



University of
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ISSUE 24: SEPTEMBER 2024

DISCOVER

The University of Nottingham's Manuscripts and Special Collections

Tales from the Caves: Exploring Nottingham's underground stories

Discover more
about Nottingham
Womenspace

Developing the land
– Boot and boating
at Highfields





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See Nottingham's *Womanspace* on page 8



University of Nottingham
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Presented by
University of Nottingham
Libraries, Manuscripts and
Special Collections

Tales from the Caves


Exploring Nottingham's underground stories

Weston Gallery

Free admission

Thursday 3 October 2024 –
Sunday 9 March 2025

Box Office:
+44 (0)115 846 7777
lakesidearts.org.uk



Part of the University of Nottingham

Cover image: *Mortimer's Hole*, Nottingham Castle; undated. Taken from a Collection of Illustrations of Nottingham, MS 240/2/15

WELCOME

Editor's letter

It's been a busy summer of events for us. Teaching ebbs and flows over the year, but there are always group visits and talks taking place. In particular, I wanted to mention one visit from a group you may have seen mentioned in the local news back in summer 2023. Upper Broughton History Group found a chest in the outhouse of a farm building that was full of title deeds, wills, and other documents dating back to the 16th century. A grant from Rushcliffe Borough Council helped them transcribe and photograph them, and we are delighted to say the group has approached us about depositing the documents here. It's always an honour when people trust us to look after their archives, and we are grateful to Dr Rebecca Gregory, Assistant Professor in Historical Linguistics and Onomastics, for her help in bringing this about.

In this issue there is much about what's on in our gallery at Lakeside, with the recently-closed *dear sisters* exhibition and the current *Tales from the Caves* exhibition, but we've also been involved with several external exhibitions. Special Collections Librarian Ursula worked with the Old Rectory Museum in Loughborough to curate a display of images from the books in the Loughborough Parish Library collection. Parts of the Old Rectory building still standing date back to the 13th century and are now a museum run by the Loughborough Archaeological and Historical Society. The Loughborough Parish Library, held by us in Manuscripts and Special Collections, was originally kept in the Old Rectory and it's been a rare treat to reconnect the books with their former home. More about this on page 10-11.

We've also loaned a political print to The National Gallery in London for their exhibition *Discover Constable and The Hay Wain*. Political satire and an iconic painting of the Suffolk countryside seem an unlikely pairing, but when it was first exhibited in 1821 *The Hay Wain* was considered radical in its truthfulness. The exhibition runs October 2024 to February 2025, and I'm very much looking forward to visiting it.

Kathryn

Kathryn Steenson, Senior Archivist
(Academic and Public Engagement)



Opening times

Reading Room at King's Meadow Campus

- 9.30am–5pm
Monday–Tuesday
- 9.30am–6pm
Wednesday–Thursday

Weston Gallery at Lakeside Arts, University Park

- 12 noon–4pm
Tuesday–Sunday



For holiday opening hours, see our website nottingham.ac.uk/mss

Outreach diary

Here at MSC, our outreach calendar is always bursting with a wide range of events, visits and classes – here's just a snapshot of a few highlights from the year so far...

- We were pleased to welcome the **Wollaton Local History U3A** for a session introducing our collections, along with a **tour of our facilities and a bespoke display** of items in our collection relating to their area.
- Our stall at the **East Midlands Family History Show**, which was hosted here at King's Meadow Campus, went down a storm – **over 200 people attended**, with the opportunity to take a tour of our facilities as well as visiting the various stands and talks on offer.

Staff at the Family History Show – thanks to Nottinghamshire Family History Society and the Family History Federation for inviting us!



Over
200 people
attended the
East Midlands Family
History Show

As you can see, it's been a jam-packed few months and no doubt there's more to come: we can't wait to see what the next year will bring. If you'd like to book a visit, talk or class with us please contact us at mss-library@nottingham.ac.uk – we'd love to add you to our diary!

We led nine archive
research sessions to
over **140** geography
undergraduates

- Next up, we hosted **MA English students for a class all about the Benedikz collection of Icelandic sagas, poetry and travel books** to enrich their understanding of Old Norse literature, cumulating in a hands-on session with the texts themselves.
- We headed out to **Radcliffe on Trent** to talk to their **Local History Society** all about *'The Unheroic History of Robin Hood'*. Spoiler alert: it isn't quite like the Disney film...
- Our museum team were delighted to **help loan a rare ichthyosaur fossil**, the only known example of that species, to the Nottingham Natural History Museum at Wollaton Hall, where it will make a showstopping addition to their new *'Discovering Dinosaurs'* gallery.
- **We collaborated with colleagues** across the university to provide activities for a **Family Discovery Day** – and it's safe to say that the participants enjoyed getting the opportunity to learn how to write with a quill and to participate in an archaeological dig (though fortunately not at the same time).
- If that's not enough, **we led nine sessions for Geography undergraduates**, helping them to develop confidence with using our collections to undertake independent archive research during their degree – **over 140 students attended** in total!
- Finally, **we were joined by Southwell U3A** for a talk all about our *'Nottinghamshire Treasures'* – our most significant holding relating to the local area, **from medieval manuscripts to Victorian scrapbooks**. What's more, the group had the opportunity to take a look at many of these rare gems for themselves.

Keeper's update

I am thrilled to announce that we have been awarded £1.1 million from Research England's Museums, Galleries and Collections fund. As regular users of our service will know, Manuscripts and Special Collections is responsible for looking after and making available the University of Nottingham's collections of archives and rare books. The University of Nottingham Museum is also part of our service, having joined Manuscripts and Special Collections in 2020. The Research England funding will be used to increase access to all of our collections – archives, rare books and museum.

Museums, Galleries and Collections funding is available to universities who maintain a permanent collection and where the collection has significant reach outside of the home institution. In Manuscripts and Special Collections approximately 50% of our users are from outside the University of Nottingham. This was our first time applying for this funding and we are delighted that the importance of our collections and work has been recognised. We will receive the funding over the course of the next five years.

We are still exploring how we can make best use of this money, and there will be a mixture of short-term projects and longer-term posts. Two new staff members will join us soon, and hopefully by the time you read this recruitment will be well underway. Firstly, we have created a new role of Cataloguing Archivist to tackle the cataloguing backlog of our archival collections. Creating descriptions of collections and making these available via our online catalogue, mss-cat.nottingham.ac.uk/Calmview/, is hugely important in making material discoverable. It can be a lengthy process, as collections must be arranged into a sensible order, researched and accurately described. Having an archivist dedicated to this work will allow us to make many more collections accessible. Our second new role is the Impact and

Outreach Officer. They will build partnerships with academics and community researchers, and help our students better understand the collections through teaching and volunteer placements. Both roles will run until the end of the funding period, July 2029. Please keep an eye on future issues of *Discover* to find out more about these new roles, and for further information about our use of the Research England funding.

Research England is not the only funder that we have cause to be grateful to this year. In May we received grants of £3,825 from the Arts Council England/V&A purchase grant fund and £3,442 from the Friends of the National Libraries. This enabled us to purchase a small group of letters dating from 1927 and 1929, sent by DH Lawrence to the teenage daughter of friends of his and his wife Frieda.

Since 2014 we have received almost £1m in external funding for our archives and special collections from funders including the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Foyle Foundation, Arts Council England, the Arts Council England/V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Friends of the National Libraries, the Wellcome Trust, the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The Research England funding will increase this amount to approximately £2 million. We are enormously grateful to all of our funders, who enable us to acquire and care for our collections and make them available to everyone both now and in the future.

Hayley Cotterill
Keeper of Manuscripts and Special Collections

Visit our online catalogue at: mss-cat.nottingham.ac.uk/Calmview/

Dead end?

Tunnels under Nottingham in fact and fiction



Left: *Mortimer's Hole*, Nottingham Castle; undated. Taken from a Collection of Illustrations of Nottingham, MS 240/2/15

Background image: 'The Park rock holes' from *Album of view-postcards, chiefly of Nottingham*, p.41; undated. University of Nottingham Oversize Not 1.D14 ALB

Considering the number of manmade caves lying beneath the streets of Nottingham, it is unsurprising that, over the years, a tangled web of stories has developed which imagines a secret network of tunnels beneath the city. The details vary, with passages variously linking the city centre, the castle, and Wollaton Hall, or running instead between the castle and Lenton Priory; but the central myth remains the same: legendary figures in city's history, be they aristocrats or bandits, traverse the town under cover of night by means of a hidden tunnel.

By far the most famous of these Mortimer's Hole. For those in need of a refresher, Isabella of France, consort of Edward II, conspired with her alleged lover Roger Mortimer to depose her husband in 1327, placing her son on the throne in his stead. However, the teenage King went on to overthrow the treacherous pair just three years later, capturing them by means of a secret rock-

cut tunnel at Nottingham Castle, which would go on to be known as Mortimer's Hole. Many versions of the story are scattered across our collections – as are visual representations of the scene, such as this vivid illustration.

However, the reality is more complicated. The name 'Mortimer's Hole' is today associated with a 98m long passage on the castle grounds, but it is not the only candidate for the site of the incident. There are several shorter underground walkways, including one which opens out on to the castle green, which could plausibly have been used. Another tunnel to which the story is occasionally misattributed is definitely out of the running, having been constructed in 1955 specifically for cave tours!

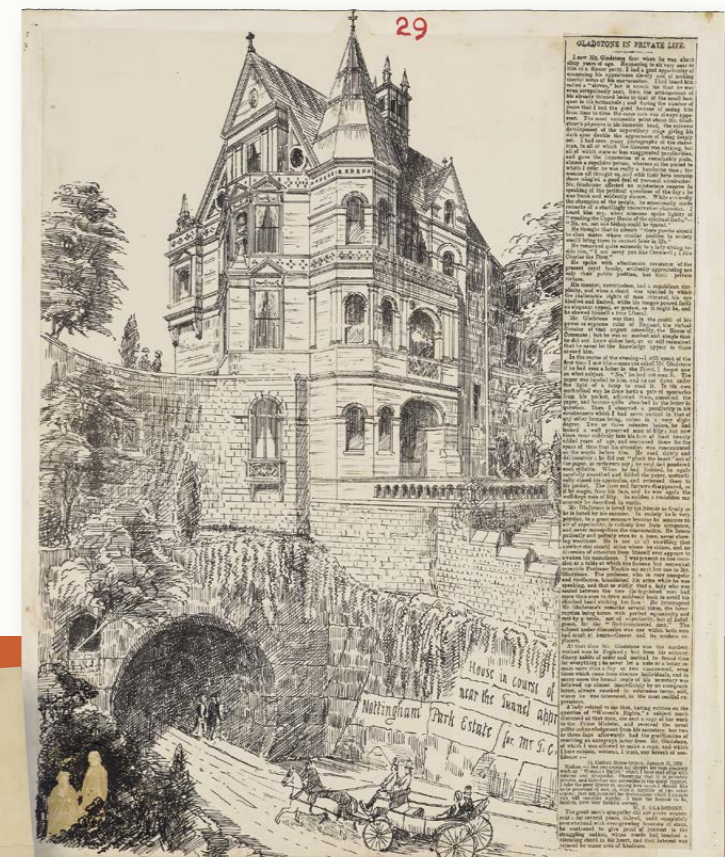
There were certainly many subterranean chambers beneath the castle itself, as shown on this 1903 plan of the rock cellars beneath Castle Rock, but there are no 'tunnels' to speak of –

though some of the chambers are connected, with entrances either being added to create a larger space, or even accidentally broken through in the process of hollowing out a new chamber. Indeed, the first purpose-built passage beneath Castle Rock would not be constructed until later in the twentieth century, blasted out of the rock with the aid of mining machinery, to enable the space to be used as a rifle range. The same is true of many of the other so-called tunnels beneath the city: while there are 'networks' around which make it possible to walk for hours without coming up for air, these caves have countless entrances mere metres apart, suggesting they were initially designed as self-contained cellars.

The Park is a hotspot for rumours of secret passages. This is perhaps not surprising considering its location, lying in the shadow of the castle in the direction of both Lenton Priory and Wollaton Hall, but similarly there is little basis for this belief. Given the dearth of actual tunnels, it might instead be suggested that the myth has instead arisen from the circumstances surrounding the construction of The Park. If anyone had both the means and cause to build a private network of underground walkways, enabling surreptitious travel away from prying eyes, surely the wealthy industrialists and businessmen who occupied the purpose-built private estate at the heart of the city would be prime candidates. Fortifying these claims was the construction of the (very real) Park

Tunnel, which, rather than being a covert passage, acts as an ostentatious gateway into the estate from Derby Road.

Designed by TC Hine in the mid-nineteenth century on instruction from the 6th Duke of Newcastle, from it was originally intended as a thoroughfare for carriages, as in this prospective drawing from Hine's scrapbook. However, upon construction, the incline was too steep for horses to manage, so it was relegated to pedestrian traffic – a purpose which it still retains today. Hine's scrapbook, along with a range of plans of both the Tunnel and the estate, are available to view in our reading room... though maps of secret passages sadly remain only in the imagination!



The Park Tunnel, taken from a scrapbook compiled by T C Hine, architect of Nottingham; 1847-1925. Papers of T C Hine, MS 575/1/164



Plan by Frank Lewis, city architect, of the rock cellars under the Castle Rock, Nottingham; 1903. Records of the Park Estate Nottingham, NPE P 4/13/1

Nottingham's Womanspace

The private view of the exhibition *dear sisters: activists' archives* in March 2024 attracted our largest ever audience for events at the Weston Gallery, our dedicated public exhibition space at Lakeside Arts. As well as celebrating local feminist activism, this exhibition carved out a new community-focused approach to collecting and curating.

Our plan to exhibit feminist archives and magazines began as soon as they arrived in Manuscripts and Special Collections. Exhibiting the Feminist Archive (East Midlands) delivered what we had hoped for: to signal that the University of Nottingham collects and preserves this history for future generations. Over the course of the exhibition, several women contacted us offering personal memorabilia, availability to record oral history interviews, and information which enhanced our existing knowledge of documents collected so far.

We also received an email from Carrie Salzedo, former member of the Nottingham Women's Liberation Group and one of the creators of the *Womanspace Exhibition House*. A drawing of this art installation featured in *dear sisters*. However, we only knew the identity of Shirley Cameron, the originator of the idea, not of any of the other women involved. Thanks to Carrie Salzedo, we were able to re-caption the exhibit, including a direct quote from her:

The two weeks of the Women's House in 1975 were curated by Carrie Salzedo, Char Scrivener, Ann Ferguson known as Ferg, and Irena [Kriszona?]; all friends and members of the Women's Liberation Group after Shirley Cameron initiated the idea. [...]



Photograph of Carrie Salzedo at the private view of *dear sisters: activists' archives*, 21 March 2024. © Tina Pamplin

The concept was to turn a house into art. Nottingham's 1975 *Womanspace* may have been inspired by *A Woman's Place* 14 Radnor Terrace, a house in London squatted by the South London Art Group (S.L.A.G.) in 1974; this group took inspiration from the Los Angeles *Womanhouse* from 1972, also a group project with different installations. The LA exhibition was a great success. The idea crossed quickly over to the UK, according to Amy Tobin's 2017 essay *Breaking down A Woman's Place*:

In 1973 the American art critic Lucy R. Lippard showed slides of Womanhouse to audiences in London, while other artists found documentation of the work in mainstream publications such as Time, which is where members of S.L.A.G. encountered the work.

Womanhouse/Woman's Place/Womanspace is protest art against domesticity as free labour imposed on women in patriarchal capitalist structures. The common ground in which this protest art grew is, according to Tobin, the sisterhood of feminism; women meeting and discussing their

experiences in spaces without men. Overall, the history of liberation played out in makeshift accommodation. For an anti-domesticity show, a disused house was both a suitable set and an alternative gallery. Commercial gallerists rejected feminist art as risky due to the likelihood of it being maligned by the press or sued for obscenity.

Of Nottingham's *Womanspace* street Carrie Salzedo writes: "It was one of a number of streets of terraced housing which, as I remember, the Council were knocking down to be made into car parking for the Poly [now Nottingham Trent University]. They definitely were knocked down not long after and made into car parks. They've been built on again since."

The impermanence of the walls is complemented by the blurring of the divide between creator and spectator. The creators of *Womanspace* appealed to the Nottingham Women's Liberation Group with this call: "We need you, your ideas, criticisms, feelings. We want to share this house with you."

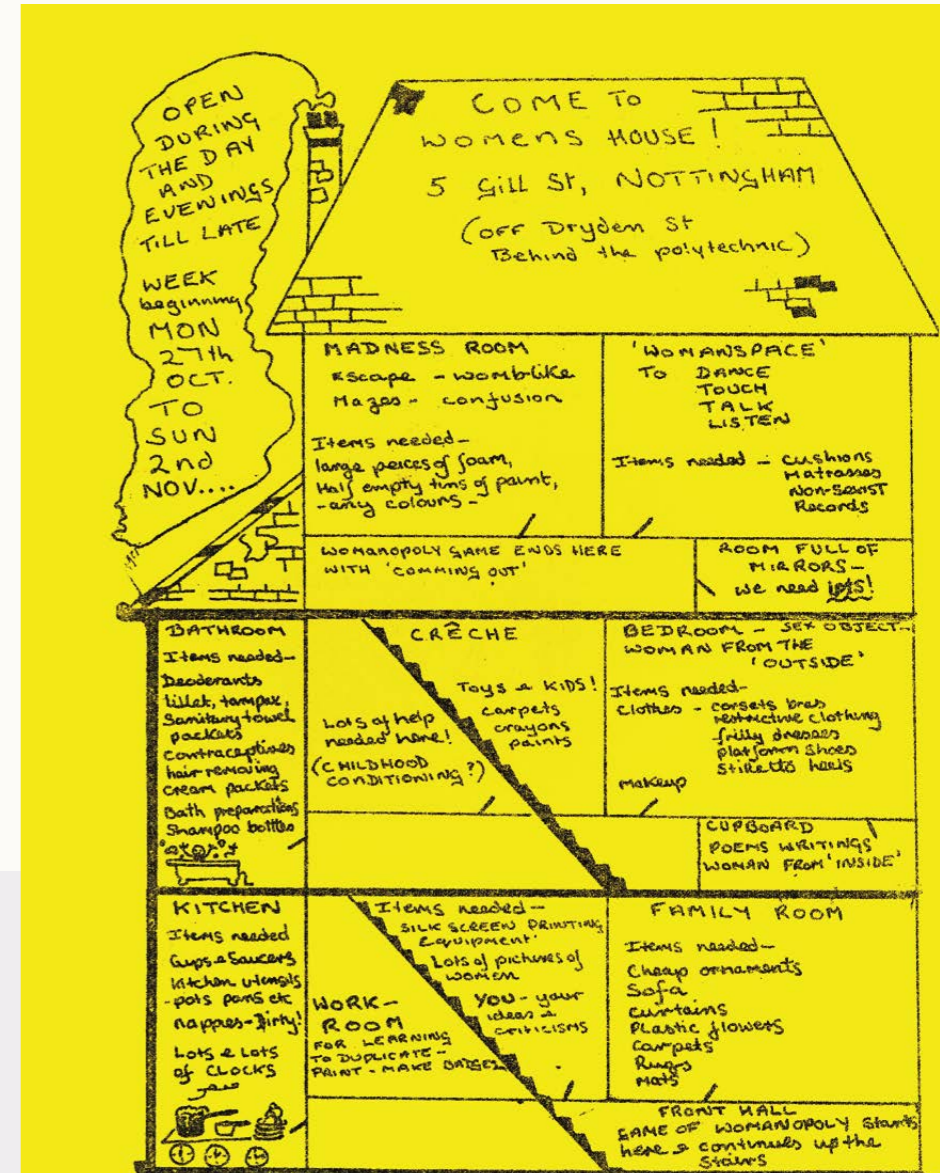
Comparatively, analysing co-creation in *A Woman's Place*, Tobin tells us that:

[Kate] Walker called it a 'gift' to the movement. Whatever is constructed here remains

Plan for 'Womanspace' Exhibition House, 5 Gill Street, Nottingham, October/November 1975. Papers of Audrey Beecham, AB/93/2

ghostly and incomplete, because in some sense this was also the point and the power of the artwork.

Tobin concludes that the "almost-disappearance of this installation-exhibition from history is political." Thanks to Carrie Salzedo we can document some of the existence of Nottingham's *Womanspace*. Whilst the "almost-disappearance" may be what some artists intended, the archiving of every detail of this disappearing act remains to be completed in retrospect.

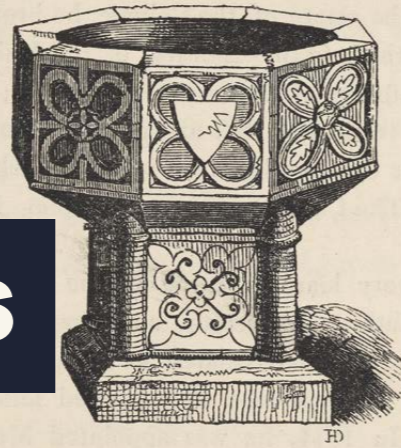


If you have memories or photographs of *Womanspace* email us at: mss-library@nottingham.ac.uk

More information about *dear sisters*, including a video with exhibition co-curator Dr Ursula Ackrill discussing *Womanspace*, is on our website: nottingham.ac.uk/mss/exhibitions/dear-sisters



A what-if story from Loughborough's Old Rectory



North-Cadbury Font.

Baptismal font of St Michael's Church, North Cadbury, in which Samuel Blackall's daughter Elizabeth was baptised in 1814. *The history and antiquities of Somersetshire* by Rev. William Phelps (1839). Volume 2. Special Collection, Oversize DA670.S49.P4

The Reverend Samuel Blackall (1737-1792) succeeded to the rectory of Loughborough in 1786. Upon arrival in his new home he found his predecessor's, the Reverend James Bickham's books waiting for him, some 700 volumes which the latter had bequeathed in his will to his successors in perpetuity as Loughborough's Parish Library. A fine collection, which Blackall may have appreciated more, had he not brought with him a library of his own. He was 49, unmarried, fond of the families of his siblings. In his will he left his library to his two favourite nephews, Samuel Blackall, a clergyman, and John Blackall, a medic.

Blackall kept his books separate from the Parish Library so that they could stay in his family. However, at least three of Blackall's books were left behind after his death. They are in the current Loughborough Parish Library, which is deposited in Manuscripts and Special Collections. Blackall's marginalia show tantalising glints of personality. In one

“We know from contemporary sources, among them a lady to whom Blackall was nearly engaged in 1798, that he waited patiently for one of the richest livings in the country to become vacant. That parish was North Cadbury in Somersetshire.”

instance he could not resist puncturing what he perceived as a cult of personality surrounding the poet Thomas Gray, whom Bickham had befriended in College.

When Samuel Blackall died in 1792, his eponymous nephew was 21. He graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1791 and became a Fellow of that College in 1794. He remained in College for twenty years. Presumably some or all of the library which his uncle had kept in Loughborough moved into his rooms in College. This raises the question why the nephew did not succeed the uncle to the Rectory of Loughborough. The timing would have been perfect. We know from contemporary sources, among them a lady to whom Blackall was nearly engaged in 1798, that he waited patiently for one of the richest livings in the country to become vacant. That parish was North Cadbury in Somersetshire. In 1798 the lady's hopes of marriage were disappointed. Fellows were forbidden to marry, and Blackall must have

felt unable to pursue a relationship, knowing that the prospect of North Cadbury becoming vacant was distant.

Samuel Blackall became Rector at St Michael, North Cadbury in 1812, when he was 42. He married in 1813. Newspapers printed the announcement of Samuel Blackall's marriage to “Susanna Lewis, eldest daughter of, James Lewis Esq. of Clifton late of Jamaica”. The bride was the Jamaican-born daughter of a prosperous owner of a slave-run sugar plantation. Her dowry explains the speed with which they managed to build their new home. It was completed in one year and looked interesting enough for William Phelps to mention it in *Antiquities of Somersetshire*.

This must also have been the next home of the library which Blackall inherited from Loughborough. Just one year later, in 1814, the couple baptised their first-born, a daughter named Elizabeth. Elizabeth's own first surviving child, a daughter, would also be called Elizabeth. She settled in Sudbury, Derbyshire, and died in 1892. It is possible that books from Blackall's library survive somewhere in Derbyshire, as his rectory in North Cadbury no longer stands.

If Samuel Blackall had succeeded his uncle as Rector of All Saints, Loughborough, the lady he met in 1798 may have been his bride and relocated to Loughborough's Old Rectory. We know she felt jilted because she wrote a letter to her brother which leaves us in no doubt about it.

“I wonder whether you happened to see Mr Blackall's marriage in the Papers last Jan[uary]. We did. He was married at Clifton to a Miss Lewis, whose Father had been late of Antigua. I should very much like to know what sort of a woman she is. He was a piece of Perfection, noisy Perfection himself which I always recollect with regard. - We had noticed a few months before his succeeding to a College Living, the very Living which we remembered his talking of & wishing for, an exceeding good one, Great Cadbury in Somersetshire. -

I would wish Miss Lewis to be of a silent turn & rather ignorant, but naturally intelligent & wishing to learn; - fond of cold veal pies, green tea in the afternoon, & a green window blind at night.”

Can you guess who the lady was?

Answer on page 15.

[v]

plan was finish'd, it was thought less necessary to print that article at present; nevertheless, should this Catalogue be so far improved, as there is now reason to expect; it will then be considered whether a list of the writers may not also be useful in a future edition.

[*] This Mark placed before any place denotes that it is more particularly worthy of Notice.

The reader is desired to take notice, that this catalogue though declar'd to be drawn up by a person of eminence, is in almost every particular incorrect, defective, and delusive. Indeed Mr Gray's taste, and abilities have been ridiculously overrated by his friends, who by their indiscrete sallies of admiration

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Samuel Blackall comments in *A catalogue of the antiquities, houses, parks, plantations, scenes, and situations in England and Wales* by Thomas Gray (1773). Loughborough Parish Library, DA620.G73



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Tales from the Caves

Exploring
Nottingham's
underground
stories

Weston Gallery

Free admission

Picture: 'Caves under 57, Hounds Gate, Nottingham', from 'The Lighter Side of Caving', pp.39-41 in Annual report (Peveler Archaeological Group); 1951. University of Nottingham Periodicals:Not/Thor Soc

Thursday 3 October 2024 – Sunday 9 March 2025

Opening times: Tuesday–Sunday 12 noon–4pm. Closed Mondays.

Weston Gallery
Lakeside Arts
University Park
Nottingham NG7 2RD

☎ Box Office: +44 (0)115 846 7777
🌐 lakesidearts.org.uk
📧 nottingham.ac.uk/mss



EXHIBITION NEWS

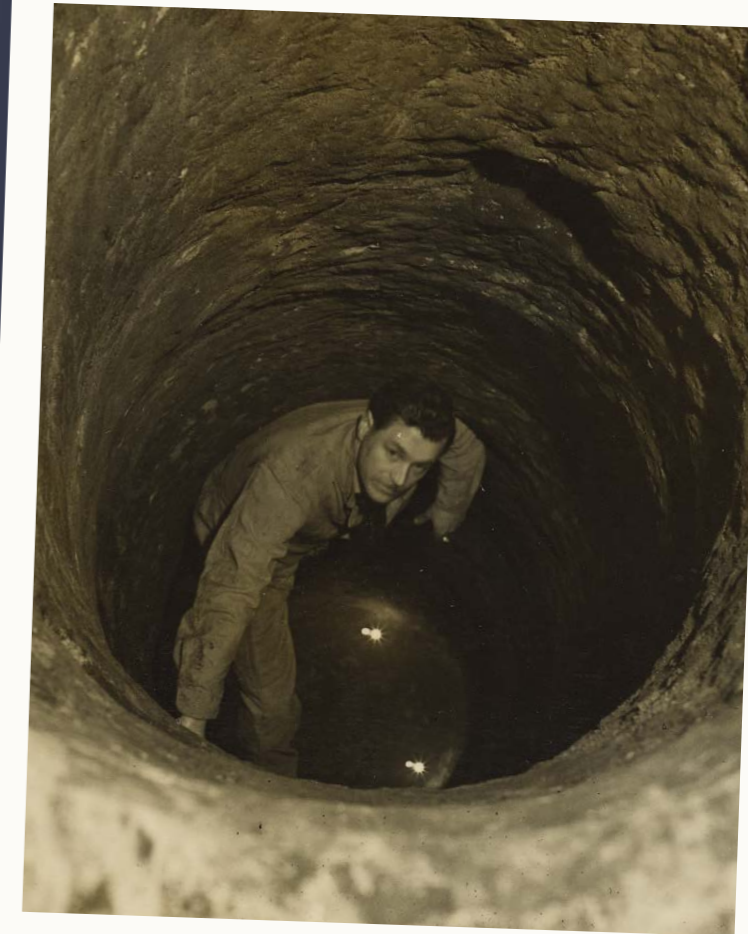
Tales from the Caves: Exploring Nottingham's underground stories

Delve beneath the surface at this new exhibition uncovering the many-layered history of Nottingham's famous caves and the stories of the people who have carved out a life within their walls for over a thousand years.

From medieval tanneries and breweries to the overcrowded slums and makeshift air-raid shelters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people have sought everything from refuge to recreation below ground, leaving behind traces of their lives which survive in our collections. The caves have also made their mark on the local imagination, as the backdrop to the dramatic capture of Roger Mortimer in a rock-cut passage beneath Nottingham Castle and the hatching of secret Luddite plots alike. These stories – whether legends of Robin Hood or adventures of latter-day urban explorers – are now brought together for the first time.

Tales from the Caves has been created by Dr Chris King and Dr Charlotte May of the Department of Classics and Archaeology at the University of Nottingham, with the generous support of Arts and Humanities Research Council. We would also like to thank the National Justice Museum, Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives and Nottingham City Museums and Galleries as well as colleagues across both the university and the wider community, for their valued contributions.

'Caves under 57, Hounds Gate, Nottingham', from 'The Lighter Side of Caving', pp.39-41 in Annual report (Peveler Archaeological Group); 1951. University of Nottingham Periodicals:Not/Thor Soc



Join our events

A series of special events will be held to accompany the exhibition. Places are limited so please book in advance on +44 (0)115 846 7777 or online at lakesidearts.org.uk

Lunchtime talks at Djanogly Theatre

1-2pm, £3 (free concessions)

Tuesday 17 October 2024, 1-2pm

Tales from the Caves: exploring Nottingham's underground histories

Nottingham is famous for its unique heritage of hundreds of sandstone caves beneath the city, and from the beginning, caves have been tightly woven into the stories of the city's past. The exhibition curators Dr Chris King and Dr Charlotte May of the Department of Classics and Archaeology will explore both the myth and reality of Nottingham's underground history, and some of the many characters who have been associated with the city's caves over the centuries.

Thursday 21 November 2024, 1-2pm

The Caves of Medieval Nottingham – the documentary evidence

Dr Richard Goddard of the Department of History at University of Nottingham will examine Nottingham's medieval caves using the borough court rolls and other records from the city. These reveal a huge amount of information about what the caves were used for, who owned them and their value to their owners. Importantly they reveal the experiences of everyday living in medieval Nottingham.

Friday 17 January 2025, 1-2pm

The Archaeology of Nottingham's Caves

Gavin Kinsley is a professional archaeologist who has been researching and recording Nottingham's historic caves for over four decades. He will talk about how we can use archaeological methods to understand the construction and chronology of the caves, show how they relate to the development of the urban landscape, and the many and varied uses of caves over the centuries.

Saturday 26 October 2024

Saturday 16 November 2024

11am–12.30pm

Guided walk: health and disease in medieval Nottingham

£5, free concessions

Explore places of health, illness and pollution in the pre-modern urban landscape with Dr Chris King. Were medieval towns really as dirty and disease-ridden as popular myth would have us believe? How did Nottingham make use of its caves for managing waste and disease?

Weston Gallery tours

Join us for a walk through the exhibition and learn about the stories behind the items on display.

Tuesday 17 October, 11am–12 noon

Thursday 21 November, 11am–12 noon

FREE Advanced booking is required

Five minutes with...

Chloe Highton



What is your job title and how long have you worked in Manuscripts and Special Collections?

“I’m an Archivist in the Academic and Public Engagement Team and I’ve been here for just over a year.”

What is your background and how did you get into this type of work?

“I first came across archives when I was at university and when I was coming to the end of my degree, it struck me as something that I might be interested in doing as a job. So I started volunteering in various archives, including Unilever and Liverpool Cathedral. Then I did a course in Liverpool to qualify as an archivist and that eventually led me here.”

What does your work involve?

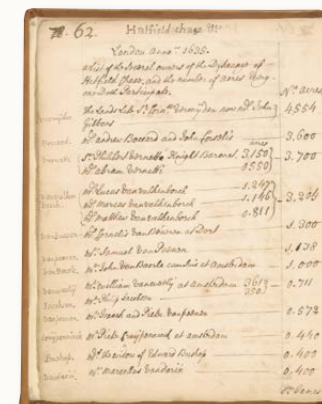
“I’m involved in helping to organise and deliver classes to students and public engagement events. For example, I’ve just taken part in the Family Discovery Day. I also do engagement activities online, so I create blogs and publish social media content, and I do other things like desk duty in the reading room, email enquiries, and cataloguing. Right now, I’m the co-curator for our next exhibition *Tales from the Caves*.”

What are the most challenging aspects of your job?

“I would say that the most challenging aspect of my job is that I only moved to Nottingham a year ago and when I’m doing events with the public, I often get asked about local places in the East Midlands or famous events in the local history that I’ve never heard of before. But I am learning a lot more about the local area every day and I know a lot more about the East Midlands than I used to.”

What is your favourite collection or item from a collection?

“I think my favourite item is the George Stovin Manuscript (HCC 9111/1). I think it’s really fun. It’s an account of the drainage of Hatfield Chase, which might sound a bit boring, but it’s actually a really bizarre tale. It’s got everything from sabotage and court cases to the English Civil War, and there’s a lot of tension about religion. It covers events spanning over a hundred years and is quite wild.”



List of the Participants in the Level of Hatfield Chase in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire in 1635, from Stovin's manuscript; c.1766. Records of the Hatfield Chase Corporation, HCC 9111/1

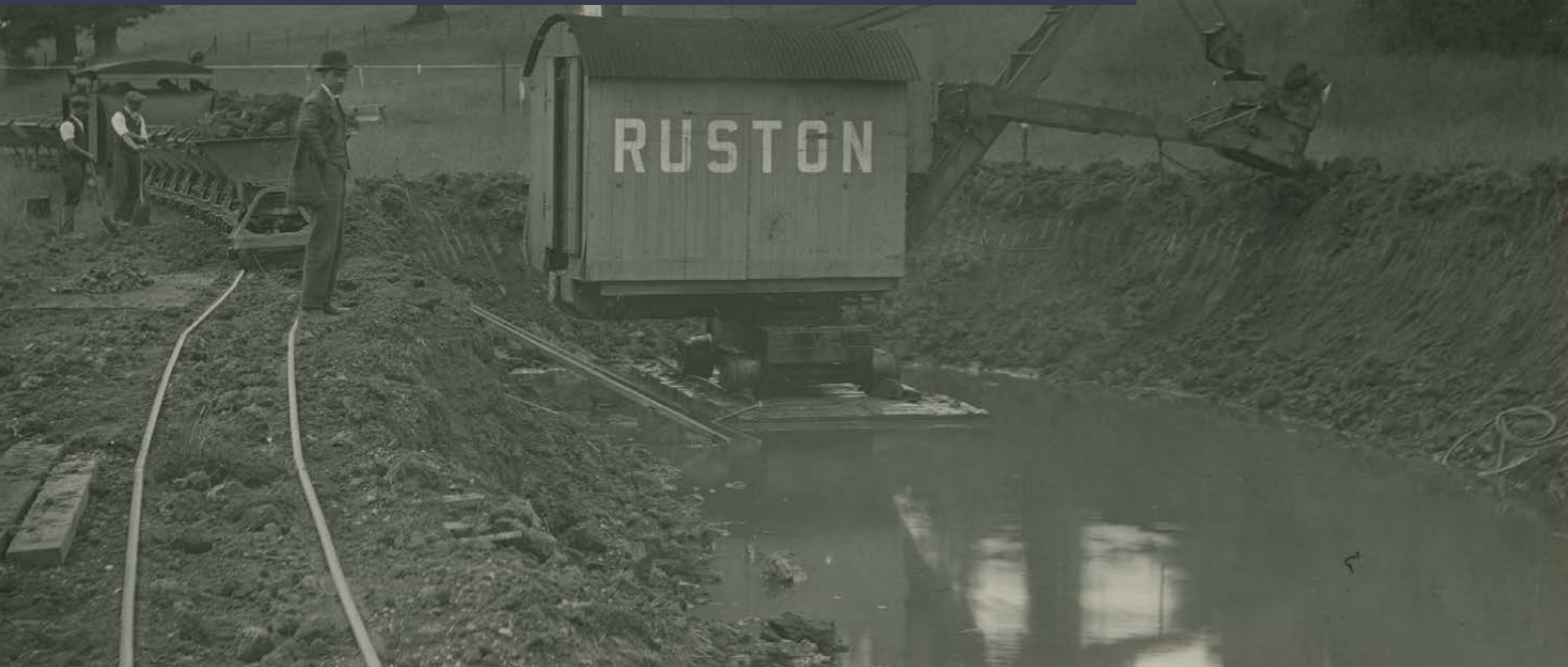
What do you most like about your job?

“I really like having the opportunity to talk about the collections and also to write about them, whether it’s exhibition captions, blogs, or whatever. I also find out a lot in the process that I didn’t know before about the East Midlands, or things in history I was never aware had happened. It’s just really rewarding, not only for me, but also to be able to share knowledge of the collections with a wider audience.”

Answer to ‘What-if story’ on page 11.

Jane Austen. The quote is taken from her letter to her brother Frank, 3 July 1813, Chawton, Hampshire, held in the British Library.

Boot and boating at Highfields



Photograph of the construction of the lake at Highfields Park; c.1922-1924. Note the railway line and trucks containing gravel. Photographs relating to the University of Nottingham and University College Nottingham, NUP 1/11

Highfields Park today is a well-known beauty spot for a stroll. However, if we were to go back a century, there would be plenty of noise as workmen dug out the foundations of the lake. Nearby, the construction of the Trent Building, named after Sir Jesse Boot (Lord Trent), would also be taking shape. It was, of course, Jesse Boot who donated land and money for the venture.

As part of the construction process for the lake, a narrow-gauge track was laid on site. Trucks were loaded with gravel from a mechanical digger. Plans were drawn up for a fifteen-acre ornamental lake for pleasure boating and about 350,000 tons of material was extracted. Much of the gravel was used to make concrete for the base of the Trent building, but it was also laid along the new boulevard. This was essential in order to raise the height of this new road above the level of the Trent valley floods. Excavation below the water table was required to supply water to the new lake.

W. H. Radford, a Nottingham engineer, was brought in to supervise the excavation. Jesse Boot

“Plans were drawn up for a fifteen-acre ornamental lake for pleasure boating and about 350,000 tons of material was extracted. Much of the gravel was used to make concrete for the base of the Trent building, but it was also laid along the new boulevard.”

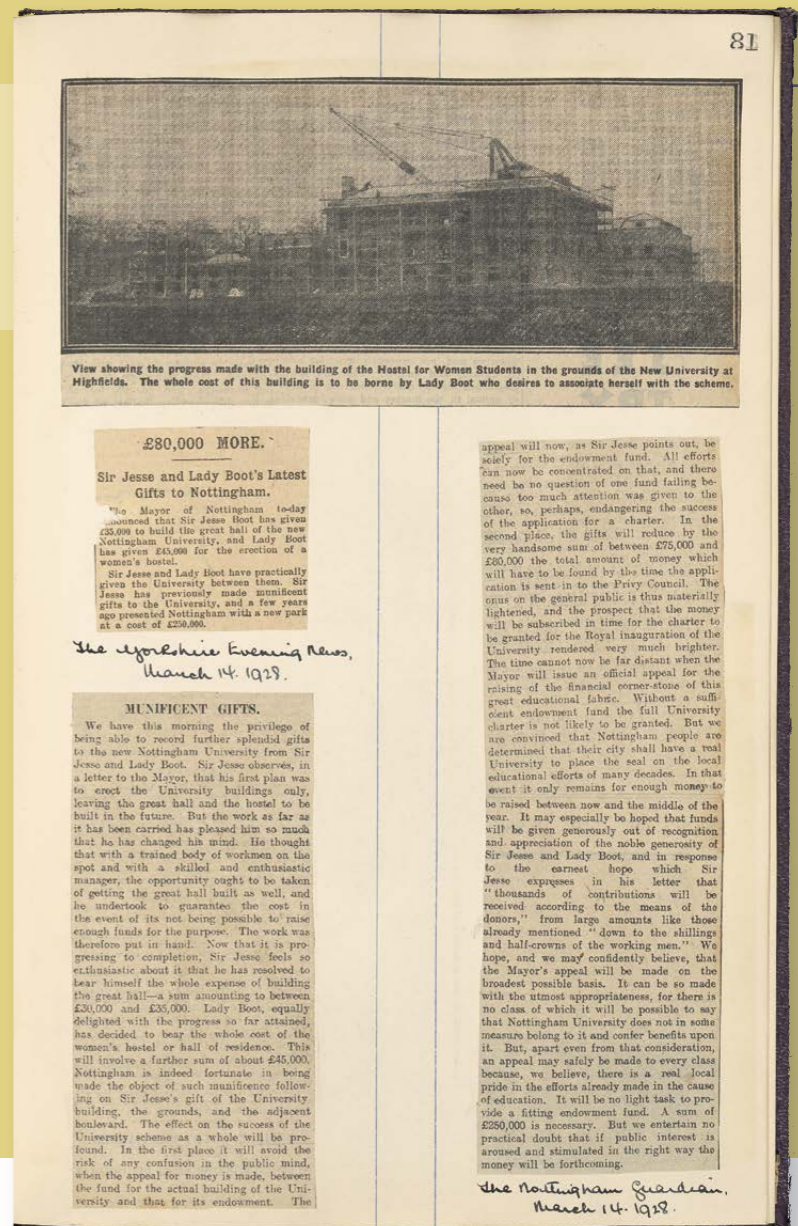
Newspaper cuttings from 1928 relating to the Boots's generosity towards University College Nottingham. Records of University College Nottingham, UR 1460

“By 1921, Boot was planning to amalgamate a proposed university and its grounds (35 acres) into the development of the Highfields estate for both recreation and education.”

had engaged him in 1920, with his plans to build a new boulevard from Dunkirk to Beeston. By 1921, Boot was planning to amalgamate a proposed university and its grounds (35 acres) into the development of the Highfields estate for both recreation and education. The work involved enlarging an earlier fishpond and diverting the Tottle Brook. It also involved filling in part of the original pond. This was where the formal gardens leading to the lake were to be located; leading from the central 'Circus' along University Boulevard, where today there stands a bust of Jesse Boot.

Once the lake was dug, rowing boats were bought. Prices of various boats were obtained and a flurry of correspondence ensued between Boot and Mr J. E. Shimeld (Acting Registrar, 1922-1933).

On 19 June 1925, Boot wrote to Mr Shimeld regarding canoes: 'Are they likely to be of practical use or are they considered unsafe? Is there any demand for them?...Is there also a popular demand for these paddle prams?'. In a letter dated 27 June 1925, Boot was obviously thinking in professional



£80,000 MORE.
Sir Jesse and Lady Boot's Latest Gifts to Nottingham.
The Mayor of Nottingham today announced that Sir Jesse Boot has given £35,000 to build the great hall of the new Nottingham University, and Lady Boot has given £45,000 for the erection of a women's hostel.
Sir Jesse and Lady Boot have practically given the University between them. Sir Jesse has previously made munificent gifts to the University, and a few years ago presented Nottingham with a new park at a cost of £250,000.

The *Nottingham Evening News*,
March 14, 1928.

MUNIFICENT GIFTS.
We have this morning the privilege of being able to record further splendid gifts to the new Nottingham University from Sir Jesse and Lady Boot. Sir Jesse observes, in a letter to the Mayor, that his first plan was to erect the University buildings only, leaving the great hall and the hostel to be built in the future. But the work as far as it has been carried has pleased him so much that he has changed his mind. He thought that with a trained body of workmen on the spot and with a skilled and enthusiastic manager, the opportunity ought to be taken of getting the great hall built as well, and he undertook to guarantee the cost in the event of its not being possible to raise enough funds for the purpose. The work was therefore put in hand. Now that it is progressing to completion, Sir Jesse feels so enthusiastic about it that he has resolved to bear himself the whole expense of building the great hall—a sum amounting to between £20,000 and £35,000. Lady Boot, equally delighted with the progress so far attained, has decided to bear the whole cost of the women's hostel or hall of residence. This will involve a further sum of about £45,000. Nottingham is indeed fortunate in being made the object of such munificence following on Sir Jesse's gift of the University building, the grounds, and the adjacent boulevard. The effect on the success of the University scheme as a whole will be profound. In the first place, it will avoid the risk of any confusion in the public mind, when the appeal for money is made, between the fund for the actual building of the University and that for its endowment. The

appeal will now, as Sir Jesse points out, be solely for the endowment fund. All efforts can now be concentrated on that, and there need be no question of one fund falling because too much attention was given to the other, so, perhaps, endangering the success of the application for a charter. In the second place, the gifts will reduce by the very handsome sum of between £75,000 and £80,000 the total amount of money which will have to be found by the time the application is sent in to the Privy Council. The onus on the general public is thus materially lightened, and the prospect that the money will be subscribed in time for the charter to be granted for the Royal inauguration of the University rendered very much brighter. The time cannot now be far distant when the Mayor will issue an official appeal for the raising of the financial corner-stone of this great educational fabric. Without a sufficient endowment fund the full University charter is not likely to be granted. But we are convinced that Nottingham people are determined that their city shall have a real University to place the seal on the local educational efforts of many decades. In that event it only remains for enough money to be raised between now and the middle of the year. It may especially be hoped that funds will be given generously out of recognition and appreciation of the noble generosity of Sir Jesse and Lady Boot, and in response to the earnest hope which Sir Jesse expresses in his letter that "thousands of contributions will be received according to the means of the donors," from large amounts like those already mentioned "down to the shillings and half-crowns of the working men." We hope, and we may confidently believe, that the Mayor's appeal will be made on the broadest possible basis. It can be so made with the utmost appropriateness, for there is no class of which it will be possible to say that Nottingham University does not in some measure belong to it and confer benefits upon it. But, apart even from that consideration, an appeal may safely be made to every class because, we believe, there is a real local pride in the efforts already made in the cause of education. It will be no light task to provide a fitting endowment fund. A sum of £250,000 is necessary. But we entertain no practical doubt that if public interest is aroused and stimulated in the right way the money will be forthcoming.

The *Nottingham Guardian*,
March 14, 1928.

terms about the running of the boats: 'I do not mind so much about the chief attendant for the landing stage being a boat builder, so long as we get a man who is businesslike, courteous, and who thoroughly understands the public. I calculate we shall be taking from sixty pounds to a hundred pounds a week in the Summer'.

An order for two rowing punts was placed with A. J. Witty, boat builder of Nottingham, but problems arose and Boot was most upset that these boats were not 'sufficiently in keeping with the charming surroundings of the Lake'. However, problems subsided and boating on the lake became an enjoyable pastime.

Boats are still available to hire on Highfields Lake during the summer months. There's also a children's playground, and in recent years an Adventure Golf and Foot Golf course has opened next to the lake. It would be interesting to know what Sir Jesse Boot would have made of it all.

New additions to the collection and catalogue



Page from *Red Earth Theatre, Field Notes for Getting Lost and Found*, a history of the company; 2023. Red Earth Theatre, RET

Audio cassette tape recording by the Nottingham Clarion Choir, *The Gathering of the People* (includes 'Women of the Working Class'); 1990. Nottingham Clarion Choir, NCC

Theatre collections

Our collections of material relating to theatre and performance continue to expand. One notable addition is the archive of the Nottingham Clarion Choir (CCN). Formed in 1988, they describe themselves as 'a group of socialists and other radicals who have revived the tradition of singing songs of solidarity and protest - all in glorious four part harmony!' The choir archive was given to the university by Bronwyn Westacott, choir leader. Some of the members of the choir have strong links to the activities documented in the Feminist Archive (East Midlands) (FME), and the Nottingham poet Connie Ford, whose archive we hold (CF) offered some of her political poems to the choir.

As New Perspectives Theatre celebrate their 50th anniversary we continue to receive accruals to their archive, most recently set models and stage designs for various productions (NPT). We have also received theatre material from playwright Julie Wilkinson (MS 1059) including a news bulletin 'Here We Go' produced by the Nottinghamshire Women's Support Group.

A larger accession is the archive of the Red Earth Theatre (RET). Founded in 1999 and closed in 2023, Red Earth was a nationally touring inclusive theatre and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation (NPO). Red Earth developed new techniques for accessible storytelling so that hearing and Deaf audiences could understand and enjoy a performance together.

Feminist Archive (East Midlands)

The exhibition *dear sisters: activists' archives* has prompted some interesting additions to this collection including papers, videos and an interview (FME/4/41 - with Andrea Barker) relating to the Nottingham Girls Project, collected by Chris Capel (FME/3/34) and Jennie Fleming (FME/3/36). This project, which ran in the 1980s, was focused on the unmet needs of girls and young women and included a programme of girls' activities days held at local sports and community centres where girls could try sports such as fencing (at the time girls were excluded from football, rugby or cricket, in school and at weekends).

University of Nottingham

The current Weston Gallery exhibition *Tales from the Caves* is co-curated by members of the *City of Caves* project team. We will soon be receiving digital recordings and transcripts from the oral history part of the project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 'Echo' (MS 1060), in which staff and volunteers at the University of Nottingham recorded people's own histories of the caves with the intention of preserving these stories for the future and sharing them with new audiences.

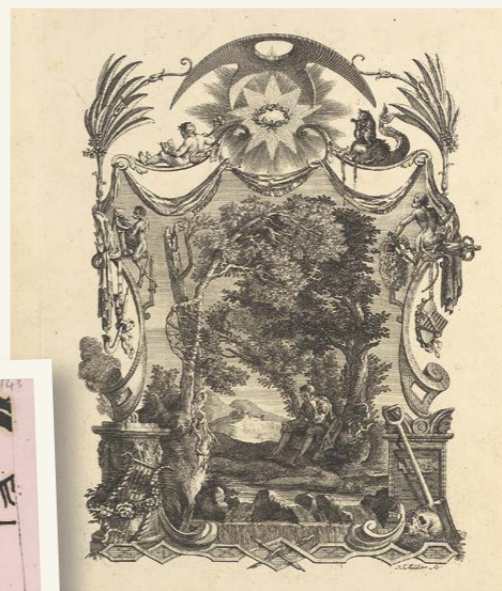
We were also delighted to receive digital copies of

photographs taken by a student showing Rag Week events in 1971 (NUP/62). They include images of the Rutland Hall float and a boat race on the River Trent.

Special Collections

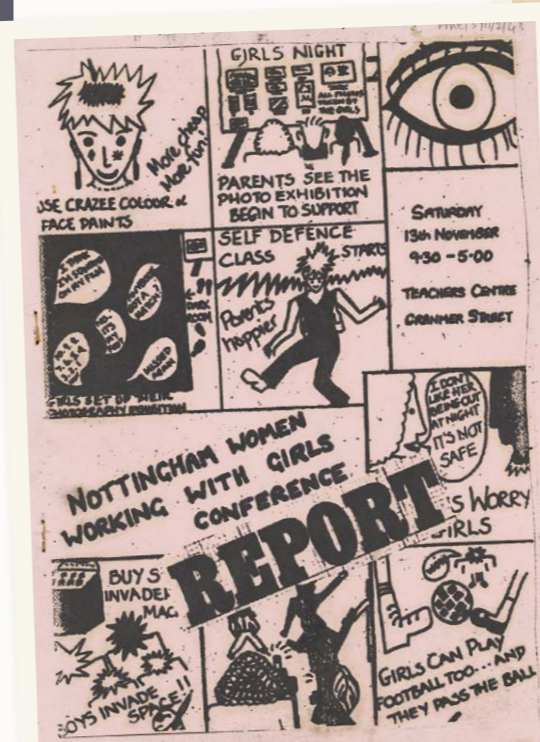
Notable additions to the special collections include a richly illustrated edition of poems by Thomas Gray. The purchase was prompted by a gap in an existing collection which was the subject of our recent extramural summer exhibition: Loughborough Parish Library, held in the Old Rectory where the library was originally kept. The curator of this library, Rev. James Bickham (1719-1785), befriended Thomas Gray whilst they were students at Cambridge. In his library at Loughborough, Bickham collected several editions of poems by Gray. We do not know whether Bickham owned a copy of this book. However, the catalogue of Bickham's library from 1786 lists "Gray's works" in quarto format, and it is one of the volumes which was lost. The engravings in this 1766 celebratory edition are in the Rococo style, an exuberant style focused on asymmetry, such as the playful singerie

- monkeys and cats as painters and musicians - beside a rapt poet playing a lyre and sombre symbols of death.



Front cover of the *Nottingham Women Working With Girls Conference Report*; 1982. Feminist Archive (East Midlands), FME/3/11/2/43

Frontispiece of *Designs by Mr. R. Bentley, for six poems by Mr. T. Gray* (1766). Special Collection, Over.X PR3500.A1



Rag Week raft race; 1971. Photographs relating to the University of Nottingham and University College Nottingham, NUP/62



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Talks and tours

from Manuscripts and Special Collections
at the University of Nottingham

Our talks (last for approximately 45 minutes)

Our expert staff offer talks on a range of topics including:

- Nottinghamshire Treasures
- Sex and scandal in Nottingham Church Court
- Supernatural stories from the East Midlands
- An unheroic history of Robin Hood
- Murder most horrid

Our tours (last for approximately 60 minutes)

- Private behind-the-scenes tour at Manuscripts and Special Collections, display of archives and rare books.
- Private curator's tour of the exhibition gallery at Lakeside Arts.

For group size, fees and refreshments, see online.

For a full list of talks available and
details on how to book, visit

nott.ac/mss-tours-talks

or email:

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and around Nottingham or
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