1983). Using primary source materials that are, in many cases, available on library shelves or in bookstores, and are, therefore, more accessible (and possibly more accurate) than publisher’s archives, this method is not only practical but also symbolic: it underscores the vulnerable position of so many feminist writers, even within the production of their own books, with these paratextual traces documenting the struggles of attempting to do feminist work within mainstream publishing.

‘Defying Expectations: South Asian Women in British Print Media’

Nishah Malik

South Asian women have long fought for equal rights and autonomy, challenging both patriarchal cultural norms and colonial narratives that sought to define them. They have struggled with cultural and sexual limitations for generations, not only in South Asia but throughout the diaspora. British Online Archives hosts British periodicals that reported upon Britain’s empire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These periodicals often depicted South Asian women through a lens of subjugation, mentioning that because of their modest dress (purdah) they were suppressed and backwards.

This paper explores the often-overlooked representations of South Asian women in the *Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, and *The Sphere*, highlighting how certain figures defied the dominant colonial narrative that depicted Indian women as passive and oppressed. Scattered throughout these periodicals are articles on women who challenged such stereotypes, particularly those who fought for suffrage, pursued legal careers, and played key roles in India’s independence movement. By analysing the limited coverage of figures such as

Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, Sarojini Naidu, Cornelia Sorabji, and Hansa Mehta, this paper examines how their presence in these publications complicates the narrative of South Asian women solely as victims of oppression and instead highlights their agency, activism, and leadership.

Reconnecting the Women's Work Collection at Imperial War Museum

Sarah Paterson

In 1917 when the Imperial War Museum was established it gathered exhibits and built up a collection through various sub-committees dedicated to different subjects. The Women's Work Sub-Committee sought material relating to the female contribution to the First World War with enthusiasm and tenacity. The collection they created has been of great benefit to researchers and historians over the last century. However, the Museum only had a permanent home from 1936, and museum practices have dispersed the various types of objects to different storage areas according to media, thus losing the integrity of the collection. This paper considers how and why this has happened, the significance of the original collecting activity and resulting collection, how it can be 'reconnected' and why it is important to do this – with some interesting 'hidden' stories along the way.

PANEL 6

'Looking at the Ladies of Llangollen'

Ruth McKew & Carly Davies

Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler escaped societal expectations and moved to Llangollen in 1778 where they lived together for 50 years at Plas Newydd. They were well known and were visited by many celebrities of the time. The museum collection displayed at the house is quite small and has been gathered from donors and via sales and auctions. We have been considering the significance of this collection in terms of understanding the story of the ladies but also in the context of Welsh history. One of the aspects which make this collection significant is the lack of permanent museum displays in museums that tell the story of LGBTQ+ history. We will explore the reasons for this, looking at gaps in collections and stories. We will consider how we can define the changing significance of museum collections and how we articulate the significance of collections where the meaning and value of the objects lies in the connection to people. A new exhibition opens in 2025 that helps visitors explore this story.

'Linking Lesbian Legacies'

Indigo Dunphy-Smith

This paper explores the hidden histories of women connected to queer legacies at The Georgian House, a National Trust for Scotland property in Edinburgh. Through experimental interpretation and close attention to geographical and archival details, the project links four stories to the historic house, illuminating overlooked narratives of lesbian-like relationships. By drawing out traces of desire, intimacy, and unconventional female companionship, the paper engages with the gaps and silences in the historical record, exploring how queer pasts can be creatively reimagined within an immersive context.

The stories of Sappho's enduring influence, the intellectual intimacy between Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter, the documented passion of Anne Lister and Sibella Maclean, and the scandal surrounding Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods serve as key examples. The paper will address how ambiguity, fragmented documentation and silences in the archive can be

overcome through evidence-based speculative methods, research into social networks, and storytelling links through the collection. By reframing the context of the historic house, the paper proposes that heritage sites can become powerful spaces for re-inscribing queer histories, making visible the lives of women whose desires and identities have often been rendered invisible.

[‘Bearded women: some remarkable women’](#)

Norena Shopland

During the Victorian era the ‘freak show’ was at its height, that exhibiting of people considered outside ‘normality’. One staple act was the Bearded Lady, those women who sported extensive facial hair. However, far from being a discovery of the nineteenth century, they have always existed, there have been bearded goddesses and saints; and ‘wonders’ of natures - until society wanted to be seen as homogenous and then bearded women became ‘freaks’ and ‘curiosities’ yard sticks to measure crowd ‘normality’. So successful was the Bearded Lady trade that men imitated them, resulting in intrusive inspections for the women. After the exhibiting of humans came to an end, bearded women still fascinated society but modern depictions were generally comic and often played by men. This humorous horror added to a sense of shame and today hair removal is an enormously lucrative market. For those women who today defy societal fear of women’s facial hair they have been viciously trolled in the press and on social media. Some have decided to embrace their looks and have become celebrities. This talk looks at why women’s facial hair causes so much fear, and the lack of representation in heritage collections.

[‘Unearthing Coded Desires: Lesbian Narratives and Hidden Lives in Archives, Cinema and Poetry’](#)

Twisha Singh

This paper explores the hidden histories of lesbian desire and queer identities within archival materials, focusing on how these stories have been obscured, coded, or neglected in mainstream representations. Drawing on feminist and queer theory, including Judith Butler’s concept of performativity, the presentation examines the ways in which lesbian identities have been embedded in archival objects, literature, and cinema, often in forms that resisted visibility or recognition. Using examples such as the tragic portrayal of lesbian desire in *The Children’s Hour* (1961) and the subtext of female relationships in *All About Eve* (1950), this paper discusses how queer readings of these films reveal the silences and omissions that have shaped our understanding of women’s histories.

The paper further examines the “deviant” sexuality of female performers and how their expressions of lesbian desire and gender fluidity have historically been hidden or misinterpreted. Through an exploration of Urdu Rekhti poetry, an 18th to 19th century form that conveyed female homoeroticism and challenged traditional gender norms, this paper shows how lesbianism and non-normative sexualities were performed through subversive literary and theatrical expressions. By applying Butler’s theory of performativity, the paper investigates how these “hidden” lives, once marginalized, can be reclaimed through queer readings of archives, performance, and literature, and how we might further expand these narratives to uncover untold stories of women who have been silenced in the historical record. This presentation highlights both the difficulties of accessing and interpreting these histories and the innovative approaches necessary to bring them into the light.

Friday 5th September

Online

Welcome and introduction by Professor Sarah Richardson, WHN Chair

Keynote 2:

[‘The Fragility of Feminist Futures in Digital Collections’](#)

TERESA DOHERTY

As we look back 50 years to the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, we search through physical archives or some digitised items to discover the stories of how that milestone was achieved. In 50 years’ time what evidence of feminist activism will survive in what is now a digital landscape? Leaflets replaced by social media, publications by websites, face to face meetings by zoom, whilst correspondence were replaced by email but are now in social media or WhatsApp.

My experience over the past 30 years has witnessed the pivot from paper to digital. Using my lived experience in managing collections I’ll share the challenges and some of the approaches to successfully collecting activist records. I’ll speak about active collecting from across the UK; of the wider digital collecting landscape for formal activist organisations, trade union activism, and charitable bodies; of collecting personal papers in a digital world; and the importance of collaborative working when collecting web archives.

I’ll share some of the dangerous assumptions and technical challenges that are made about digital collecting; and will touch on what this might mean in a world with AI. I’ll share my thoughts on the way in which archivists, librarians and curators become (feminist) activists through the act of collecting, preserving and making accessible our collections.

PANEL 7

[‘“I never could stitch, but always could write”: archival discoveries of parliamentary daughter Anne Rickman \(1807-1898\)’](#)

Chloe Challenger

Researching women’s history often involves piecing together previously unknown lives which have existed deep in the folds of archives and other repositories. This paper uncovers the life of Anne Rickman, whose memoir came to light in 2024 via descendants. Anne provides a rare example of an educated (though non-elite) woman living within the British Parliament in the early decades of the 19th century. This paper explores the challenges of uncovering Anne’s early decades, and what her memoir tells us about key events in Parliament’s history including the Queen Caroline Affair (1820) and the great fire of 1834 – and how a woman’s voice reshapes aspects of parliamentary history. It asks what it means for the hidden stories of women to be discovered and retold. The paper also examines how nostalgia and the march of time affect recollections of early lives. It will consider ways in which gender and sexuality can be treated in women’s histories.

[‘Private collections, public libraries, and occupational pluralism for women workers in the recordkeeping professions, c. 1880-1910.’](#)

Lucy Brownson

Lucy Brownson's paper will trace the shared ontological roots and occupational pluralism of archival and librarianship roles for women working with private collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on her recent doctoral research on women knowledge workers in the library at Chatsworth House and other private libraries of international import, Lucy will interrogate the linkages between knowledge work and other, similarly invisibilised, forms of feminised labour, tracing a throughline to the feminisation of the recordkeeping workforce today.

'Pioneering women archivists in early 20th century England'

Elizabeth Shepherd

Elizabeth Shepherd's paper will explore her new work on the role of women in the development of the modern archival profession. The story of four of the remarkable women who laid the foundations of English local archives in the early 20th century (Ethel Stokes, Lilian Redstone, Catherine Jamison and Joan Wake) seeks to analyse their professional historical work, alongside their educational, social and family contexts. It brings out the hidden voices of women in archival history which has previously been the history of great men, institutional archives, government commissions and professional infrastructure. It also tells the story of women's struggle for independence and education, of the ways in which women established independent cultural, social and family networks and shows how these women used their scholarly skills to earn a living, despite their exclusion from permanent employment and advancement.

'The first women library and archive staff in the UK Parliament, 1945-1960'

Mari Takayanagi

Mari Takayanagi's paper will consider the significance of the earliest women library and archive staff in the UK Parliament. Pressure from politicians for a modern professional reference and research library service led to the employment of the first women in the House of Commons Library immediately after the Second World War, despite concerns over them carrying ladders and undertaking night work. They included statistician Betty Dusart, the first permanent female Library Clerk, and the legendary Roseanne O'Reilly. Meanwhile the House of Lords Record Office, today the Parliamentary Archives, was set up in 1946 with Elisabeth Poyser employed as Assistant Clerk of the Records as early as 1950. Poyser got her opportunity because aspects of archival work were deemed especially suitable for a woman but faced prejudice in the House of Lords including being barred from using the Lords Library.

PANEL 8

"More important than the war!"

Gary Perkins

During the heat of World War Two, on 18 December 1941, the British Government passed legislation making all single women aged between 19 and 31 subject to conscription. Since the authorities determined that none of these women would be required to use a weapon of war but would be employed only in civilian and civil defence duties, it was assumed dissension would be negligible. However, refusal to support the war effort in this manner created a collision course resulting in hundreds of peace-loving women from varying religious, political and philosophical backgrounds being imprisoned over the following four years. One group of women in particular took exception to this form of conscription and stood out in number and in attitude: Jehovah's Witnesses. One need not necessarily agree with them, but why did these women object, how significant a stand did they make and how did they later become marginalised and forgotten? Little understood in British society at the time,

and not much since, is it now possible to ‘cut them some slack’, understand their motivation and see their stand in a different light? What lessons may be learned from their dissent?

‘Sister of No One: The Rediscovery of Anne Baker’

Kayley Porter

My journey into uncovering the lost life of Anne Elizabeth Baker (1786–1861) began during a Heritage Open Day tour of St. Peter’s Church, one of the oldest Norman churches in England. There I first heard how Anne spent eleven years painstakingly scraping away centuries of plaster to reveal the church’s Norman carvings, hidden since the Reformation. Yet inside the church, Anne is reduced to “the sister of George Baker”, her brother, the county historian—a fate familiar to many women whose work is absorbed into male narratives. This discovery inspired my Public History MA dissertation, but recovering Anne’s story exposed archival silences. Her personal archive is lost, and where she appears, it is almost always through her brother’s lens. Even the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* offers her only a brief, secondary entry.

Using imaginative archival research, I traced her *Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases* (1854), uncovering extensive newspaper coverage, including a poem written by John Clare for her work. Beyond her Glossary, Anne was also a natural historian, curating fossil collections acquired by the Natural History Museum, with her expertise influencing William Smith, the ‘Father of English Geology’. This paper reflects on how feminist heritage interpretation can re-centre Anne’s legacy.

‘Nobody Talks about Elizabeth Preston Anderson (1861-1954)’

Nasih Alam

Elizabeth Preston Anderson (1861-1954), former president of North Dakota region’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union, does not gain high traction from rhetoricians, historians, and ordinary Americans because of a few available sources. Despite the apparent limitation, the presenter will analyse rare archival materials comprising her unpublished memoir, *Under Prairie Woods*, conference speeches, membership forms, letters of correspondence, newspaper articles, obituaries, illustrations, magazines such as *The White Ribbon & Western Womanhood* to investigate her life and relationship with others as a mother and political activist in 19th and 20th century America. Therefore, the presenter sheds light on Anderson’s activism in support of the suffragist movement and alcohol prohibition to understand her aspirations to make North Dakota, a state of women’s emancipation, sobriety, and Christianity. She inspired 19th and 20th century American women to address their silences and express their voice through writing and community engagement and participation with her conference speeches. This paper attempts to reinterpret and reassemble Anderson’s life as a mother and activist to begin a conversation about this ordinary/extraordinary woman.

‘Uncovering the Stories of South Presentation Convent’s Sacred Burial Ground’

David Ryan

The burial ground in South Presentation Convent, Cork is the final resting place of generations of Presentation Sisters, Ursulines and a number of other women. The burials date from the late 1700s up to the present day. Aside from Nano Nagle herself and some of the other founding Ursuline and Presentation Sisters, relatively little research had been conducted on the other burials and the lives they led. During an internship in Nano Nagle Place as part of an MA in Public History in Cultural Heritage I began researching some of these burials. Using archival sources such as convent annals, newspaper obituaries and necrologies, this research has

revealed many fascinating stories and some mysteries about those buried in the graveyard and the work they did. Despite the stereotypes of nuns, this research helped shine a light on their role within the local community and internationally. This talk will highlight a brief selection of the stories revealed as a result of this research and what they can tell us about the hidden lives of Irish women.

PANEL 9

‘Historic archives and contemporary society: the Joyce Butler collection at Haringey Archive’

Lyndsey Jenkins and Julie Melrose

This paper examines how women’s archives can be used to champion equality, diversity and inclusion in contemporary society. In this paper, we will discuss how our project, grounded in collaborative working, is helping to further an exciting research agenda, while opening up the archive and collection to new audiences. We will explain our proactive and ambitious engagement efforts, which link Joyce Butler’s political interests—in women’s rights at work, women’s healthcare, consumer rights and peace—to today’s challenges. For example, we are using Butler’s work instigating the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act as a basis for collaborative engagement with schools, young people, and women’s organisations; establishing an oral history project on women at work; and working with the National Health Service’s Cultural Health Campaign as part of a wider effort to engage with hard-to-reach communities to improve public and women’s health. This project reflects our shared belief that, used creatively and boldly, this archive can be used to help foster social inclusion and social justice: as well as helping to develop a richer and more compelling story of women’s activism in the twentieth century.

‘“Responsibility without authority”: Angela Raspin and Churchill Archives Centre’

Sophie Bridges

Angela Raspin (1938-2013) had a long and distinguished career at the London School of Economics, where she was one of a pioneering generation of professional archivists in the major university research libraries. Immediately prior to her appointment in 1975, she worked for a brief period at Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge, a relatively new institution collecting modern personal papers. Its official history has largely been told as a linear narrative highlighting the achievements of male keepers, librarians and fellows of Churchill College. But research using organizational records, private archives and oral histories, suggests a more complicated alternative history. Angela Raspin’s experience brings into focus the gendered hierarchies and dynamics of cultural institutions. It reveals the exclusion of women staff from decisions on collecting, organizational policy and strategy, and yet the reliance on their unacknowledged labour for the day-to-day management of collections and relationships with researchers and depositors of archives. This paper will make connections between the marginalization of women staff, the disregard for women depositors, and the neglect of women’s papers in the archive workplace.

‘Matters of “Public Interest”: Uncovering everyday battles for employment equality in the archives’

Suzanne Jobling

Women’s experiences in the workplace have undergone a seismic shift in the last 50 years in the UK and Republic of Ireland (ROI). Considerable improvements have occurred in the area of gender discrimination, and while issues still exist, few could credibly argue that women should be paid less than men for the same work or be excluded from particular professions. While foundational laws such as the Equal Pay Act 1970 in the UK and the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 in the ROI were significant for changing the employment landscape for women workers, legislation was not the sole influencing factor. Many employers chose to evade the new laws, forcing employees to pursue employment equality cases. These cases tested the legislation’s provisions, bringing equal pay and discrimination to the attention of the wider public. Case documentation provides rich narratives of women’s navigation of power imbalances in working relationships but has, to date, received little scholarly attention. This paper will discuss my experiences of sourcing such material from a number of archives across both the UK and ROI while completing my PhD studies, and will argue that these cases constitute an important primary source of both social history and women workers’ lived experiences.

‘ “What your wisdoms could not discover”: Surfacing women in the Collections at Shakespeare’s Globe’

Philip Milnes-Smith

Finding evidence for past women’s lives is not only hindered by their unequal opportunities in life and the less than meritocratic processes that lead to the deposition of records in archives. Women are also disadvantaged because archive catalogues are often hindrances to discoverability, because the default records creator and user has remained a man. This presentation is about a project to improve discoverability.

With the support of a Research and Innovation grant from The National Archives, four new finding aids have been developed at Shakespeare’s Globe to improve the discoverability of gender (as well as disability, queerness and race). The gender guide not only surfaces women’s roles as creatives and performers in the history of the modern Globe, where there have now been more all-female casts than all-male, but also considers the women in the texts of the plays performed. For Shakespeare, this includes characters named but without spoken lines and ‘ghost characters’ who are mentioned in the text but not embodied. For other plays, the storylines of the chief female characters are introduced. Obviously, women appear in all four guides, and in some cases, ordinary Early Modern women, named or referred to in the plays, are identified.

PANEL 10

The Navy WAVES of WWII

Patricia Chappine

On July 30, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Public Law 689, authorizing the women’s reserve of the U.S. Navy, also known as the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service or the WAVES. The act was designed to release more Navy men for active combat and utilize women in administrative and other specialized tasks on the home front. By the end of the war, over 86,000 women served as WAVES, staffing 900 duty

locations across the United States. This presentation will detail the narratives of the women who served as Navy WAVES during WWII with a specific focus on the many groundbreaking fields they worked in, particularly in science, engineering, and mathematics. These women broke barriers in areas like cryptology, aviation, engineering, and computing, paving the way for fields that evolved into cybersecurity, information technology, and computer science. The contributions of New Jersey women who joined the WAVES during WWII remain an underacknowledged area.

‘Coal Boarder Women: Stories from a Yorkshire Coal Board Estate’

Jessica Field

Post-war coal mining was an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry and male miners’ lives, hardships and fights have been extensively chronicled. Some women worked in the mines and their labours are being increasingly acknowledged. Yet, hundreds of thousands more were integral parts of this distinct community – the wives, daughters, sisters, mothers of miners – making lives in often isolated estates. Coal boarder women have briefly appeared and then disappeared from the public eye depending on how proximate they’ve been to newsworthy events (disasters, strikes, closures) and the men involved. Yet their influence on coal community life and politics has been constant.

This talk shares snippets of daily life on one coal board estate in Leeds since 1952. My parents were tenants on this (now ex-coal) estate for 16 years until they were evicted in 2022, and I came to learn about former tenants’ lives – particularly coal boarders – through research for my book: *Eviction: A Social History of Rent*. I will share my indirect route to coal women through this estate, the invisibility of their lives in coal board housing records (stored in archives, libraries, mining heritage institutions), and the challenges of keeping a spotlight on their lives in coal mining heritage moving forward.

‘Secret Service: Recovering and Rewriting the Institutional Histories of Women in Science’

Luisa Kapp

This paper examines the structural mechanisms through which women’s contributions to scientific institutions have been obscured or omitted from historical narratives, using the Senckenberg Gesellschaft für Naturforschung (a major German natural history institution founded in 1817) as a case study.

Drawing on feminist epistemologies and the concept of “institutional amnesia,” the paper interrogates the gendered dynamics of visibility within archival and museological practices. It argues that cataloguing systems, metadata schemas, and curatorial hierarchies have long produced narratives in which scientific authority is coded masculine.

Drawing on case studies of 19th- and 20th-century women, technicians, illustrators, curators, and scientists, all affiliated with Senckenberg, the paper reflects on the methodological complexities of reconstructing gendered histories from fragmented, misattributed, or silent records. It argues for a shift from recovery to reframing: rethinking what constitutes authorship, labour, and contribution in the institutional life of science.

Telling the stories of these women not only restores individual lives to historical visibility but also challenges the foundations of institutional narratives that have long privileged masculine

authority. By embedding these histories within the fabric of institutional memory, we begin to reshape how scientific legacy is constructed, remembered, and transmitted.

'"Dearest Sister and Aunt": Women in Greek Shipping Archives'

Dimitra Kardakari

Greek shipping was male-dominated in the early 20th century, yet women played crucial but often unrecognised roles within maritime business networks. One such woman was Marigo Kulukundis, a well-known Kassian shipping family member. Born and raised in Kasos, a small Aegean Island with a strong maritime tradition, Marigo was a shareholder in anonymous shipping companies and played a central role in the family's economic and social affairs. Despite her philanthropic contributions in Kasos and Syros, her business involvement was overshadowed by her brothers' activities, rendering her an "invisible entrepreneur" in Greek tramp shipping history.

This paper examines women's roles in Greek shipping businesses through private archives, using the Kulukundis Family Archive as a case study. Housed in the Historical Archive of Syros, it includes 1,500 letters from the late 19th to mid-20th century. Many were addressed to Marigo by family members, merchants, and trade representatives in Port Said, Syros, and beyond, revealing her role as a central communication hub in financial decision-making. By analysing this archive, the paper explores archival silences, gendered biases in cataloguing, and how women's contributions to maritime economic history can be recognised and documented.

PANEL 11

'The Challenges of Researching Fascist Women's Cross-border Exchanges'

Veronica Barry

In October 1941, women from ten states gathered in Berlin to attend the International Women's Meeting which was organised by the Nazi women's leader, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink. The event took place at a time when a Nazi victory in the Second World War (although never conclusive) appeared imminent and a flurry of international events were organised in the name of creating a new Fascist-led European order. The aim of the International Women's Meeting, which was itself rather paradoxical given the conservative regimes they represented, was to discuss women's position in this envisioned new order.

Despite being an example of Nazi cultural diplomacy and far-right women's internationalism in action, this Meeting has been virtually forgotten in the historiography of Nazi Germany and Fascism more generally. This omission can, in part, be attributed to the difficulty in collating material related to the event which is scattered across European archives. Using material from repositories in Spain, Germany and Portugal, this paper seeks to examine the International Women's Meeting and its significance to the study of women and Fascism. In doing so, it seeks to address the broader challenges of researching women's transnational encounters, particularly those which were sponsored by far-right regimes with traditional perceptions of womanhood.

'Uncovering the Monuments Women: Evelyn Tucker and Restitution in Post-war Occupied Austria'

Anne Rothfeld

Evelyn Tucker, a Museum, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFA&A) Representative, worked in U.S. military occupied Austria, investigating and restituting Nazi plundered Austrian-owned cultural property from 1946 to 1949. A firebrand, Tucker carved an ethical path to restitute Austrian cultural property to rightful owners as she encountered corrupt military practices.

Her meticulous and colorful reports and correspondence provide a rich and nuanced story; and personify Tucker's own mixture of an appreciation for the beauty of fine arts, and a healthy dose of realism with a hint of guarded enthusiasm.

Fully conversant on restitution matters as her education and professional abilities meshed well with the complicated and highly specialized work that returning artworks required. Her ideas impacted policies. Her observations were critical of the contradictory decision-making in which government agencies fought for their respective programs and responsibilities, and which obstructed Tucker's restitution cases. She championed the return of Austria's cultural property. Tucker's experiences remain silent, despite passing references in the scant scholarly literature on restitution efforts. Her voice heard mostly through her male supervisors. Tucker presents a fresh perspective on Allied occupation of Austria.

[‘ “We are all Witnesses”: German Jewish Women and Archiving after the Holocaust’](#)

Christine Schmidt

This paper will explore the unique history of The Wiener Library in London and its early efforts to record eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust, beginning in the mid-1950s. This effort was led by a German Jewish refugee scholar, Dr Eva Reichmann, and resulted in over 1200 accounts gathered from Jewish and non-Jewish refugees and survivors in Britain and abroad. Contributors to the project (interviewers, interviewees, and library staff) included many women, but their work to build this collection and to solidify the Library's place as a site of early postwar documentation has been largely under-recognized, in part because they held administrative and other roles perceived as service-oriented and secondary to leadership roles. This talk will center the role of German Jewish women in archives-building and library work after the war and will explore the ways in which their intellectual and cultural backgrounds helped mediate and shape the archive. It will also discuss the challenges of “finding” the women in institutional correspondence and other records about the project. Finally, it will also raise questions about the relationship of archives and libraries to knowledge production, particularly in the field of Holocaust studies.

[‘Historical Silences and Archival Abundance: Uncovering Polish-Swedish Activist, Exile, Refugee, Soldier, and Survivor, Ludwika Broel-Plater’](#)

Victoria Van Orden Martínez

Ludwika Broel-Plater was nearly 60 when she arrived in Sweden in spring 1945 as a liberated prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp. She survived torture by the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied Poland's notorious Pawiak Prison and three-and-a-half years in Ravensbrück. As soon as she was able, she became part of an initiative in Lund, Sweden, to collect documents, evidence, and testimony from other Polish survivors of Nazi persecution in Sweden. She dedicated the rest of her life to this cause, becoming a Swedish citizen in 1957 and working with the Polish Research Institute in Lund (PIZ) until her death in 1972, age 86. Although her contributions to documenting and collecting materiality of the Holocaust and Second World War are known in Sweden, little has been written about her. While her age, gender, and other factors have meant that she has been excluded from dominant (and male-dominated) historiographies of Swedish “rescue and relief” efforts, another reason is that her archive has been hidden in plain sight in the archive of a man. The focus of my paper is on how Broel-Plater's archive defies the historiographical and discursive dismissiveness of survivors in Sweden that have kept it, and her, “hidden” for decades.

PANEL 12

'News from Below Stairs: Magazines and newspapers as a primary source on the Domestic Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1908-1914'

Kate Bugos

This paper will examine the challenges faced in uncovering domestic workers' political lives and attitudes in the Edwardian period while undertaking a study of the Domestic Workers Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1908-1914. While domestic workers accounted for over a fifth of the female workforce in this period, they are often excluded from narratives about the political lives of the working class. Uncovering the voices and political agency of these women is key to understanding construction of class and gender in this period. Due to the relative failure of a mass trade union movement for domestic workers little documentation survives of their attempts, but it is for that very reason that studying these attempts is so important. This research explores the central role that newspapers and magazines played both in the formation of political consciousness for these women and in the historical study of their political lives. Studying suffragette magazines, socialist women's magazines, and woman-focused trade unionist publications sheds light on domestic worker's roles within these movements and relationships to them, both in terms of formal institutional relationships and in the construction of the self as a political subject.

'Faded but not forgotten: Female Friendships during the Women's Suffrage Movement'

Hannah Purtymun

Within the Women in Medicine and the History of Homeopathy collection in the Legacy Center Archives at Drexel University, there are subcollections that pay tribute to the formation of the first women's medical college in the United States, the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. These collections are home to photographs, essays, lectures, founding documents and more that record the lives of the women, and men, who made history by establishing the WMCP. However, also within these collections is a subcollection entitled "In Her Own Rights – Women asserting their civil rights, 1820-1920". This collection houses a series of letters between women at the WMCP who were participating in the women's suffrage and abolitionist movements. These letters provide insight into the inner workings of these movements but also into the friendships between the women who were striving to make history.

'On the trail of Arabella Scott, Scotland's missing suffragette'

Hannah Speed

This paper presents the first detailed study of the autobiography of Scottish suffragette Arabella Scott. Scott was notable in the movement for her commitment to militancy (including attempted arson), and enduring forcible feeding for an uncommonly long duration in Perth Prison.

To my knowledge, no academic research has been published on the finished version of her autobiography, due to the fact that it was privately printed and only two publicly available copies exist worldwide. My presentation will be based on an upcoming research trip to the libraries in Australia which house those copies.

The paper will reveal insights from Scott's autobiography for the first time, considering both her suffrage experiences and broader life narrative (including her activities during the war, and her time in South Africa and Australia, of which little is currently known). It will then use my experience of tracking down Scott's text to illuminate wider questions about how

suffragists/gettes chose to preserve their memories, and the dispersed nature of those archives, particularly for Scottish, regional or lesser-known campaigners. I will consider how these accessibility challenges might be overcome (for example through digital humanities approaches) to enrich the field beyond a reliance on the most well-known published sources.

‘Luck, Persistence and Archival Relationships’

Helen Kay

Based on personal experience, Helen will talk about four aspects of archival research that she encountered in her work to uncover the work of Chrystal Macmillan (1872-1937):

1. Initial inspiration which nearly failed,
2. Relationships with family descendants,
3. Research work at the Women’s Library in London,
4. Assistance from previous writers,
5. Accessing foreign deposits.

Lucky breakthroughs seem to occur after a lot of work, but much reaches a dead end. What seems promising initially can suck up energy without providing much information – but some small piece of information can give a clue that leads to positive progress.

Chrystal Macmillan escaped from the social demands of polite Edinburgh society and used her privileged background to work throughout her life for equal rights for women. Where she found that the law discriminated against women, she worked and lobbied to have the law amended, nationally and internationally. Although her early work for woman suffrage was celebrated in the British press following her appearance in the House of Lords in 1908, her story became hidden from historical study.

This talk will describe some of the research which uncovered her remarkable life and work.

About our speakers

Keynote speakers

Mary Thorley was born and brought up in Carmarthen. After studying for a degree in History and Politics at Swansea University she became a primary school head teacher in Gloucestershire and, later, in her hometown. She was also Head of Teacher Training at the University of Wales Trinity St. Davids for a number of years and is now retired. She has a MA and a PhD in Welsh History. The title of her doctoral thesis was ‘The Naming of Women. The Lives of the Middle Class Women of Carmarthen 1850-1918’. She has been a member of the Women’s Archive of Wales for a number of years and Chair for the past two years. She is currently writing a biography of Rachel Barrett, a leading suffragette and deputy editor of ‘The Suffragette’ magazine. Her hobbies are cricket, rugby, all sport, reading and being a subversive influence on her granddaughter. She was awarded an OBE for her services to education in 2000.

Teresa Doherty is Head of Archives and Records Management, Royal College of Nursing, Professional Lead for the History of Nursing.

She has managed archive, library and museum collections and their teams for over thirty years - over twenty of those years in women’s activist collections. During this time, she has pursued

the holy grail of digital collecting, understanding digital fragility and the lack of resources available for digital preservation of mainstream let alone feminist activist archives.

Panellists

Julia Hamilton - Before earning a PhD, Julia Hamilton spent ten years in the heritage sector at National Trust's Ham House and at Windsor Castle for the Royal Collection Trust developing and delivering interpretation and Adult Learning programming on architecture and display. She witnessed first-hand how a visitor's engagement increased after having a greater understanding of the functionality of space and hearing stories about people and objects. She has lectured on privacy and the evolution of the Stuart Withdrawing Room for the Royal Studies Network. She is an Associate Fellow of the Royal History Society and a member of the Furniture Society.

Leah Warriner-Wood is a Senior Lecturer within the School of Humanities and Heritage at the University of Lincoln, where she specialises in the fields of Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Material Culture Studies. Her research unites these disciplines, positioning conservation practice as a unique lens through which to interpret the material culture of historic decorative interiors. In her recently completed doctoral thesis, Leah explored the role of tapestry within landowner John Hussey Delaval's eighteenth-century interiors at Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire, highlighting the material as an active agent for the construction and expression of an elite masculine cultural identity.

Helen Antrobus is part of the National Curator team at the National Trust, specializing in cultural heritage and landscapes. Her research interests include social activism and access to rural landscapes, and the lives of female conservationists between 1900 and 1945.

In 2022, she co-curated Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature at the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 2018, she curated Represent: Voices 100 Years on at the People's History Museum. Her first book, *First in the Fight: Women Who Made Manchester* was published in 2019. *100 Things to Wear: Fashion from the Collections of the National Trust*, co-authored with Emma Slocombe, will be published in September 2025.

Emily Deal is a PhD researcher at the University of East Anglia, working in collaboration with the National Trust and Historic Royal Palaces. Her research centres on early modern women's intellectual and cultural history, with a focus on material culture and collection, a co-founder of the Women's Early Modern Material and Ephemeral Worlds (WEMMEW) PGECR Network. Emily's doctoral project explores the collections of Mary Lepell, Lady Hervey, primarily held at Ickworth, Suffolk. Prior to her PhD, Emily was a Digital Curator and Collections Officer with the National Trust, finding new ways to tell varied and marginalised stories from our places.

Arlene Leis is an independent art historian. Her research interests include women and cultures of collecting, print and exhibition culture, intersections between art and science, transcultural exchanges, fashion and dress, and travel. She has published numerous articles, book chapters, and reviews. She co-edited the volume *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (2020) and edited *Women, Collecting and Cultures Beyond Europe* (2022). Leis has received grants and fellowships from institutions such as the Paul Mellon Centre, The Society of Antiquarians (London), Association for Art History, European University Institute, and the American Philosophical Society.

Jon Breton is a cultural consultant and founder of Eagle & Oak. He has held senior roles in museums, historic houses, and landscapes across the UK and works with organisations to bring neglected stories and places to life. He is currently transcribing and researching the diaries of Anne Rushout (1767–1849), inherited from his mother, and is exploring how they reveal a life both visible and silent. Jon is also a Trustee and Chair of the Commercial Committee at the Museum of the Home in London.

Clara Woolford is Property Curator at Cragside in Northumberland, responsible for the care and presentation of its house and gardens. She is leading the creation of a revised interpretation plan, seeking to share more nuanced and diverse stories about Cragside's creation.

Amy Craig is a third-year PhD student at the University of Cambridge. Her thesis explores the embodied significance of small-scale material culture in eighteenth-century England. Her research for this paper was conducted as part of an OOCDDTP-supported placement in collaboration with the National Trust.

Philippa Tudor has a doctorate in history and is a volunteer cataloguer at Lambeth Palace Library. She researches previously unexplored aspects of the music of Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Publications include a biography of *Mrs Gustav Holst: An Equal Partner?* (2022), articles in the *Musical Times*, *Brio* and *BBC Music Magazine*. She is co-curator of the current exhibition at Holst Victorian House Cheltenham about the collaboration between Gustav Holst and music publisher and patron Louise Dyer.

J. E. Smyth is a historian, critic, and the author of the acclaimed *Mary C. McCall Jr.: The Rise and Fall of Hollywood's Most Powerful Screenwriter* (2024) and numerous other books about film, media, and women's history. Her work has been supported by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and she is a regular contributor to *The Times Literary Supplement*. She is Professor of History at the University of Warwick.

Kirsty Roberts is a PhD candidate at the University of Central Lancashire with over a decade of experience in the heritage sector. Her work spans curatorial practice, engagement, and exhibition development, including contributions to award-winning projects. She is currently leading the development of two exhibitions exploring the lives and legacies of Black performers in Morecambe from 1850 to 1950.

Christina Guillaumier is Reader in Music & Cultural Practice at the Royal College of Music, London. She is a multilingual musicologist, historian and pianist. She holds fellowships with the Royal Society of Arts and the Higher Education Academy and contributes as a peer reviewer for several academic journals and presses. Additionally, she serves as an editor for Bärenreiter Editions. Her current research delves into the intersections of music, history, politics, and cultural practice, with a particular emphasis on the role of women in music.

Melissa Alexander is a PhD candidate in Art History and Visual Culture at York University, where her research is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Her specialization in early-twentieth-century Canadian art has focused on recovering the careers and oeuvres of underrepresented women artists. In 2024, she was awarded the W. David Hargraft Fellowship in Canadian Art at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Prior

to this, she served as curator at the North Lanark Regional Museum and has previous experience at the Ottawa Art Gallery and the Varley Art Gallery.

Emma Curtin is a senior lecturer at the Liverpool School of Architecture (LSA), currently on scholarship leave exploring the lives and careers of women who studied at the LSA in the early 20th century. She has organised events such as “Celebrating Decades of Women at the LSA” (2019), her research activities have highlighted early women graduates, and lead to new donations of female alumni’s papers to the University’s Archive. Collaborating with colleagues she is part of a wider project considering intersectional and transnational histories of the LSA. Previously, she worked as an architect at several practices in Northwest England.

Sophie Fitzpatrick joined Wikimedia Community Ireland as Projects and Communications Manager in August 2023. She oversees the running of the community and organises various educational projects, collaborations, outreach and events. She runs educational programs in universities across Ireland and is involved in the WikiWomen Erasmus+ Project and, more recently, Full Stack Feminism. She holds an LLM in International Human Rights law, and she is passionate about intersectional feminist approaches to knowledge sharing and access to information.

Francesca Seni Pardo is a recent graduate from NYU’s MA History program. She currently works in education at both the Museum of the City of New York and the New York Historical. She is a coffee addict and book lover.

Sukriti Issar is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Sciences Po, Paris. Her research focuses on the history of property and urban life with a focus on the city of Mumbai.

Ellen Barth is postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of Book Studies, University of Münster, Germany. Her doctoral dissertation (under contract with University of Georgia Press) looked at women’s production of community cookbooks in the second half of the twentieth century. Her work is located in the field of women’s book history, and she has published research on feminist craftivism, menstrual activism, and women’s self-publishing of online fanfiction.

Nishah Malik is Editor at British Online Archives, a leading academic publishers based in the UK. Nishah gained a Masters in History in 2020. Her research interests centre around South Asian culture and heritage, as well as the history and experiences of the South Asian diaspora. She also has a keen interest in women's history.

Sarah Paterson has worked at the Imperial War Museum since 1988, initially as a Librarian in the Department of Printed Books, where she developed an expertise in military genealogy. She is currently a Senior Curator in the First World War and early Twentieth Century Team, and has specialized knowledge of the Women’s Work Collection.

Ruth McKew is Director of Headland Design and works as a heritage consultant for museums and heritage sites across the UK. Ruth worked as a curator before moving into consultancy work. She worked in Malawi and published a paper about audience development work in Malawi for a science exhibition. Headland’s work is varied and includes exhibition design and fit out as well as consultancy work for museums across Wales to understand the significance of their collections. She delivers regular training and mentoring for museum professionals.

Ruth will be joined by Denbighshire Curator Carly Davies who is responsible for the collections.

Carly Davies is Lead Officer for Heritage and Museums at Denbighshire County Council, following six years as Curator. For more than three decades, she has worked to make heritage meaningful, shaping the way people connect with history through interpretation and storytelling. Carly is currently driving forward major capital projects and is passionate about creating sustainable heritage spaces that bring history to life for all audiences.

Indigo Dunphy-Smith (she/her)

Indigo (she/her) is a researcher and writer based in Edinburgh, with a focus on queer storytelling through museum collections. From castles to convict barracks, she has over eight years of experience working in the heritage sector across Australia and Scotland. She specialises in research and public programmes that create space for marginalised stories in traditional settings. Indigo recently launched a toolkit for heritage professionals seeking to uncover queer stories in historic houses, which can be found on her website, *A Queer Was Here*. She has also appeared on the podcast *Bad Gays*. She currently splits her time between working for the National Trust for Scotland—where she co-chairs their LGBTQ+ network—and freelancing, supporting organisations in queering their heritage spaces and collections.

Norena Shopland is an author/historian, specialising in the researching and writing of diversity, and Welsh history. Her works include *Forbidden Lives: LGBT Stories from Wales* the first work on Welsh sexual orientation and gender identity history and *Women in Welsh Coal Mining: Tip Girls at Work in a Men's World*. She devised a methodology for researching hard to find people in *A Practical Guide to Searching LGBTQIA Historical Records*. Norena was awarded an honorary degree from the Open University for raising awareness of diversity in Wales, and she writes a monthly history column for the online news service Nation Cymru.

Twisha Singh is a lecturer at the Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at McGill University and a part-time faculty member at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia University. Her research focuses on gender, women's history, and feminist theory, with a particular emphasis on queer histories and South Asian feminist thought. Dr. Singh's academic work critically explores the intersections of gender, sexuality, and power, and she is dedicated to teaching courses that engage with these themes. In addition to her academic role, she is actively involved in community-based mentorship programs for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, striving to connect academic insights with transformative, real-world engagement.

Chloe Challender is a third-year doctoral candidate at Warwick working on an AHRC-funded collaborative project with the Parliamentary Archives that examines Parliament's history of gender and sexuality in the long 19th century. Her work has a particular focus on women's and contested sexualities including same-sex relationships. She undertakes her research part-time alongside working as an official at the House of Commons in the Select Committee and Chamber Participation teams.

Lucy Brownson is an archivist, educator, and feminist cultural organiser. A lecturer in archival practices within UCL's Department of Information Studies, she is broadly interested in queer, feminist, and grassroots approaches to history-making and community-building. Awarded by the University of Sheffield in 2024, Lucy's PhD offered a social history of archival practices at the intersection of gender and class in that most patriarchal of institutions: the British country

house. Lucy is also a long-time organiser of Sheffield Feminist Archive, a community archive documenting the Steel City's feminist past and present for all.

Elizabeth Shepherd (UCL, Department of Information Studies) researches information policy compliance and rights in records, and the history of the archive profession in England. She has a particular interest in surfacing hidden voices whether those of care experienced adults who want to access, read and write into the records created and kept by their 'corporate parents' (MIRRA project) or the voices of pioneering women archivists in the early 20th century. Among her publications are *Archives and Archivists in 20th Century England* (Ashgate, 2009) and the forthcoming monograph, *Pioneering Women Archivists in early 20th England* (Routledge, 2026).

Mari Takayanagi is Senior Archivist at the UK Parliamentary Archives and an historian of women and Parliament from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries. Her research interests include legislation affecting women's lives and gender equality, early women MPs, and women staff in the House of Commons and House of Lords. Her book, *Necessary Women: The Untold Story of Parliament's Working Women*, co-authored with Elizabeth Hallam Smith, was published in 2023 by The History Press.

Gary Perkins - Coming from a background in Training and Development, I hold an ongoing interest in my faith as a Jehovah's Witness, conflict management, holocaust remembrance and the history of the peace movement in Britain and elsewhere. I researched the subject of Bible Student conscientious objectors for 15 years before publishing the book 'Bible Student Conscientious Objectors in World War One - Britain'.

Kayley Porter - I'm a neurodiverse public historian with an MA in Public History from the University of Derby, where I specialized in feminist heritage interpretation and the recovery of overlooked voices. My work focuses on using creative methods to lift hidden women's stories from the archives, finding imaginative ways to connect local history, community storytelling, and creative interpretation. I've shared my research at conferences like Interpret Europe and the University of York, and I'm currently working with the Friends of St. Peter's, Northampton to re-centre Anne Baker's voice within the church's interpretation.

Nasih Alam is a first-year PhD student in the department of History (Emphasis in North American History), North Dakota State University (NDSU). He completed his MA in English at NDSU in May 2024. From August 2022 to May 2024, he taught first-year writing in the Department of English at NDSU. In March 2024, NDSU recognized him as an 'Innovative Teacher.' While completing his MA in English, he gave 7 conference talks and published 2 peer reviewed articles, 1 nonrefereed article, 1 blog and 2 book reviews in America.

David Ryan is a genealogist and historical researcher based in Cork, Ireland. He has worked as a professional genealogist for the past decade and is a member of the steering committee for the Oral History Network of Ireland. He recently completed an MA in Public History and Cultural Heritage with the University of Limerick.

Lyndsey Jenkins is a historian of women, politics and activism. She is an associate professor and tutorial fellow at Mansfield College, Oxford. Her published work examines women's activism in the suffrage campaign, and more recently, women in the post-war Labour Party, and her latest publications can be found in the *Historical Journal* and *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*. She is a co-editor of *Women, Power and Politics in Britain, 1945-1997*,

forthcoming with OUP later this year. She is currently working on an AHRC funded project entitled 'The National Woman's MP?' Joyce Butler, women's rights and women's liberation from the 1950s to the 1970s'.

Julie Melrose is responsible for the management, development and engagement of the London Borough of Haringey's Archive and Special Collections. She has been working for London Local Authority Archive Services for over 15 years. She is a Board Member of the London Archives Partnership and has extensive experience in leading on cooperative, community-lead archive and heritage projects. She is particularly interested in the role archives have in issues around social justice and self-determinism, and in giving marginalised communities the opportunity to represent themselves through the preservation of their cultural heritage and lived experiences.

Sophie Bridges is an archivist at Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge where she specializes in twentieth century personal papers. She has worked previously at the Historical Manuscripts Commission and the Guildhall Library in London. She is particularly interested in diaries, women's writing, and the history of collecting private archives.

Suzanne Jobling is an independent researcher who recently graduated with a PhD in history from Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests are inspired by her previous career in IT and include women's experiences of employment, employment equality legislation and equal pay and sex discrimination cases taken by women workers in the Republic of Ireland and UK, between 1970 and the early 1990s. Her first article was published by *Irish Economic and Social History* in 2023. She has recently convened her first module in Irish women's history at QUB and is currently working as a part-time lecturer and teaching assistant.

Philip Milnes-Smith works as the digital archivist at Shakespeare's Globe, where he where he has been leading archive work in inclusive practice. He also volunteers for the Archives and Records Association as co-training officer for the Archives for Learning and Education Section, and as one of the ARA's Diversity and Inclusion Allies. He contributed to the development of the Women at the Heart of General Practice exhibition at the Royal College of General Practitioners. With the help of a Research and Innovation Grant from The National Archives he has developed four new finding aids to the Globe's collections.

Patty Chappine is an adjunct professor at Stockton University where she has been teaching since 2014. Her classes include undergraduate courses in historical studies, general studies, and the American Studies graduate program. She also works for the Alliance Heritage Center at Stockton University. She earned a B.A. in Sociology and an M.A. in Holocaust and Genocide Studies from Stockton University and an M.A. and a Ph.D. in History and Culture from Drew University in Madison, NJ. Her recent book *New Jersey Women during World War II: On the Home Front and Abroad* was published by Lexington Books in 2024.

Jessica Field - I am a social historian and activist writer exploring displacement, social marginalisation, and resistance in various forms. I have a history PhD from the University of Manchester and have taught history and humanitarian studies at UCL, Brunel, and O.P. Jindal Global University in India. In 2022, I won the Dawn Foster Memorial Essay Prize for my article 'Fighting for Cardboard City', published in *Red Pepper* magazine. My first book, *Eviction: A Social History of Rent*, will be published in September 2025.

Luisa Kapp is a postdoctoral researcher at the Goethe University Frankfurt, currently working on the BMBF project “Secret Service: Women. Research. Senckenberg”, uncovering the forgotten or overshadowed roles of women in the natural sciences. She completed her DPhil at the University of Oxford with an interdisciplinary dissertation on Victorian etiquette and social norms, combining historical, sociological and literary approaches. Her work explores intersections of gender, culture, and knowledge production in the long nineteenth century.

Dimitra Kardakari is a researcher at the Centre for Maritime History, Institute for Mediterranean Studies. Her work focuses on Greek shipping networks in the early 20th century, particularly in business archives and gender history. She specialises in uncovering women’s roles in maritime enterprises through archival research. She is currently working on the MareChronStat project, which examines the digitisation of Greek tramp shipping records from 1931–39, aiming to create an accessible maritime statistical database. Her research explores how private and business archives can reveal overlooked contributions of women in shipping and economic history.

Veronica Barry is an Assistant Professor of Modern European History at Dublin City University. Her research examines the interwar and Second World War periods, with a particular focus on the topics of women’s transnational networks and fascism. In 2024, she completed her PhD which examined Nazi propaganda directed at women of key neutral states.

Anne Rothfeld, an independent scholar of European history, is an archivist and historian in the U.S. Federal Government and earned her doctorate from American University. Her scholarly interests include the collaborative roles of art dealers, collecting histories of stolen artworks, and restitution efforts in the Allied occupation zones. She’s a recipient of a 2023-2024 Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies research grant, and 2024 U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Research Fellowship.

Christine Schmidt (<https://christineeschmidt.com>) is Deputy Director and Head of Research at The Wiener Holocaust Library. Her research has focused on the history of postwar tracing and documentation efforts, the concentration camp system in Nazi Germany, comparative studies of collaboration and resistance in France and Hungary, and the collection of survivor accounts recorded by The Wiener Library. Schmidt is co-editing *Letters and the Holocaust: Methodology, Cases, and Reflections* (Bloomsbury, 2025) and *Older Jews and the Holocaust* (Wayne State UP, 2026).

Victoria Van Orden Martínez is a Researcher in the Department of History at Lund University in Sweden, where she is affiliated with the North European Center for Research about Antisemitism and the Holocaust at Lund University (NORAH). Originally from the USA, she holds her PhD in History from Linköping University in Sweden. Her research interests include forced migrants in history, women’s and gender history, intersections of gender and other differences in relation to forced migration, survivors of Nazi persecution in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Holocaust, and the histories of knowledge and medicine. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4491-5520>

Kate Bugos is an independent researcher based in London, England. After nearly two years working in communications at The National Archives, in 2023 she left the archive sector to

undertake an MA in Modern History at King's College London. Her research focuses on women in the early socialist movement in Britain.

Hannah Purtymun, MSc, MLIS, is a Discovery Librarian at Drexel University Libraries and a historian with an interest in book history, medieval religion, and the digital humanities.

Hannah Speed is in the third year of a part-time PhD at the University of Glasgow, researching 'Women's life-writing and the suffrage campaign in Scotland c.1890s-1990s'. Her main research interests lie in women's activism in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has published on Mary Crudelius, one of the founders of the Edinburgh movement for women's higher education, in Scottish Archives. Hannah is a member of the Women's History Scotland Steering Committee.

Helen Kay spent several years researching and giving presentations on the work and life of Chrystal Macmillan. In 2014, the work was put on hold when Helen became the coordinator of an International History Working Group, preparing material for centenary exhibitions on the history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 2024 she co-authored (Edinburgh University Press) with Rose Pipes.