

Footprints in the butter: finding the elephant in the archive

In 2008, the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters hosted a postgraduate conference showcasing some of the most interesting and exciting work being produced by emerging scholars. Entitled 'Footprints in the Butter: Looking for the Elephant in the Archives', the focus of the conference was to celebrate and examine archival research. We could not have predicted how rich and varied the response would be. The articles collected here grow out of the papers presented at the conference.

In his *How do you know if John Donne has been in your archive?* Daniel Starza Smith charts his journey of his search for the manuscript poetry of John Donne. Taking the collection of the Conway Papers as a case-study, Smith resists the urge to 'tidy' the archive conceptually, instead using a contextual approach that takes into account the social conditions and circumstances surrounding Sir Edward Conway's life, and how papers relating to Donne came to be in the archive.

In his *The spy who loved me? Familiar letters from Nicholas Faunt to Anthony Bacon*, Will Tosh explores the one-sided correspondence between Faunt and Bacon, two figures deeply embedded in the intelligencing fraternity. Against the political backdrop of the Earl of Essex's secretariat and the Signet Office, and flanking the sensitive information they shared, Tosh uncovers a current of sentiment which transcends the conventional homosocial bond based on humanist ideas of friendship.

In her *A letter of travel advice? Literary rhetoric, scholarly counsel and practical instruction in the ars apodemica*, Elizabeth Williamson assesses the critical and archival legacy of the letter of travel advice that circulated in manuscript and print in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She offers a new critique of the letter - which has been stoutly ascribed to various correspondents in ongoing scholarly debate - examining in detail the practical uses such a literary form might have, and how the provenance of the surviving witnesses might further contribute to an understanding of how the text operated.

Lucy Harington Russell, subject of Ariel Franklin-Hudson's *"I haue written to the Queene": the countess of Bedford's performance of power*, has long been celebrated as a patron of the arts. Franklin-Hudson's achievement in focusing on her correspondence with Sir Dudley Carleton is to capture the countess as a well-practiced political agent. The article is also a counsel for the archival scholar not to

despair at the gaps in the record, the missing letters, the lost papers, for it is within these lacunae that we find space for our own, more academic, performance.

Daisy Hildyard's *John Ray, Martin Lister and taxonomic publication, 1675-91* employs the friendly correspondence between these two early scientists to demonstrate how taxonomies were developed, augmented, and redeveloped, but unfinished nonetheless. Hildyard builds upon a remarkable contextualisation of the letters with the gifts of printed volumes that accompanied the exchanges and the friendship. It succeeds in reminding us of the power of curiosity and curiosities within archival studies.

In '*Upon reading over the whole of this letter I am sensibly struck*': *affectionate networks and schemes for dissenting academies*, Tessa Whitehouse concludes this special edition with an intricate discussion of the role that correspondence played in the establishment of the eighteenth-century's most distinctive educational institution, the dissenting academy. Whitehouse's exciting research stands out not only on its own virtues, but as a promise of more to come, with the launch of the exciting resources made available on the internet by the Dr Williams's Centre for Dissenting Studies Dissenting Academies Project.

These articles demonstrate how archival research can still furnish us with materials for new and dynamic readings of the past. The contributors share a methodology rooted in scrupulous research techniques and a close attention to theoretical trends, but each offers a fresh and individual approach to the material they employ. What we find particularly exciting about the work of these scholars is their ability, using techniques that are too often associated with the dry-as-dust scholarship of another age, to animate a body of manuscript material, and in doing so creating new space for intellectual manoeuvres. As the work of these scholars testifies, one can still find an elephant in the archive.

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