

# THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF WILLS, ENGLAND 1540-1790 SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER

Hello, and welcome to our third newsletter. It's been another busy period, which among other things has seen us launch our Zooniverse site, and recruit a Creative Fellow.

## LAUNCHED INTO THE ZOONIVERSE!

Our biggest news is that we launched on Zooniverse last November. This is the site where our volunteers are checking and correcting our automatically generated will transcriptions.

The response has been staggering, so we want to offer a resounding **Thank You!** to the **2,629 volunteers** who have already contributed on Zooniverse.



At the time of writing volunteers have put in over 7,800 hours of work, and have transcribed over **350,000 lines** of text from early modern wills.

We estimate there are c.2 million lines to check in total though, so volunteers - please keep up your amazing work, and for anyone not yet transcribing - it's not too late to join in!

[Visit our Zooniverse site to transcribe.](#)

## APPROACHING MATERIAL CULTURE

In January Jane, Laura and Emily gave the first research presentations on findings from the project, at a conference entitled 'Integrating the Image: Visual Culture, Material Culture, and Early Modern British History', at Newcastle University.



Each team member discussed a type of object that appears frequently in our wills - hats, rings and 'lost' textiles. They showed that wills can illuminate people's relationship with these items in a way that complements visual and material evidence.

## MASTER OR APPRENTICE?

We now have a variety of wills on our Zooniverse site, where you can pick a 'workflow' according to your level of palaeography expertise.

Thus an experienced volunteer might challenge themselves with the 16th-century 'Master' workflow, transcribing wills from the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. If that's a bit too advanced, the 'Apprentice' 16th-century workflow will allow you to get a bit more training first.

For those more familiar with later hands, there are 17th- and 18th-century wills, again with a choice of Master or Apprentice workflows.

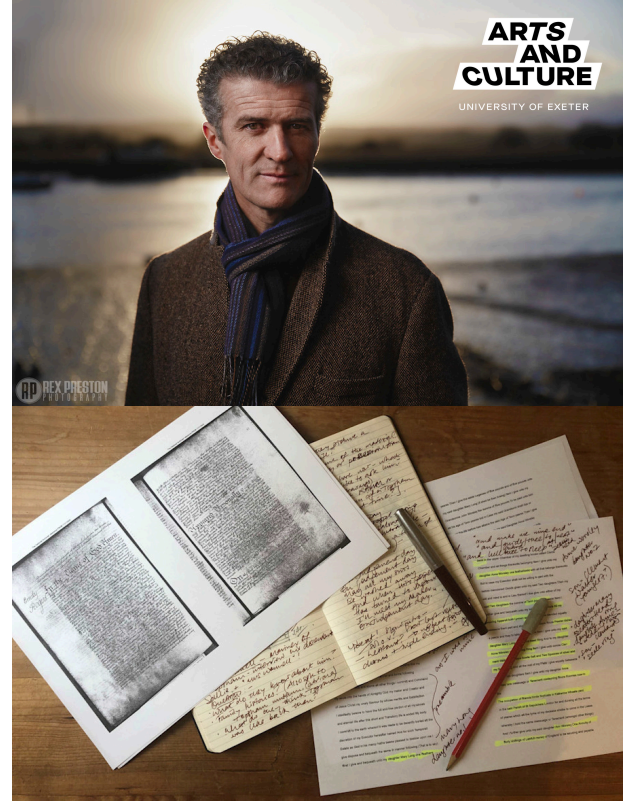
## CAN YOU HELP?



**WE ARE SEEKING PEOPLE  
WHO CAN READ  
SECRETARY HAND TO  
CORRECT OUR 16TH-  
CENTURY WILLS - IF YOU  
COULD DISPLAY OUR  
POSTER IN YOUR ARCHIVE,  
LIBRARY OR RESEARCH  
CENTRE, PLEASE  
CONTACT EMILY  
<E.M.Vine@exeter.ac.uk>**



# WELCOME TO CHRIS HOBAN



Last year the project Co-Investigator Laura Sangha was selected to host an Exeter Arts and Culture Creative Fellow, and we are now delighted to welcome **Chris Hoban** to the wonderful world of wills.

Chris is a Devon based composer, arranger, performer and lyricist who will be collaborating with Laura and the team to explore and compare historical and creative approaches to historic wills.

In future we will be sharing insights into this process by various means so do look out for future news of those. In the meantime you can find out more about the fellowship in Laura's recent **blog post**.



## VISITING 'REAL' WILLS

In February Chris joined the project team on a visit to The National Archives at Kew. We were thrilled to spend a couple of hours looking at original early modern wills and their registered copies.



We discovered our sample includes the 1608 will of Elizabethan lady-in-waiting Dame Elizabeth Talbot Countess of Shrewsbury (Bess of Hardwicke). It can be seen in the photo to the left, on the desk in front of Jane. It includes an enormously detailed inventory, and is subsequently more than 100 pages long!

## WEBSITE GOODIES

Would you like to keep up to date with the project between newsletters and webinars?

We add to our **project website** regularly – there you can find recent project news, events, resource lists, and our research blog (with our Will of the Month series) too. You can also follow us on **Bluseky**.

## JOIN US FOR A WEBINAR ON OUR PROGRESS



**Wednesday 19 March, 14.00 GMT**

Emily, Harry & Laura will give an update on our progress towards transcribing 25,000 wills, share some exciting objects volunteers have been finding, and answer questions submitted in advance. Zoom link at: <https://sites.exeter.ac.uk/materialcultureofwills/news/>

