

<b>Institution: University of Derby</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34</b>		
<b>Title of case study: The Midlands Enlightenment: informing collection, curation and public engagement</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2009–2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Ruth Larsen	Senior Lecturer in History	2006–present
Professor Paul Elliott	Professor of Modern History	2008–present
Dr Cath Feely	Senior Lecturer in History	2014–present
Dr Paul Whickman	Senior Lecturer in English	2014–present
Dr Erin Lafford	Postdoctoral Research Fellow in English	2018–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017–2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p><b>This case study considers the impact of the team's research in the history, culture and legacies of the 'long' eighteenth-century 'Enlightenment'. This interdisciplinary work has achieved three key impacts:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Informed the curation, preservation and management of 'long' eighteenth-century (1688-1832) collections in museums, archives and other sites of historical importance.</li> <li>2. Made use of these collections and holdings to increase public awareness of, and critical engagement with, Enlightenment ideas (concerning, for example, philosophy, politics, literary and material cultures, science and medicine).</li> <li>3. Increased critical public understanding of the significance of the British Midlands within the global historical Enlightenment.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In drawing on interdisciplinary work undertaken by members of the 'Long Eighteenth Century' research group under the remit of the school's Identity, Culture and Representation (ICR) research cluster, this case study details the resulting impact of the team's research on the curation and collection practices of local organisations. These include museums, archives and other places of historic importance. These organisations have, in turn, made use of the team's expertise in the long eighteenth-century Enlightenment to improve public access and engagement.</p> <p>The work of Larsen (2006-), Elliott (2008-), Whickman (2014-) and Lafford (2018-) on the Enlightenment period and its legacies has consistently served to emphasise the important role of the Midlands, and Derbyshire in particular, to the broader historical Enlightenment project. This is evident, for instance, in Elliott's work on <i>The Derby Philosophers</i> [3.1]. In his focus on local Derby and Midlands-based intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – including Erasmus Darwin and industrialists such as the Wedgwoods and the Strutts – Elliott demonstrates their profound influence on social, political and urban developments both nationally and internationally. While Elliott argues for the significance of these thinkers' scientific and educational views behind advances such as the Derby Arboretum and the Derbyshire General Infirmary, this is importantly contextualised within a broader intellectual history of both national and international significance that is far from parochial. This approach also informs Elliott's later <i>Enlightenment, Modernity and Science</i> [3.2]. In analysing the cultural and historical geographies of Enlightenment science, Elliott uses methods drawn from cultural and historical geography, urban history, history of science and education. He considers how the creation, dissemination, reception and uses of scientific knowledges and practices varied by geographical location. This reveals the complex, heterogeneous and hybrid geographies of the English scientific cultural experience in the long eighteenth century. Through geographically and thematically defined case studies, Elliott interrogates interconnections between the sciences, politics and culture during the period of Enlightenment industrialisation, emphasising connections between the local and the global.</p>		

Larsen's work similarly considers the significance of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Derbyshire and the Midlands within a broader context. Not only is her original research partly based on findings from the extensive archive of Derbyshire's Chatsworth House [3.5], Larsen focuses on several of Chatsworth's famous historical residents, including Georgiana Cavendish, later sixth countess of Carlisle [3.4, 3.5]. Like Elliott, Larsen emphasises the importance of interconnected networks. In her focus on elite country house families and material cultures, Larsen highlights the important role played by letter writing in shaping and sustaining networks of women. She demonstrates how vital women were to the dynastic success of families, enabling the continuation of family pedigree whilst, as wives and sisters, they played important roles as their husband and brother's allies in running the household, estate, and sustaining political interests. Her archaeological analysis of letter writing is original and shows how the very physicality of letters encapsulates the full range of meanings to senders and recipients, as well as their part in sustaining elite networks and role in the construction of self.

The nature of Larsen's work with long eighteenth-century cultures of writing attests to the broader transdisciplinarity of the team's underpinning research. This is evident in Lafford's work concerning literary responses to the technological and scientific advances of the Enlightenment period, serving to broaden the more historical and geographical approaches of Elliott and Larsen. With reference to the history of balloon launches, Lafford's original research on the hymnodist and poet William Cowper's ambivalent response to the 'balloonomania' of the late eighteenth century reveals how hot air balloon launches inspired reflections on poetry in relation to 'flight and aerial invention' [3.3]. Lafford's focus on Cowper's interest in social and scientific culture in his poetry and poetics is analogous to the team's own interdisciplinary responses to the Enlightenment period and its legacies. Like Lafford, Whickman's research is concerned with literature and poetry more specifically. His *Blasphemy and Politics in Romantic Literature* [3.6] not only shows the significant legacy of Enlightenment-inspired philosophical scepticism in influencing the poetry, philosophy and politics of the Romantic-period poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, it also offers an original contribution to the study of censorship and religious attitudes throughout the long eighteenth century. In addition, Whickman's monograph is particularly attuned to the political radicalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and its manifestation within literary texts.

Feely's (2014-) expertise in Public History and Heritage informed the ultimately successful Being Human Festival 2020 hub funding application where she was the lead applicant.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### 3.1 Elliott, P., (2009) *The Derby Philosophers: Science and Culture in British Urban Society, 1700-1850*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Peer-reviewed monograph of c.100,000 words with a leading university press. The book offers an original approach to the Midlands Enlightenment in the broader context of the historical Enlightenment project. The book was well-received, with one reviewer commenting that the author is, "adept at situating the Derby intelligentsia and their ameliorative schemes in the wider European context" (*Economic History Review*, 63, 2010).

#### 3.2 Elliott, P., (2010) *Enlightenment, Modernity and Science: Geographies of Scientific Culture and Improvement in Georgian England*. London: Bloomsbury/I. B Tauris.

Peer-reviewed monograph of c.100,000 words with a leading academic publisher. This is the first full length study of the geographies of Georgian scientific culture in England, with one reviewer favourably contrasting the book with others that, "do not adequately capture the richness of the scientific enterprise and its consumption" (*British Journal for the History of Science*, 2011).

#### 3.3 Lafford, E., (2018) "'But now we float': Cowper, Air-Balloons, and the Poetics of Flight", *The Cowper and Newton Journal*, 8, pp.1-22.

Peer-reviewed article of c.7,000 words in a leading specialist journal. This original article uncovers how William Cowper's interest in the developments in air-balloons and the prospect of aerial travel in the 1780s shaped his representation of poetic imagination, and so makes a case for this famously 'introverted' poet's fruitful connections with social and scientific aerial culture.

**3.4 Larsen, R., (2018) 'Sisterly guidance: elite women, sorority and the life cycle, 1770–1860', in Doolan, O'Riordan and Ridgway (eds.) *Women in the Country House in Ireland and Britain*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, pp. 157-169.**

An essay in a peer-reviewed collection with one of Ireland's leading academic publishers. Written for a wider public audience, this essay draws on original archival research in order to explore the largely ignored power dimension of elite sisterhood.

**3.5 Larsen, R., (2020) 'An Archaeology of Letter Writing: the correspondence of aristocratic women in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England' in Archer, C. and Dick, M. (eds.) *Pen, print & communication in the eighteenth century*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 75-88.**

Part of a peer-reviewed collection of essays with a leading university press, this chapter utilises a transdisciplinary approach to letter writing to engage critically both with letters as physical objects, as well as their contents, in order to examine discourses of power and display.

**3.6 Whickman, P., (2020) *Blasphemy and Politics in Romantic Literature: Creativity in the Writing of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.**

A peer-reviewed critical monograph of c.80,000 words with a major academic publisher. This was subject to two stages of reader review that determined it was, "*originally researched, and present[ed] a fresh approach to the poetry and politics of Percy Bysshe Shelley*". A major thread uncovers the intersection of blasphemy, censorship and literary property throughout the 'Long' Eighteenth Century as well as the legacy of Enlightenment thought in the Romantic period.

#### **Funding received**

GBP1,000 School of Advanced Study, University of London, Being Human festival events, 2019.  
GBP5,000 School of Advanced Study, University of London, Being Human festival hub, 2020.

#### **4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**

Pathways to impacts have included publications, lectures, workshops, conferences, exhibitions, podcasts, guided walks and re-enactments. Collaboration with organisations such as the Derby Local Studies and Family History Library (DLSL), Derby Museum and Art Gallery (DMAG), Calke Abbey, Derbyshire (CA) and Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield (EDH) has been central to these activities. This was supported by the Being Human Festival, based in the School of Advanced Study, University of London. Previous successful academic collaborations with these organisations inspired the activities upon which this impact case study is based. In 2017 for instance, an academic conference with the John Thelwall Society hosted by the university (between 21 and 23 July 2017) included a small public exhibition at the DLSL, showcasing some of the library's major holdings. This included the display of the so-called 'Derby Manuscript' of the elocutionist, radical orator and poet John Thelwall (1764-1834). Most significantly, for another public event held alongside the same conference, eighteenth-century manuscript and archive material from DLSL was written into a script and 're-enacted' in a dramatic performance by professional actors at a well-attended event (22 July 2017). As the DLSL testimonial [5.1] indicates, these 2017 events showed how the team could, "*help elevate the library collections and the engagement work*" of the DLSL by "*using the material in new ways and introducing it to new audiences*". This would prove important in 2019 and 2020.

Following the success of 2017, the team's expertise informed a series of events in November 2019 with DLSL, EDH and the 'Being Human Festival of the Humanities' that worked to both 'elevate' local collections for the purposes of improved public engagement and also inform future collection and curation practices. These activities aligned with the 2019 Being Human festival's theme of 'Discoveries and Secrets' since they concerned both the uncovering of lesser-known histories and collections of the region and also the lives and 'discoveries' of the Enlightenment-period 'Derby Philosophers'. Most importantly, following the success of 2019, Feely led an expanded funding bid for the university to become a festival 'hub' for Being Human 2020. The application successfully obtained the maximum £5,000 grant with Derby becoming the only festival hub hosted by a post-1992 institution. The programme of events with external partners, aligned with the broader festival

theme of 'New Worlds', drew heavily on Derby's Enlightenment legacy. The resulting impacts of these events are detailed below.

#### 4.1 Curation, preservation and management

Crucial to the success of the 2019 and 2020 events was the access provided to local collections that were then in turn contextualised by the team's expertise. For instance, a spoof playbill, appearing in a local newspaper of the period and held by DLSL, was a satiric response to a failed balloon launch held in Derby in 1783. The title of the playbill, the 'Moon-struck philosophers', inspired the title of the series of 2019 events and the associated exhibition [5.1]. The team curated this exhibition, and the work of Elliott in particular is cited as "*invaluable*" in identifying the appropriate items [5.1]. DLSL commented that Elliott's research into: "*the interpretation panels was something we simply couldn't have done ourselves. Our expertise lies in navigating the collection and it required a subject expert to provide this contextual information, so critical in helping visitors to interpret the items on display*" [5.1]. The opening event of the series (1 November 2019) included a lecture by Elliott on both the Derby Philosophers and the failed balloon launch that inspired the series' title, informed by published research from Elliott and Lafford [3.1, 3.4, 5.6]. Importantly, Elliott's published research [3.1, 3.2] is cited in *The Moon-Struck Philosophers* exhibition catalogue [5.2]. For Being Human 2020, DLSL's significant holdings of maps by the eighteenth-century cartographer Herman Moll (1654-1732) were similarly contextualised by Elliott alongside DLSL staff in the live-streamed event 'Parts Unknown: The Extraordinary Maps of Hermann Moll' (12 November 2020).

The transdisciplinarity of the team's approach is evidenced by Lafford's online talk, chaired by Whickman and Feely, on the legacy of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Derbyshire's lime burning history on the literary and artistic imagination (17 November 2020). Collaboration with the National Trust at Calke Abbey enabled an online 'photographic tour' of the Ticknall Limeyards. Participants attested to the strength of this collaboration, by describing the photographic tour as a "*wonderful addition*" [5.8]. For EDH, Whickman delivered an in-person lecture on 'Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets' (12 November 2019), an event designed to coincide with the 2019 'Derby Philosophers' events the same month. This also fund-raised for EDH itself, who are a charitable organisation. This talk was informed by Whickman's research in Romantic-period poetry as well as Elliott's on Darwin as a scientist and polymath [3.1, 3.2, 3.6]. EDH noted that, as well as "*promoting the museum and the life and times of Erasmus Darwin*", Whickman's lecture also contributed to the museum's "*intellectual offer*" [5.3].

#### 4.2 Public awareness and critical engagement

Whickman's talk was attended by 63 people. Of those surveyed, 91% rated the event 'good' or 'excellent' and, in speaking on a lesser appreciated aspect of Erasmus Darwin, respondents affirmed that they had learnt a lot about Darwin as a poet that they did not know before and would pursue this further [5.5]. The DLSL have similarly attested to the reach and significance of the team's collaboration with them on the contemporaneous 'Derby Philosophers' series of events, noting visitor numbers to the library over the month of November 2019 as "*well above [the] year's average*" [5.1]. Also, the two research skills workshops held at DLSL (6 November 2019 & 27 November 2019) as part of the programmed 2019 events, "*saw unprecedented enthusiasm and engagement from the attendees*" [5.1]. Larsen's moderation of the series' closing lectures on the legacies of the Enlightenment (29 November 2019) that drew on her published research [3.4, 3.5], was attended by 40 members of the public and, of those responding to questionnaires, 100% rated the event as 'good' or 'excellent' [5.5]. Lafford's 'Landscapes of Lime Burning' event was similarly well-attended and received, with 55 online attendees, while Elliott's joint presentation on the Moll Maps had been viewed 144 times as of 23 November 2020 [5.7, 5.10]. Participants also praised Lafford's "*informative and highly accessible presentation*" [5.8].

The small grant from the Being Human 2019 festival helped fund an app (Sprytar's 'Love Exploring') used with two guided walks of Derby (16 November 2019 and 23 November 2019). These were to places of historical significance to the 'Derby Philosophers', with the app and activities again informed by the team's research and the holdings of the DLSL. Like the re-enactment of 2017, this app included an audio script based on DLSL archival material and the



research of the team; it even included Whickman performing the role of Erasmus Darwin. These walks had significant reach and were attended by 58 members of the public. Of those responding to questionnaires, 100% rated the walks as 'good' or 'excellent' [5.4].

#### 4.3 The local, the national and the global

Walk participants declared they left feeling more 'informed' and able to attest to others of the historical significance of Derby in a national and international context [5.4]. Similarly, attendees of Larsen's closing lecture events remarked that they learnt of the 'particularly significant impact of women on 18<sup>th</sup> Century science in the area' [5.5]. In addition, the 2020 events took place as part of a national festival of the humanities. In situating the history of Derby in local, national and global contexts therefore, the events received attention in local and national media. Feely and Elliott were among staff interviewed on BBC Radio 3's 'Free Thinking' (12 November 2020) for instance, and this was in turn praised in a letter published in the *Derby Telegraph* (17 November 2020) that congratulated them for "*representing Derby [...] on national radio so ably*" [5.9]. The online nature of the 2020 events enabled broad participation during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as international access. Canadian attendees remarked how Lafford's, "*presentation engaged not only ourselves, at a great distance from Derbyshire, but also residents of the area*" [5.8].

#### 4.4 Legacy of impact

It has been the team's intention to ensure not only that these events have legacy, but that these existing collaborations remain. EDH, for instance, note that the university has a long-standing relationship with the organisation and this is set to continue [5.5]. DLSL have attested to the influence of our 2019 collaborations, saying that the two research skills workshops have helped them devise a 'formula' for running such events in future [5.1]. In addition, the work with the Sprytar 'Love Exploring' app is described as a 'lasting legacy' that has remained in place beyond the 2019 events [5.1]. Similarly, the podcasts and recordings of 2020 events remain available online for future access [5.10]. DLSL have commented on the team's influence on future curatorial events, on the knowledge base of the staff themselves and have described the influence the events had in attracting further volunteer staff [5.1].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

**5.1** Impact support letter from Manager of Local and Family History Services, Derby Local Studies Library (date of testimonial: 10 December 2019).

**5.2** *The Moon-Struck Philosophers* Library Exhibition Catalogue, published October 2019.

**5.3** Letter of support from Chairman of Executive Committee, Erasmus Darwin House, Staffordshire (date of testimonial: 3 April 2020).

**5.4** Being Human Festival 2019 – Participant Feedback from Derby Philosopher's Guided walks on 16 November and 23 November 2019, conducted by Jenesys Associates.

**5.5** Participant Feedback from Paul Whickman's Lunar Society Lecture, on 12 November 2019; Participant Feedback from Ruth Larsen's closing event 29 November 2019 conducted by Dr Victoria Barker, Impact Officer, University of Derby (2018-2020).

**5.6** Participant feedback from Paul Elliott's launch Lecture (audio file), 1 November 2019.

**5.7** Being Human Festival 2020 evaluation, Free Thought Research Ltd, 12 January 2021.

**5.8** Letter of support from academics of the Universities of Manitoba and Victoria, Canada, 27 November 2020.

**5.9** Published letter, *Derby Telegraph*, 17 November 2020.

**5.10** Online viewing and streaming data for Being Human festival 2020 online events and [link to podcasts](#) (views and streams measured on 23 November 2020).