

IMEMS Durham

End of Fellowship report

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I was lucky enough to secure a two-month library fellowship as part of the Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Durham. My new research project is entitled “Rogues’ Licence: Counterfeiting Authority in Early Modern England”, which involves a study of early modern bureaucracy and its vulnerability to forgery by a variety of actors. Durham University’s collections offered me unparalleled access to administrative documents from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries that do not usually survive. I have a particular research interest in licences, and was amazed to find ecclesiastical licences for activities as diverse as the alienation of land to the hearing of confessions (GB-0033-DCD-Regp-4, f.166r-v) and the building of altars (DCD/B/BA/2, Loc.I:47). This confirmed my idea that even the most routine activities were imbricated in paperwork at the time, and gave me the opportunity to see that paperwork first-hand. I was also able to consult Star Chamber reports dealing with cases of forgery (GB-0033-MSP 65) which aided my understanding of how the crime of forgery was prosecuted and punished. Librarian Richard Higgins was also kind enough to share a link to a newly-digitized manuscript, Durham Cathedral Muniments Registrum Parvum IV, which was incredibly useful to my research (<https://n2t.durham.ac.uk/ark:/32150/t2mnmv935284m.html>).

In terms of my time outside the libraries, the staff and members of IMEMS were uniformly welcoming and enthusiastic about my research. I had the opportunity to discuss key findings at a lunchtime seminar, as well as attending in-house events such as workshops and lectures from visiting speakers. I’ll glad to have gotten to know Patrick Gray, Luke Sunderland, John O’Brien, and Andy Burns better during my fellowship, and have even collaborated with Patrick Gray on a podcast for ECRs (forthcoming). The fellows that I met during my time, Elizabeth Biggs and Liam Temple, were very helpful upon arrival, and I have stayed in contact with both to share research and suggestions via Twitter.

Lastly, this fellowship was invaluable to me as it allowed me to continue with academic work at a time when I was without a home institution. Being part of IMEMS gave me a base from which to work, as well as library access both in-person and online to a wealth of secondary materials on early modern studies. Durham’s great strength in early modern social history meant that I was able to find books I could not previously access, while keeping up-to-date with the latest research in my area. I’d like to say thank you for the opportunity at a particularly precarious moment in my academic career, and I look forward to building on the connections forged during my time in Durham.