

CAL Undergraduate Research Scholarships Scheme 2017
Project Proposal Form

Project Proposer/s:	Dr Elizabeth L'Estrange
School/Dept:	LCAHM/Art History, Curating and Visual Studies
Project Title:	Women and the Book: A Reconsideration
Project Summary	
<p>Nearly thirty-five years ago, Susan Bell published an article that would generate a rich and important area of research by art historians, literary historians, and manuscript specialists. 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture' (<i>Signs</i>, 7 (1982) 742-68) sought to establish the 'special relationship' that women had with books and their influence on lay piety in the Middle Ages. In an era when gender studies was mainly unheard of even within the academe, Bell relied mainly on examples of already-famous (because considered exceptional) female patrons. These were mainly aristocratic Christian women from the later middle ages – queens, duchesses, consorts – who hailed from France, Burgundy or England. While Bell's work was certainly pioneering, her article has continued to shape the field of research into women and manuscript/book studies. There is a vast amount of scholarship, for instance, on noble women's libraries in France in the fifteenth century. In addition, it has led to an assumption that Books of Hours – the most popular devotional book in the later fifteenth century – was particularly suitable for women's devotions.</p> <p>This project seeks to look beyond the chronological, geographical and generic boundaries that have come to dominate the field of women's book ownership by investigating other examples of women's bibliophilic practice and interests. For instance, what books were women collecting and reading in places like Italy, Spain, Germany, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Scandinavia? What evidence is there for women as patrons of books pre-1300? How did the rise of printing and the Reformation influence the social status of women readers and collectors? What evidence is there for Jewish women's engagement with books and how does this compare to that of Christian women? And how does women's book ownership and patronage compare to that of men?</p>	
What the researcher will do	
<p>The researcher will help me to build up a better picture of the state of the field by</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conducting bibliographic searches to identify research (articles, books, projects, networks) on women's book ownership across Europe from c. 900-1600 (given the potentially large field/timescale, specific periods/regions can be identified for special attention, in conjunction with the researcher's skills and interests if necessary) 2. Reading and summarising key articles 3. Building up a list of primary and secondary sources that will be integrated into an online bibliography 4. Identifying links and patterns that might emerge (popular texts, patterns in collecting, dynastic interests) that will help to 'map' networks of book ownership and interests 5. Flagging up areas that require more research 	
Skills required by the Scholarship holder	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An interest in book and manuscript history (from any point of view – art historical, literary, material culture etc.) and a familiarity (or a desire to become familiar) with the Middle Ages and Early Modern period in particular - A reading ability in one or more foreign languages would be desirable (French, Spanish, German, Italian...) - Familiarity with online bibliographic databases - The ability to conduct independent research and follow up leads; and to critically assess secondary literature and summarise its aims - An aptitude for online editing via a platform like Wordpress, or the willingness to learn 	
How will your Project benefit the Scholarship holder?	
<p>Through this project, the UG researcher will gain a variety of specific and transferable skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application and development of existing research skills to a new project (becoming familiar with new databases and online sources, for instance) - Gain knowledge in the field of book and manuscript history, especially as it pertains to women - Application and improvement of language skills, where appropriate, to a specific project (learning new vocabulary, reading original texts) 	

- Gain experience in the efficient gathering and digesting of information and research
- Drawing conclusions based on the work carried out and following up their own leads
- Presenting information digitally

How will the Scholarship benefit your Project?

One of the first stages of this project is to conduct a 'state of the field' enquiry, bringing together all existing work on women and books. This is a relatively time-consuming task which will be greatly facilitated by the assistance of a UG researcher. In addition, having two people working on the project can help it to advance more efficiently through discussion of findings and the identification of areas to follow up. Furthermore, potentially employing someone with additional language skills or familiarity with other literatures and cultures will significantly help to build up a better picture of the research already out there, and research that could be undertaken.