



Official Newsletter

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Welcome from the RSLC

Thank you for reading the latest *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Newsletter*, and for your interest in our Society. The RSLC – established in 1878 – is a registered charity which aims to promote understanding of, and public interest in, the history of Lancashire and Cheshire – including Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and Preston – through the publication of editions of historical records and other activities.

If you are a member of the Society, we are very grateful for your support. If not, you can find out more about the RSLC, including details about how to join (and receive our annual volumes in return for your £25 subscription), at <http://rslc.org.uk/>. Alternatively, you can write to Diana Dunn at East Manley Hall, Manley Lane, Manley, Frodsham, WA6 9JE or d.dunn@chester.ac.uk

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The RSLC in 2025

Last year saw the publication of RSLC volume 160, *The Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registrations 1908-11* edited by Craig Horner. This is the second, and final, instalment of Dr Horner's edition tracing the history of early car and motorbike ownership in Cheshire – a rich source for the social history of the county, as well as for the early motoring industry.

We were pleased to welcome a large audience, both in person and online, for the annual Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture at our March AGM. It was delivered by Dr Bertie Dockerell and Dr Marc Collinson who introduced their upcoming RSLC volume, an edition of the minutes of party meetings held by Manchester City Labour councillors in the mid-1970s. This rare survival sheds much light on political activity in the city over that decade, including housing policy, the development of Manchester Airport, and reciprocal exchanges with Manchester's 'twinning' city, Leningrad.

Annual General Meeting 2026

The society's AGM will be taking place on **Wednesday 1 April**, in the Liverpool Central Library (Meeting Rooms 1-2) starting at 1.45pm. It will be followed at 2.00pm by the **Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture**, which will this year be given by Professor Siobhan Talbott and Dr Sophie Jones. This talk will introduce their upcoming RSLC volume *The Letter-Book of Daniel Peck, Merchant of Chester 1702-1704*.

Siobhan Talbott is Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Keele, with expertise in the history of early modern business and commerce. Sophie Jones is Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century History at the University of Liverpool, and her research focuses on the British Atlantic, including American loyalism and early modern merchants.

ALL ARE WELCOME! Our AGM and public lecture will also be livestreamed, for those who would like to join us online. To register for the AGM and lecture, please contact Diana Dunn (d.dunn@chester.ac.uk) in advance of the meeting, providing your email address and confirming whether you would like to attend in person or online.

The Society's Annual Report and financial accounts will be made available on our website (<http://rslc.org.uk/>) in advance of the AGM.

RSLC: Approaching our 150th Birthday!

The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire was established in 1878, and so we are approaching the 150th anniversary of the Society's foundation. The RSLC was set up by some of the leading lights in historical studies in the North-West – including J. P. Earwaker, James Crossley, J. Paul Rylands and the herald G. E. Cokayne (author of *The Complete Peerage*). The Society's aim, then as now, was to publish interesting and important historical records relating to counties of Lancashire and Cheshire – 'to be placed within the reach of every reader who may desire to examine them'.

The founders proposed that the Society's publications should focus particularly on certain categories of document: inquisitions post mortem, wills and inventories, subsidy rolls, manor court and guild rolls, family deeds and papers, records of the Duchy of Lancaster, plea and recognizance rolls, clerical records, marriage licences and bonds, parish registers, early churchwardens' accounts and 'miscellaneous documents of local interest'. We have to date published 160 volumes, covering a very wide range of subjects and genres of documentation, some of which would probably have surprised the Society's founders.

We intend to mark the 150th anniversary of the Society with a variety of events, details of which we will communicate to members over the coming months. We hope these activities will boost our membership, to help ensure that the RSLC can continue its mission of making historical records for Lancashire and Cheshire widely accessible for another 150 years.



PROFESSOR SIOBHAN TALBOTT and DR SOPHIE JONES tell us about their upcoming RSLC volume, *The Letter-Book of Daniel Peck, Merchant of Chester 1702-1704*. This volume sheds fascinating new light on the business practices and networks of Chester merchants in the early eighteenth century, and some of the challenges and opportunities they experienced.

What are your backgrounds and areas of expertise as researchers?

Siobhan: I'm Professor of Economic and Social History at Keele University (and, for my sins, Head of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences). My area of expertise is early modern (predominantly seventeenth and early eighteenth-century) business history, and I've always had a particular interest in the activities of merchants – how they operated, how they networked, and how they behaved in order to navigate difficult political situations that threatened their business.

Sophie: I'm Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century History at the University of Liverpool. My area of expertise is the British Atlantic (specifically, colonial North America and the American Revolution). Before my move to Liverpool, I worked with Siobhan as a Postdoctoral Researcher on her AHRC-funded project, 'Business News in the Atlantic World, 1620-1763'. Daniel Peck's letter-book is the second book that we have written together – our first, the co-edited collection *Business News in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, was published by Brill in 2024, and we co-wrote an article for *Enterprise and Society* that was published in 2021.

What first drew you to this set of records?

Sophie: One of my main roles whilst working on Siobhan's 'Business News' AHRC project in 2017 was to find and transcribe examples of merchants' letter-books and correspondence, on both sides of the Atlantic. Daniel Peck's letter-book was a great – and local – example. After Siobhan and I compared notes on my archival visits, she remembered that she had seen and photographed the letter-book when she was a postdoc at Manchester back in 2013, and suggested that it would make a great edition. It's taken us a while to get to the stage of publishing it, but we're really glad that it's going to see the light of day after several years of working on it. It's been valuable to both of us in different projects, so we hope that other scholars will find it equally interesting, perhaps for different reasons from us!

What was the biggest challenge you faced in producing this edition?

As all scholars in modern academia will recognise, one challenge is always time! Producing an accurate edition takes time and patience, and it was hard to fit in work on the volume around day-to-day responsibilities, especially as we are both parents to young children. We're proud to see it come to fruition. Aside from practical challenges, palaeographical puzzles are par for the course in producing editions, and the various hands in Peck's volume (which we discuss in the introduction to the volume) produced varying levels of problems as we have striven to produce as accurate a transcription as possible.

Siobhan: I remember a particularly funny moment, over a coffee on Keele's campus, when Sophie corrected a transcription that I was struggling with. Peck mentioned a type of 'corn', but

the preceding word was (to me) illegible. I went down a substantial rabbit hole researching different types of corn and their historic names and uses, only for Sophie to gently point out that the word was *Unicorn*, the name of a vessel commissioned by Peck (which appears multiple times throughout the volume). It was a very funny moment that highlights that undertaking projects like this – especially collaboratively – is so enjoyable despite the challenges. Every edition I’ve published has led to knowledge gained about subjects that I never thought I’d be researching!

Sophie: The closure of Cheshire Archives in 2024 threw in a curveball just as the project was reaching its end – some of the 2013 photos we were working from were a little bit blurry in places, so we had planned to go back and look again at the original to make some final checks. We still hope to be able to do this before the volume enters production.

What do we learn about early eighteenth-century Chester and its merchant community from these records?

Siobhan: The impact of war on trade has been an ongoing theme of my research, particularly earlier in my career when I first used Peck’s letter-book. The letter-book was compiled in 1703 and 1704, during the War of the Spanish Succession and as political tensions at home were mounting ahead of British political union. The volume gives an insight into the impact of these events on trade, as Peck frequently discusses the use of convoys and insurance, as well as problems finding men to serve on board merchant ships due to impressment. The volume illuminates how the activities of trading networks, and the opportunities offered by particular ports, were impacted by changing contexts, and adds substantially to our understandings of the use of marine insurance for a period in which this mechanism has received little scholarly attention to date.

Sophie: The letter-book also provides valuable insight into the ways that early eighteenth-century merchant networks were created, and sustained, despite members being separated by (sometimes vast) geographical distances. From his base in Chester/North Wales, Peck maintains important business connections with merchants in locales ranging from neighbouring Shropshire and Wales to Ireland and continental Europe. Many of these connections were sustained only through handwritten letters, with Peck depending on members of his own network to provide introductions to reliable and trustworthy business contacts whom he would likely never meet – this is something that Siobhan and I have written about elsewhere (*Business News*, 2024).

Were the trading networks and opportunities of the city changing over these years?

The early eighteenth century was an important moment for the region’s economic history, and this letter-book was being compiled as Chester was beginning to decline as a major port, with Liverpool rising in prominence. Peck is a prime example of an individual who needed to adapt his commercial activities in line with changing opportunities. The letter-book details Peck’s early interest in mining: he was involved in lead mining in North Wales in 1703, before becoming the ore purchasing agent for the Company of Mine Adventurers in England in 1707.

As work by Chris Whatley has shown, in 1721 Peck and John Potter signed a 31-year lease of the colliery, harbour, and saltpans in Stevenston (North Ayrshire), indicating the completion of Peck's pivot away from overseas trade and towards coal mining, as well as a geographical relocation of his business interests.

What is the most unexpected or exciting material you've uncovered in these records?

Sophie: For me, it was how important the areas surrounding Chester were in eighteenth-century networks of global trade – particularly parts of North Wales and the Wirral. Being local to the area, I had always been aware that places like Parkgate played important roles in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century maritime trade, but it was really exciting to see this clearly written out in original manuscript material. I was also particularly taken by Peck's descriptions of warships on the River Dee – even if it's quite difficult to imagine today!

Siobhan: I have worked with aspects of Peck's letter-book for several years, but it was only when working on my last monograph (*Knowledge, Information and Business Education in the British Atlantic World, 1620-1760*, OUP, 2025) that I began to think about merchants' record-keeping practices. Rather than acting solely as an out-going letter book, which is more common, Peck's volume contains copies of receipts, summations of correspondence (rather than verbatim copies), and copies of accounts, as well as copies of legal instruments, including bills of exchange, bills of lading, and affidavits. There are also copies of third-party correspondence, again unusual for letter-books of this type. This affords the reader insight into a variety of methods of storing information, as well as illuminating the conduct of trade within this network more broadly, which is something not often visible in this type of manuscript.

How would you hope your volume would be useful for historical researchers in the future?

Sophie: We hope that all the themes we've mentioned here, which we expand on in the volume's introduction, will be useful for historians, but we also hope and anticipate that other scholars with different interests will find things in the volume that we have missed, or that we have not ascribed as much importance to. We hope that the volume will make this fascinating letter-book more widely accessible, especially for researchers unable to get to Chester to see it in the archive, and also for those who may not have had the opportunity to develop palaeographical skills that would allow them to read the original. Our introduction and annotations will – we hope – help researchers from all backgrounds decipher and use Peck's writing.

Siobhan: I'm making publishing editions of merchants' letter-books a habit, and for me there's an added incentive in exposing larger and more diverse audiences to their value. I've built a career on qualitative approaches to economic and business history, which I believe hold an enormous amount of value into investigations into the past. I also often find letter-books amusing, touching, and emotional – and I hope to bring these feelings to a broader range of people through publishing as many as I can!



RACHEL COLLETT is completing her History PhD at the University of Liverpool. Her research focuses on the Merseyside Women's Liberation Movement from 1969 to c.2000. Here she outlines some of the sources she has used for her recent article 'Capenhurst Women's Peace Camp (1982-3) and after: local nuclear resistance, grassroots feminisms, and transnational solidarities', which was published in the journal *Modern British History*, and for her wider doctoral project.

As is often the case with women's activist groups, Capenhurst Women's Peace Camp did not leave a substantial archival record. This ephemerality posed a significant challenge in my research for my article, necessitating a broad approach that drew on a diverse range of sources to recover the camp's story, including archival material, newspapers, oral history, visual media, and material culture.

My starting point was a small folder of peace activism material in the Merseyside Women's Liberation Movement archive at Liverpool Record Office. This included camp leaflets, alongside papers from other local anti-nuclear groups. Although this collection was limited in quantity, it provided a useful insight into the unique subjectivities of Capenhurst Women's Peace Camp and its local context. Its inclusion in the collection also hinted at the strong link between anti-nuclear activism and the broader feminist movement across Merseyside, which I explored in the article.

Fragmentary archival material was supplemented by the vast local and national newspaper coverage of the camp, particularly the *Liverpool Echo*, *Liverpool Daily Post*, *Cheshire Observer*, and *Chester Chronicle*, all accessed via the British Newspaper Archive. These papers formed a rich source of information for my research, not just of the camp itself but of wider anti-nuclear attitudes and activism in the local area. News articles were extremely useful for piecing together a sense of chronology, charting the evolution of activism at Capenhurst, and providing insight into the differences between (mostly positive) regional and (mostly hostile) national press coverage of women's peace camps and anti-nuclear activism in Britain. Additionally, newspapers also provided crucial visual evidence of what the camp looked like, giving insight into the women's everyday life, their activities and methods, and the ways in which they deployed material culture, camp decorations, and other visual signifiers as part of their spatial protest.

Local feminist newspaper *Merseyside Women's Paper* was also a useful source and provided a useful counter-narrative to the mainstream press. The paper is accessible at Liverpool Record Office, although I used copies at home that have been kindly loaned by previous editorial member, Sue Ryrie. As with Capenhurst's archive material, coverage in *Merseyside Women's Paper* helped me gain insight into the women's unfiltered activist perspectives, without mediation or censorship of mainstream journalists.

Alongside my existing oral history interviews with feminist activists in Merseyside, this personal insight was also provided by *The Capenhurst Connection* (1986). Made by local women's collective WITCH (Women's Independent Cinema House), this was a film documentary produced a few years after the closure of the camp. In the absence of direct oral testimony from camp activists, the film was a key resource that gave voice to the women's experiences, motivations, and political development beyond 1983, which has helped me document their extraordinary transnational activism as Merseyside Women for Peace.

The article connects closely to my PhD research, providing a useful case study to demonstrate the spatially specific character of feminist and broader left-wing activism in Merseyside. In particular, the article builds on my focus on the Women's Liberation Movement's 'widening' after the late 1970s, revealing one aspect of the new priorities, spaces, and solidarity networks that emerged in 1980s Merseyside. This close connection to my PhD research also meant that the research process reflected the broader challenges I have encountered when recovering the Merseyside Women's Liberation Movement; namely, the incompleteness of its archive collection in Liverpool Record Office, the lack of material relating to activism on the Wirral or other suburban areas of Merseyside, and the difficulties in finding a diverse range of oral history participants.