

# AN EXPLORATION OF THE USEFULNESS OF DRAWING AS A TOOL IN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: Wallington Hall, Class, and the 20th Century Country Estate

**AIMS** - To explore how people's ideas of class, time, and identity are shaped by family photographs; and to consider how my artistic practice, which has a focus on drawing, could be used as a tool to highlight or uncover this.

After early research in the Tyne and Wear Archives and the Keighley Local Studies Library in West Yorkshire, my work over the summer developed a specific focus on the photograph albums belonging to the Trevelyan Family and their tenants on the estate of Wallington Hall, Northumberland, which are held in the Philip Robinson Library. In 1928, a photograph album containing images of every tenant family living on the country estate was gifted to owner of the estate Sir Charles Trevelyan, Liberal and Labour MP, and his wife Mary Trevelyan née Bell as a Silver Wedding gift. My research became preoccupied with this collection of images, which I began to use as a tool to explore socialism, landlordism, and class in the early 20th century.



**Sketch:** From Keighley Local Studies Library in collection 'BK273— Unidentified Family Photos'



**Sketch:** From 'Album of Photos and Ephemera: Vol.14 CPT/PA/13' - Silver Wedding celebrations at Wallington Hall, January 1929



**Sketch:** From 'Album of Photographs: Wallington Tenants CPT/PA/39' - Mr and Mrs Armstrong, Mary and Tommy

**METHODOLOGY** - I began the project by reading around the subject of photography and the archive. Particularly relevant was Annette Kuhn's book "Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination which explores "connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and 'personal' memory."<sup>1</sup> Using these tenets as set out by Kuhn as a framework for viewing images, I quickly realised that the images in the Wallington tenants photograph album were not "family photographs" but rather photographs of families, which changed the context of the work from an exploration of how representation affects personal history to that of social history. I thus became concerned with delving into the nuances of what it means to depict primarily working and lower middle class families in object form to a landowner. The drawings I made attempted to represent the photographs in a way that would possibly uncover hidden markers of class and position in a way that didn't exploit the people within them. I noticed recurring patterns within the images that hinted at elements of each person's life—the styles of shoes worn and men's jackets were particularly key to this, subtle differences presenting hints of what their situations could have been. I experimented with making drawings that highlighted this using a range of mediums and techniques, including pen, pencil, brush and ink, oil paint, and monoprinting (a method of printmaking that involves transferring the image to paper using a plate of ink). I also sought to work in a way that connected to the materiality of the archive and original images.



**Selection of completed drawings:**

- L-R - Mr Carmon, Nellie, and dog.
- Miss J. Mitcheson.
- Mr and Mrs Robinson.
- Mr and Mrs Hall, Basil, Lilian, and Queenie the dog.

**OUTCOMES** - Ultimately, I struggled to create a clear or definite conceptual "outcome" in this work. Whilst I produced a series of nine brush and ink drawings for exhibition, I found it hard to represent through images alone the complexities of the images and the situation of the tenants on the Wallington Estate. Charles Trevelyan considered himself a socialist, declaring in 1917 that "the root of all evil is economic privilege", and indeed made a great number of changes to the estate to improve the welfare of the tenants, including setting up an early form of child benefit; but he still benefitted from and maintained the oppressive class hierarchy of the 20th century and landowning that he supposedly disapproved of.<sup>2</sup> On returning to my exploration of drawing's usefulness, I found that in the context of this project at least, it ultimately felt like perhaps not the most conducive mode for analysing Wallington and the political situation surrounding it. Whilst making the drawings, I also produced a "transcript" of the photograph album, wherein I wrote a description of every single person in each image, tracking through the entire album. This in itself almost felt like a form of drawing, but with words rather than visuals. I have made this document into a collection of zines (a small, usually DIY publication) for the audience to view or take away from the exhibition of the drawings, as I feel that the contextual information is crucially important to the understanding of my resulting drawings. This would suggest that whilst drawing is a useful tool for illustrating visual facts, in this context at least, it is perhaps not always a medium with the most benefits—I feel I learnt more about the images when describing them with words.

With thanks to the staff of the Philip Robinson Library Special Collections, Professor Christopher Jones for supervising the project, and Newcastle University for funding it.

1— Kuhn, Annette. *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*. London and New York: Verso, 1995.  
2— Trevelyan, Laura. *A Very British Family: The Trevelyans and Their World*. London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., 2006.