

Conference Report for Warwick Researcher Development

'Er Indoors: Domesticity and Nature in Home and Garden
23 November 2019 Wolfson Research Exchange

This one-day interdisciplinary conference was arranged as a result of the Humanities Research Centre's Doctoral Fellowship competition, with additional support from the Royal Historical Society, the Society for the Social History of Medicine, Warwick Researcher Development and Warwick GRP Connecting Cultures. The conference went very well, despite industrial action on the railways only one speaker was unable to attend. All the papers were very pertinent to the conference theme and prompted good discussion with an engaged audience. The two keynote papers were especially rich, questioning the bounds of the conference theme and taking our thinking in new directions.

There was a good deal of PGR involvement, the main organiser is a PGR and there were three Warwick PGRs involved with helping on the day, assisting with wayfinding and registration, live tweeting, chairing a panel, making sure everything ran smoothly and clearing up at the end of the event. There were six PGRs on the programme, although only five were able to attend and present. Sixteen PGRs attended the conference, making up almost half of the total in attendance.

In the organisational process I was assisted by Sue Rae of the Humanities Research Centre. This was very useful, as I felt supported and now would feel able to put on an event without that support in the future. There were no major challenges, I found the process to be very fulfilling. I was very pleased that the two keynote speakers I approached agreed to come, and that I received a good range of papers that made up a well-balanced day. The industrial action on the railways caused consternation, but only prevented one speaker from attending and perhaps led to people heading off a bit earlier than they might otherwise have done.

The conference organisation has contributed to my research in myriad ways. I have made lots of new connections with scholars working in similar fields, renewed existing connections, and found out about work that I knew nothing of before. I had some in-depth discussions with one of the keynote speakers about my work and where it might go in the future, and about the specific challenges of working on gardening and being taken seriously.

The next time I organise an event I would go further in seeking out participants from communities of people of colour, or papers studying such communities. I was struck by this absence when putting together the programme and feel it's not good enough just to shrug and move on. I mentioned this in my introduction to the conference on the day and have as a result received a couple of suggestions of contacts who might open up this possibility. It is, of course, difficult to balance the need to reduce international conference travel with the need to diversify, but I would hope to broaden involvement and topics to include communities of people of colour within Britain and Europe at least.

As a result of the event, I have invited one of the speakers to join a panel that is being put together for the Society for the Social History of Medicine Conference in July 2020. I would not have known about this researcher if I had not organised the conference. I hope that this new network of scholars will create further opportunities for working together in the future.