

# LitSciMed Week – Harwarden, Wales.

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**Louise Jenkins, University of Leeds.**

*The week ...*

I started the week looking forward to the study days but slightly apprehensive about whether I would 'fit' in. I am a midwifery lecturer, undertaking a complete change of direction in undertaking a PhD on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Midwifery Instruments – I am a 'gestating' historian of medicine! So far my PhD has involved a massive learning curve for me, and I was very aware that the week would be equally challenging.

I was the first person to arrive, but took the opportunity to continue with some of the (very extensive!) pre-course reading. Other people soon started to arrive – Colin and Grace were next, and it was reassuring to meet other people. Everyone was friendly and keen to find out what everyone else was working on. The variety was amazing, so many interesting studies to find out about! The first day seemed to whizz past.

In the evening I was the first person to give a presentation on my study. Again, I was nervous, but felt okay when I started to talk. In the end I ran out of time – I had tried to fit too much in to ten minutes. It was good to start to think about my study from a different perspective. The feedback from others, both other students and lecturers encouraged me to look at my study from a wider perspective.

The week seemed to fly past. We had lots of different lectures from many different disciplines. The week had a strong focus on literature. It snowed early in the week and St Deniols is a beautiful library, in a very picturesque location.

*What have I learnt/enjoyed?*

I had started the week feeling worried that I would be 'out of my depth' in this group. I found some of the literary discussion difficult because it tackled subjects I had never heard of – let alone considered my thoughts on! I come from a medical/science background and haven't really thought about literature since I left school – I didn't much enjoy it then. I must have mellowed in my old age because I found the discussion thought provoking and very relevant.

We were asked the next day by Sharon to identify which discipline we belonged to – I was very clear that I am a Midwife, however, the question made me consider my study more widely. My study is about the history of medicine and particularly the history of childbirth, and I need to reconsider my sense of belonging. I am still a midwife and will always be, however I really need to develop a dual identity. My study absolutely crosses literature science and medicine. I had considered the medical perspective, but had not yet considered the wider scientific or literary considerations. This wider understanding of childbirth in the 19<sup>th</sup> will help me to understand the context of the developments of the instruments I am studying.

I found the lecture from Stephanie Snow which gave an overview of the History of Medicine absolutely invaluable. I am starting to have a reasonable working knowledge of childbirth in the 19<sup>th</sup>

Century, but the overview helped again to provide context about the wider medical developments and 'scientification' of medicine that occurred at the time. The trip on Friday to the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester also helped to provide wider context about the changes that were occurring in society, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I really enjoyed the residential aspect of the course. I am undertaking my PhD part time, and I am very aware that other things, particularly family and work, have the potential to impact on my time for my PhD. The residential course allowed concentrated thought and discussion with other students which allowed the class discussions to continue. It made me consider whether I should attempt to group my PhD time into more concentrated blocks. I am still considering!

The different disciplines of participants on the course was also an advantage. I have started to read some of the books that were recommended to me during the course.

### *What did I not enjoy?*

I found the week really long and by the end my brain hurt!! The days were really concentrated, and gave us lots to think about, which was actually incredibly tiring. However, I understand that time was too valuable to waste. It was a relief when a couple of lectures were cancelled due to snow to give us some breathing space, although it would have been useful to have the lectures.

The style of presentation of lectures was also new to me. Many of the lectures were read from prepared notes, which I was assured is normal as a style of presentation. I found it somewhat difficult to concentrate for the length of an hour or so at a time. I think another contributory factor to this was because most of the material was new to me.

### *Overall*

The discussion during the week gave me several key things to consider;

- How is Childbirth and in particular the use of instruments depicted in literature and other forms of media such as paintings?
- When using textbooks as sources of evidence who were the intended readers? What can the book as a material object tell us?
- What were some of the wider developments in literature, science and medicine that had an impact on Childbirth and the development and use of objects?
- So far, I have considered evidence from men-midwives in the form of journal articles and textbooks – how am I going to consider the views of others – in particular midwives and the women who experienced the use of instruments?

I really enjoyed the week in Hawarden and found it gave me lots to think about. I am really looking forward to the next one!