

CAL Undergraduate Research Scholarships Scheme 2017
Project Proposal Form

Project Proposer/s:	Professor Ewan Fernie
School/Dept:	Shakespeare Institute
Project Title:	Sewers, Sermons & Shakespeare – Birmingham’s Civic Revolution
Project Summary	
<p>The Library of Birmingham is home to one of the most important Shakespeare collections in the world: the Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library (BSML), founded in 1868. This is remarkable for longevity, numerical size and ambitious scope, but it is the BSML’s radical founding principles which make it unique in the world, and a surprisingly significant part of Birmingham’s civic history. The Lunar Society and Midlands Enlightenment are now firmly established as central to Birmingham’s identity, but its nineteenth-century revolution in local government is currently less well known. By the 1890s, Birmingham was regarded as the ‘best governed city in the industrial world’. Alongside unprecedentedly ambitious municipal schemes which dramatically improved living conditions and infrastructure in Birmingham, the Council equally championed the contribution of culture to the city’s well-being and prosperity. Unlike collections held by private institutions, universities or national libraries, the BSML was specifically conceived as a world-class resource for all citizens, irrespective of class or educational background. And its most prominent proponent, George Dawson (1821-76), was the most important influence on the city’s most celebrated son: the reforming politician, Joseph Chamberlain, who himself supported the BSML and was founder of the University of Birmingham. But Dawson’s culturally as well as politically ambitious vision for Birmingham has now been largely forgotten. This project aims to recover that vision not just as a central constituent of Birmingham’s heritage and visitor economy but also as the inspiration for world-leading civic ambition and innovation in Birmingham and its University now.</p>	
What the researcher will do	
<p>Under the guidance of Prof Fernie and Tom Epps (Cultural Partnerships Manager at the Library of Birmingham), as well as in conjunction with Martin Killeen (Special Collections Librarian at UoB), the researcher will work (1) in the Cadbury Research Library at the University of Birmingham and (2) in the Wolfson Heritage and Archives Centre at the Library of Birmingham. There may also be opportunities to work at the Birmingham and Midland Institute, which was founded to spread knowledge and learning through all classes and where Dawson taught, including classes for women. Work conducted in the Cadbury will focus on the extent of the influence of George Dawson on Joseph Chamberlain and the foundation of the University. Dawson was a literary scholar and lecturer with a remarkably broad remit, ranging across culture, religion and local and international politics. How far can his influence be traced specifically in the foundation of Birmingham as the first civic University? In addition to asking such questions in Edgbaston, the researcher will work in the archives of the fabulous Library of Birmingham in the heart of the city. Dawson was an avid campaigner for free education across creeds and classes. He wanted the BSML to be a state-of-the-art research library for the entire civic community, and he lectured to labourers and mechanics and on political reformation and revolution as well as on Shakespeare. The second focus of the researcher’s work will include gathering evidence of who actually used the BSML in its early years and to ascertain the degree of success it had in involving the various community groups of 19th century Birmingham. The results of this research will be compared with the ambition of the Library of Birmingham to bring Shakespeare to the people today, as in for instance its ‘Our Shakespeare’ 2016 exhibition, for which Prof Fernie was the academic advisor.</p>	
Skills required by the Scholarship holder	
<p>The Scholarship holder will need to be able to search and consult texts and documents in the relevant archives, but advice and initial training will be given. (S)he will also need to liaise with a number of people on a complex but navigable collaborative project. (S)he will ideally need to develop an interest and a feeling for the project which will allow him or her to follow his or her own hunches and hypotheses and creatively advance the research as a whole. Throughout the scholarship the student will work in close and regular contact with Professor Fernie and it is anticipated that this will be a demanding but rewarding scholarship to have.</p>	
How will your Project benefit the Scholarship holder?	
<p>The scholarship holder will benefit from the Scholarship in a variety of ways. First, (s)he will gain privileged experience of important Birmingham archives in the University and in the city. Second, (s)he will play a valuable part in uncovering a story which establishes the pioneering importance of Birmingham and its University on the cusp of modernity, a story which is being uncovered by this project explicitly in order to revive a distinctively Birmingham-based vision of the potential for sharing higher learning and elite culture more broadly in today’s world. As the project is also being developed in order to launch a major Heritage Lottery Fund application, it will also confer on the scholarship holder a degree of familiarity with funding in the arts and humanities sector. As it has the backing not just of the Library of Birmingham but also Birmingham City Council, it will introduce the award holder to the world and the challenges and opportunities of contemporary local government. In sum, it offers a unique chance to be involved in a major historically-informed but progressive collaborative project in Britain’s second city which should be of unusually broad interest across the country and beyond. It also offers an opportunity to be engaged in genuinely original and impactful research. It should provide excellent evidence of engagement and skills for an ambitious student’s CV, and it should be genuinely enlightening, exciting and fun,</p>	
How will the Scholarship benefit your Project?	
<p>The particular work involved in this Scholarship will help us to arrive at answers to specific and important questions.</p>	

Chamberlain is the dominant figure in the history of 19th C Birmingham and its University, but we wish to know how far Chamberlain's achievement was built on Dawson's often more radical aims and achievements, and how far Shakespeare was involved in their relationship. We also wish to know how far Dawson's extraordinary ideal of broad civic participation in Shakespeare research was realised by the establishment of the Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library. We are, in addition, eager to ascertain the extent and content of the Birmingham and Midland Institute's Dawson holdings. And the work of the scholarship will not only help to resolve these historical questions; it will also inform our attempt to revive and refresh Dawson's educational and political mission and the Birmingham Shakespeare Memorial Library now.