

Durham University IMEMS Library Fellow Report
Dr Liam Temple

Project Title:

Mysticism among the English Poor Clares, 1580-1680

Project Overview:

My project at Durham engaged with the remains of the library of the English Poor Clares, first donated to Durham in 2007. It sought to explore the devotional and mystical works preserved in the collection, focusing especially on print and manuscript material from the seventeenth century. The project aligned with the IMEMS research strands of the 'History of the Book' and '17th-Century Studies'. It also overlapped with the interests of a number of IMEMS scholar.

Project Aims:

The project had two distinct but interlinked research aims:

1. To explore the material left to Durham by the English Poor Clares in its totality, assessing the role mysticism played in the convents by exploring prayers and translations preserved in manuscript material.
2. To assess the importance of works of spiritual direction originally written for other convents, including those by Benedictine, Carmelite, Jesuit and Augustinian confessors and authors. This was done in order to explore the extent to which we can discuss a form of 'intercommunal textuality' among exiled female religious.

Project Activities:

While the project originally focused on a handful of manuscripts at Durham, it rapidly became apparent that the collection was rich and diverse in a way that had not previously been identified. While my project had originally planned to focus on seventeenth century material exclusively, the range of material dating from the eighteenth century has facilitated extending my research conclusions up to c. 1780. Of the 74 manuscripts contained in the collection, it is likely that just over half date from before the start of the nineteenth century. As a result, I have engaged with around 34 manuscripts from the collection over the month-long fellowship.

In terms of my research, the jewel in the crown of the collection is undoubtedly PCD MS 66. The manuscript contains a wealth of translations and transcriptions of mystical works, including Blosius and Harphius. Much of my time at Durham was spent engaging with this manuscript and attempting to unearth the authorship of many of the unidentified pieces of work. This work will likely continue for the foreseeable future. The manuscript contains several pieces by the Benedictine Augustine Baker, whose work I have engaged with extensively in previous research. Baker had written a piece of work for the Poor Clares of Ayre, but this additional material hints at a deeper connection between the two convents, possibly including the sharing of manuscript material.

Printed material in the collection also contains numerous works that are rare or unknown elsewhere. For example, the collection features ten copies of the *Rule of S. Clare* (Douai, 1684). The edition of this text featured on EEBO contains only the first section of the work from a clearly incomplete copy, missing three other vitally important sections. I also discovered that copies of this specific text contain important manuscript material not fully identified or mentioned in the manuscript catalogue. I have estimated that four copies alone contain around 800 pages of manuscript prayers, devotions and liturgical material. This material is of vital importance to scholars of female religious in the period.

During my fellowship, I also began communicating with the remaining English Poor Clares at Much Birch in Hereford. The collection housed at Durham originates from the Poor Clares of Darlington, who donated it when they moved to Hereford in 2007. Replies so far have revealed that some manuscripts remained with the nuns, suggesting that Durham's collection might not be as complete as first thought. My ongoing correspondence with the convent's archivist, Sister Mary Bede, will likely continue to inform our understanding of the Durham collection. I will continue to be in contact with the staff at Palace Green concerning any information I discover that is relevant to the collection.

Outcomes:

The rich and diverse nature of the collection at Durham has yielded more material than originally anticipated. As a result, I am now working on producing two journal articles rather than my original aim of a single publication. The first article concerns the 'everyday' mysticism of the Poor Clares, exploring how their daily rituals and devotional activities on specific feast days reflect their adherence to a mystical way of life. The second addresses the concept of authorship among the Poor Clares, focusing on specific nuns who produced and translated material for their convents.

My time at Durham will also inform a forthcoming British Academy Small Research Grant application to further explore the reception of Benedictine texts among other religious orders. This will shed further light on the phenomenon of intercommunal and trans-confessional spirituality.

Concluding Remarks:

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as an IMEMS fellow. The funding has allowed me to continue to be research active in this early stage of my career. It has also allowed me to branch out from my previous projects in Benedictine mysticism to explore the experiences of other monastic orders. Presenting my initial findings to scholars at a 'Work in Progress' seminar was also incredibly useful and thought provoking.

I would like to thank the staff at Palace Green Library for being so efficient and patient with my many manuscript requests. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Alpass for making the entire fellowship experience an enjoyable one.