

CfP FEATHERS conference

Scribes and Inky Fingerprints:

Collaborative and Mediated Authorship in Early Modern English Manuscripts

7 May – 9 May 2025, Leiden University

In early modern England, the production of manuscript texts, whether literary, governmental or legal, was typically a collaborative or “socialized” enterprise, involving both professionals and amateurs. Indeed, the person a modern reader might automatically identify as “the author” rarely exerted sole influence over a text’s production: scribes and manuscript users might repurpose and adjust extracts from earlier literary contexts, while others commissioned intermediaries, such as secretaries or lawyers, to commit their words to paper. At first glance these intermediaries appear either frustratingly anonymous or, as members of a royal secretariat or court of law, institutionalised and thus indistinguishable. Nevertheless, all these contributors leave inky, authorial fingerprints on the final text, fingerprints that may allow us to identify their discrete, individual voices.

This three-day international conference hosted at Leiden University by the ERC Consolidator-funded FEATHERS project, with a keynote by Prof. Daniel Wakelin (Oxford University), aims to bring together researchers working on early modern scribal culture and manuscript production. With a particular focus on three distinct genres of the secular manuscript industry – literary texts, letters and legal records – the conference seeks to explore the agency and influence of scribes, scribblers, secretaries, scribes, and other manuscript users in order to shed light on their role in the production of early modern manuscripts.

We particularly welcome proposals for 20-minute papers (in English) on the following topics:

- Scribes, scribblers, secretaries and other early modern manuscript intermediaries
- The people making use of penmen, particularly those who otherwise left no traces in the archives
- The workings of scriptoria and secretariats
- The collaborative authoring of literary works and/or communal production of miscellanies
- Co-production of letters
- The co-creation of legal records
- Manuscript production and secular scribal culture
- The experience of scribal publication, and how it may have been affected by class, gender, and so forth
- The material underpinnings of scribal publication
- Methods for uncovering the various participants in manuscript production.

We are also open to others formats such as (but not limited to) roundtable discussions, complete panel proposals, and interpretive dance extravaganzas.

Whilst participants will be expected to cover the costs of their own travel, accommodation, and conference registration, there will be a limited number of bursaries available to support early career researchers without access to adequate institutional funding. If you wish to be considered for a bursary, please note this with your proposal and explain why in a short paragraph or so.

Please submit an abstract (max. 300 words) and short biography (max. 100 words) to FEATHERS@hum.leidenuniv.nl by **20 December 2024**. We aim to inform our speakers by 7 February 2025.



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