ENGLISH HERITAGE

SPEAKING WITH SHADOWS

Transcript of Series 2, Episode 1: Bolsover Castle's Philosopher Duchess

Josie: Welcome to Series 2 of Speaking with Shadows, the podcast that listens to the people that history forgot. I'm Josie Long and I'm back – a bit later than intended what with one thing and another – but here I am, packing my bags once again to bring you stories from the shadowy corners of English Heritage's historic places.

From an 18th-century workhouse in the Suffolk countryside, we'll step into 17th-century Northamptonshire to explore the life of a servant whose heroic actions became the subject of local legend. We will hear of the heroes who came to British shores from Poland to play a vital role in Allied victory in the Second World War. I can't wait to share these stories with you.

Time now for our first stop. Once again, English Heritage have sent me on an adventure to uncover a little told corner of our history.

> [Clip] A Dialogue between a Bountiful Knight and a Castle Ruined in War
> Towers on my head, like crowns were placed
> Walls, like a girdle, went about my waist
> And on this pleasant hill, he set me high,
> To view the veils below as they do lie.
> By wars, I'm now destroyed. All rights, o'erpower'd.
> Beauty and innocency are devoured.
> Before these wars, I was in my full prime
> And held the greatest beauty in my time.

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Josie: It's not often that you get to hear the voice of a castle, but then the author of that poem wasn't exactly one for following convention.

This is Speaking with Shadows and I'm Josie Long, here at English Heritage's Bolsover Castle, near Chesterfield. Today, I'm getting into the head of the unique and prolific woman writer who made this castle speak. Margaret Cavendish: poet, philosopher and author of one of the first ever sci-fi novels. A student of the human mind and the spirit.

I've just walked through the outer walls of the medieval castle, trying to imagine what our protagonist would have felt like arriving here for the first time in the 17th century. Margaret wrote that poem,

which is called ‘A Dialogue between a Bountiful Knight and a Castle Ruined in War’, before she’d even seen Bolsover. But the description is accurate even today; the castle was ruined by the Civil War and it sits at the peak of a hill that overlooks the valley and the former mining village of Bolsover. But you can see for miles and miles, its epic, panoramic, sweeping views. And then coming through the gate, you can see a stone tower with turrets and enclosing wall. Visitors are walking around, people are taking in the views and to my left there’s a very handsome sandy-coloured range of buildings. A really beautiful hall that you can imagine at one point was very grand but is now just left in ruins.

In today’s episode we’re off to 1660. It’s the beginning of the Restoration era. England is rebuilding its identity and reflecting upon all the turbulence of the English Civil War. And Margaret Cavendish, who’s exuberant and unusual and wild, showed up on the scene to turn heads and ruffle feathers in her own personal revolution. Margaret’s journey would challenge conventions for women, philosophy, dress, performance and fiction in the 17th century. Before we explore Bolsover, let’s start with this conversation I had with English Heritage’s Senior Properties Historian Dr Megan Leyland.

Josie: Megan, you’ve spent quite a while reading the work of Margaret Cavendish, haven’t you? What is it about her story that is so important?

Megan: She was an incredibly prolific writer with a really broad range of interests and I think really confounds some of our traditional assumptions about what women did in the early modern period. As well as being the author of one of the first works of science fiction and one of the first novels in English, she wrote poems, plays, commentary, letters. In essence she could turn her hand to anything, pretty much. And they address such broad subjects such as gender, politics, science, philosophy, animal cruelty, you know, it’s got everything you could possibly want. And the woman behind these works was one that pushed boundaries in her writing, but also in points in her life as well. She played with gender norms with her clothing as well as in her writing. She wanted to be original, singular, like no other, and you know, she published under her own name, unusual. Well, as she put it, she published under the ‘thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, the Duchess of Newcastle’. I mean, I need to get a better email signature. That’s fantastic!

Josie: Yeah, incredible!

Megan: And she even found her way to be the first woman to attend a meeting of the Royal Society, a collection of the great scientists of the day and of course all male at that time. So, you know at a time when women were at best comely wives, Margaret carved her own place out, in both this world and in her imagined and written world. And she used all the power and influence she could to muster for a seat at the table. So, important in so many ways!

Josie: Yeah, what a powerful, creative spirit. Let's talk about her – where she started out. What was her early life like, and do we know that much about it?

Megan: Well, we do know quite a bit about it and actually, some of it in her own words: she wrote a biography. She was born Margaret Lucas and became Margaret Cavendish when she married. She was born near Colchester in Essex in about 1623 to a wealthy, Royalist family, which was not so great for them when the Civil War broke out in 1642, because Colchester was definitely Parliamentarian not Royalist. So she ended up heading to Oxford where King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria had set up court, and she became a maid of honour to the queen. And she reflects on her time in this role in her autobiography and she sort of, it's something which comes out in a lot of her works actually, that she describes herself as quite bashful, which doesn't seem to match with the introduction we've just given her. When she became a maid of honour to the queen – so that's Queen Henrietta Maria – she felt that her foundations had gone, her family wasn't around her any more. And she wrote, 'I had heard that the world was apt to lay aspersions, even on the innocent, for which I durnst neither look up with my eyes, nor speak, nor be any way sociable.' And she travels with Queen Henrietta Maria in 1644 to France, where Henrietta Maria sets up her own court away from the turbulence of the Civil War back home.

Josie: How did she go from Paris to Bolsover?

Megan: While she was in Paris in 1645, Margaret met the romantic (sometimes too romantic) horse-enthusiast William Cavendish, the owner of Bolsover Castle. He was 52, she was 22, 30 years between them, but this didn't stop a courtship which developed. Like Margaret, William was a staunch Royalist. After the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 he was made Commander-in-Chief of the northern Royalists. And after some success in battle, he suffered a catastrophic defeat in 1644 at Marston Moor, which brought him into exile and meant that Margaret and his paths could cross. And they did get married, there was a lot of gossip and rumours going around and some disapproval about their relationship, including that of Queen Henrietta Maria, but the marriage took place. And actually, this period was quite a period of growth for Margaret. She really pursued her addiction for writing, which she always noted; she was one inclined to contemplation and listening at a young age and with the encouragement of William Cavendish, pursued her intellectual interests. We didn't quite get to Bolsover, but we do eventually at the Restoration in 1660 when the couple would return to William Cavendish's estates in the Midlands.

Josie: What had happened to the castle and what repairs did they have to make?

Megan: Margaret and William would have returned to something which, well, was new for Margaret, but for William must have been quite shocking and very upsetting. Bolsover was surrendered to Parliamentarian forces after William had gone into exile and garrisoned until 1649. And at this point it

was slighted, so deliberately damaged to stop it being used by Royalist forces. You know, it's getting expensive to keep people there – let's just make it indefensible so that no one's going to use it as a stronghold. The outworks, garden, forecourt walls were demolished, and doors and windows removed to make it uninhabitable.

Josie: Tell me a bit about, as well, about the Little Castle.

Megan: So, the Little Castle is situated to the far end of the site. You pass through the great court, and then you see these wonderful garden walls, which enclose it, and as you go in there is this incredible little toy box-like castle standing right on the precipice of the edge of the hill which Bolsover sits on. So, one of the really striking things about the Little Castle is, when you walk inside, it is covered in wall paintings of all varieties. You've got biblical imagery, Greek myths and legends – Hercules is jumping out of the wall somewhere at you – images from stories, and these were invitations for the visitor to explore, to interpret and even interact with these wall paintings. And it's a really ingeniously planned building, an intimate space for performance, creativity, music, plays, poetry, it had rooms for dining, feasting, a garden with a series of outside spaces.

Josie: You can really see how this particular setting would have been more inspiring and more encouraging creatively for Margaret than perhaps other places that her husband owned, like Welbeck Abbey?

Megan: Yeah, I think they did probably write wherever they were to be perfectly honest! I don't doubt that at Welbeck they were scribbling away, and you know, Margaret always talks about she can't write things down quick enough, it just flows out of her brain and she needs to put it down, you know, you get this sense that it must have actually been a lot to have that going on in your mind all the time. And Bolsover, definitely at the time, is perceived as this place of creativity. One contemporary describes it as the muse's hill, which I kind of love, it kind of sums it up.

Josie: Well and also, thinking of her as a young woman, you know, she does step into a great deal of power and eccentricity, but that must have been something that she had to fight for and, build up, you know?

Megan: Yeah, I kind of wonder in some way in her writings and the way she sort of created a persona and a life for herself through and in those writings, whether they were something of a retreat for her there. We talked about her being bashful, but that actually when she goes out dressed up and you know this woman who wears clothes that no one else has, because she designs them, or she arrives at Bolsover, in this other world – you kind of see her constantly making a space.

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Josie: Onwards to the Little Castle now and the creative, artistic, bustling heart of Bolsover. It's there that I'm going to meet someone who can guide me through Margaret's inner world.

I'm here with Dr Emma Wilkins, and she's an expert on Margaret Cavendish. But before we talk properly, I just want to flag that we are in the castle itself. And in the next room, there's somebody giving a tour. So we're in the Marble Closet, which is the withdrawing room from a really beautiful socialising space. And I have to mention that above us there is some really quite risqué artwork.

Emma, it's really nice to meet you, thanks for coming to talk to me.

Emma: It's an absolute pleasure to be here, thank you for having me.

Josie: Ah, thanks. Well, let's talk about Margaret. She seems to me to be somebody who is not easily definable. You can't put her into one box of just the scientist, just a philosopher, just the writer.

Emma: Well, you're absolutely right. I mean, she's a sort of riddle, a mystery and an enigma because she was a polymath, so she doesn't really fit into any particular one box. She wrote poetry, she wrote plays, she wrote works of natural philosophy, which was a sort of form of proto-science, and she wrote orations and rhetorical speeches. Also, a sort of fragment of an autobiography which tells us a little bit about her life. And she was one of the few women of her age to do this, and also to publish it, because it was very unusual in those days for women to publish their works. Aristocratic women often wrote, but they generally circulated their writings among other members of the aristocracy. I mean, it was highly unusual for women to be writers in the 17th century. I think they accounted for about 0.5% of the total number of publications. Although, during the Civil War, when censorship eased, there is more of an explosion of writing generally and women's writing did increase.

Josie: It must have felt like an incredibly difficult world to navigate for her at that time.

Emma: Really hard.

Emma: But Margaret had a huge advantage, was that she was a duchess. And rank was so important in the 17th century and with her rank came unimaginable riches, as you can probably see from looking around you. This is a family that had an enormous reserve to draw on, even after the Civil War when their estates had been ravaged. She definitely benefited from being a duchess. Although, of course a lot of criticism that she faced in her own age and later was linked to the fact that she was a woman. So contemporaries dismissed her as mad and unseemly.

Josie: What did it mean at the time, if people were dismissing a woman as 'mad' (in inverted commas here).

Emma: So she didn't seem to mind so much being thought of as eccentric or different. In fact, she made a positive virtue of not being a follower of fashion. She said, I'm going to set my own fashion and design my own clothes and wear what I like. But it was the idea that she was not original that really worried her. Because she thought, if people thought that her natural philosophy had come from Hobbes, or Descartes, or her husband, or her brother-in-law, who were all natural philosophers at the time to varying degrees of success, that her works would be forgotten and her identity would be erased from history.

Josie: Ah, so she really wanted to strike out her own sort of claim.

Emma: Very much so. Yeah, she wanted to be remembered in 'after-ages', as she put it, 'I want a glorious and everlasting fame', and she came up with this wonderful phrase, she said 'Though I cannot be Henry V or Charles II, yet I will try to be Margaret I.'

Josie: Wow!

Emma: That gives you a clue as to the kind of strength of character that she had.

Josie: And how did Margaret's relationship with William affect her writing? He did encourage her a lot, didn't he?

Emma: He very much did, you're absolutely right. I think without his support and encouragement, it's difficult to see how she could have become the prolific writer that she did. You know, she published more than 20 volumes of poetry and plays and philosophy and so on. Often in her prefaces, she referred to the fact that William was her greatest supporter and he actually wrote sometimes himself prefaces to her works.

Josie: That's very beautiful.

Emma: It's so sweet.

Josie: Megan was telling me about Margaret's turbulent early life during the Civil War. Do you think that that informed her as a writer?

Emma: I absolutely do – how could it not? I mean she had this exile's mentality which buttressed her sort of gender disadvantage, if you like, that she was an outsider looking in. When she came back in 1651, she was accompanied by her brother-in-law, Sir Charles Cavendish. And that was when she decided to sit down and write her first two books: *Poems and Fancies* ...

Josie: Her first two books! It's so impressive!

Emma: Yes, I know, go girl! And *Philosophical Fancies*, which was the companion text. Both published in 1653, in which she outlined sometimes in poetry but also in prose, the first tentative beginnings of her theory of matter. The first book I mentioned, *Poems and Fancies*, is remembered now for the atomist poems, where she drew on classical atom theory – the views of Epicurus and so on – to outline how she saw all the objects in the world as being composed of atoms, and atoms in void space, whizzing around forming themselves into all the objects in the world that we see before us: a chair, a book, a pen, a person even. Although she later resiled from aspects of atomism, she didn't entirely throw it off. So I think this period in the early 1650s was a crucial one in her intellectual development. So she came back in 1660 with her husband, or shortly afterwards, and led this retired life where she really got to grips with a lot of reading. I think we have a bill for the books that she bought for about £39, I think it was.

Josie: Gosh, that's a lot of money!

Emma: Which in those days would have given her about 200 books.

Josie: So she gave herself a beautiful library when she was finally settled.

Emma: Absolutely. She devoted herself to scholarship.

Josie: Let's talk a bit about how she saw herself and how other people saw her.

Emma: Yeah, well, how she fitted into the intellectual scene at the time is really interesting because Margaret lived through, not just one revolution, but two. So there was the English Revolution, the Civil Wars that we talked about earlier, and she also lived through the Scientific Revolution, which was this extraordinary explosion of new ideas, new ways of thinking about doing scientific things. And she thought of herself, not as a scientist, which is a term that didn't come into use really until the Victorian era, but as a natural philosopher. And she wanted to be remembered for her natural philosophy and for her contribution to thinking about the natural world and how it all works. What is matter, what is motion, do trees perceive in the way that people perceive? She explored all these ideas and many more in the volumes of natural philosophy that she published in the 1660s. In 1667 she visited London, where she penetrated the inner sanctum, if you like, of experimental science, which was the Royal Society in London, where all the leading thinkers, natural philosophers, mathematicians and so on of the day were meeting.

Josie: That must have been incredibly exciting for her, like to reach, it's like reaching a pinnacle in a way.

Emma: It was the most extraordinary visit and there was a huge ripple of excitement throughout London society about it. When she came to London, because she was famous for being quite a snazzy dresser and quite an unusual person, so her coach was elaborate and black and silver and incredibly different from everybody else's coach.

Josie: Like an alien from the future!

Emma: Scores of children would run after her down the street, and Samuel Pepys got so excited he wrote in his diary about her. He spent a morning or an afternoon chasing after Margaret Cavendish. 'If only I could catch a glimpse of her', he wrote. Wow, and eventually he did, and he, oh God, Samuel Pepys! All he could focus on, this extraordinary woman, who'd written these books of philosophy dealing with some really major questions in thought. Do you know how he described her? He said, 'She's a good comely woman.'

Josie: Thanks, mate.

Emma: And if that doesn't tell you everything you need to know about Pepys!

Josie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And about sort of people not engaging with the full value of this person.

Emma: Her ideas, not engaging with her ideas but focusing on her appearance.

Josie: But also what a waste that is to human civilisation, you know, what a stupid waste. Yeah, it's just some bloke being like 'she seems good-looking to me!'

Emma: Yes, so of course, although it is immensely frustrating for us, looking back, in a way she was feeding that myth herself. She had this thing about not being thought original and she wanted to be a setter of fashion not a follower of fashion. So she literally did design her own clothes and wore the latest fashions and unusual subversions of fashions when she visited the Royal Society. She wore this extraordinary sort of male, I think it's called a justaucorps – a long jacket – which would have been more usually associated with male dress and she had a very long train, which you were only supposed to have if you were a member of the royal family. So she was playing with all sorts of tropes.

Josie: It's very powerful in both instances, isn't it? It's sort of claiming things that she's not technically allowed to claim.

Emma: So right. Yes, she really enjoyed that kind of playing with her own image, I think, and subverting …

Josie: Expectations, I suppose.

Emma: Yeah, expectations, that's a good word. So, on another occasion instead of greeting people with curtsies, like you are supposed to do if you were a woman, obviously, in the 17th century, instead she gave this great flourish and a bow. So she bowed like a man, why did she do that?

Josie: But can we, because I've got this quote here that Mary Evelyn wrote. Saying she was surprised to find so much extravagancy and vanity in any person to be confined within four walls. And what makes me sad is here's actually somebody who has immense power, and self-determination and style but because she's a woman, it's seen as like vanity – inappropriate. Whereas if she was a man I think it might be seen as greatness or genius.

Emma: I think you're right. And Mary Evelyn even was one of her harshest critics. I mean, not all women thought like Mary Evelyn. She did have supporters and there is evidence that she was writing for a female audience, at least to some extent. Women were interested in scientific things. Guess what, women were interested in knowledge, you know, it's not exactly, it shouldn't be a surprise. But what was unusual was for them to publish natural philosophy. So Margaret was the first English woman to publish a body of natural philosophy and being the first woman to do anything, you know, carries its own problems. But actually, Margaret Cavendish's harshest critics were the men who derided her and who scorned her and laughed at her, and she was brave to go ahead.

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Josie: Thank you so much, Emma. You'd have to have a pretty thick skin to deal with all of that criticism. And it sounds like Margaret had an interesting relationship with it, perhaps sometimes even courting it by taking so much pride in being different. But it's interesting that she also describes herself as shy. It's almost as if the private and the public lives of this woman allowed her to perform different personas – her dress an armour or even a diversion from the criticism and the objectification that follows a woman in a man's world.

I want to know more about why this singularity was so important to Margaret. She was clearly notorious amongst her peers, but what did people say about her theories and how was her science received? I'm going to find out more in a moment. Perhaps here at Bolsover, the country retreat for the family, Margaret was safe to be herself and give space and flight to her ideas and imagination. In 1666 she penned one of the world's first ever science fiction novels. Have a listen to this extract from her novel, *The Blazing World*, whilst I have a nose about the castle.

> The Duchess answered that she spent most of her time in the study of Natural Causes and Effects, which was her chief delight and pastime; and that she loved a discourse sometimes with the most Learned persons of that world. I Endeavour, said she, to be as singular as I can: for it

> argues but a mean Nature to imitate others. I had rather appear worse, in Singularity, then better in the Mode.

Josie: I've been sent here to the Pillar Parlour, which used to be a fancy dining room for the Cavendishes, in their Little Castle, in their spare castle, which is what this was. And I'm joined by Dr Keith Allen, who's a professor of philosophy from the University of York, to talk a bit more about Margaret's contribution to science and ideas in the 17th century. Hi Keith. Nice to meet you.

Keith: Hello.

Josie: We've just heard that extract from *The Blazing World*. On the one hand, it was this sort of fantastical piece of fiction, but on the other hand, it meant a lot more to Margaret, didn't it?

Keith: Yeah, so *Blazing World* is an extraordinary work. It's often described as one of the first novels in English, about 50 years before Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. It's one of the first ever works of science fiction, about 150 years before Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and it's also a feminist manifesto. But at the same time, it's a kind of fictional vehicle for Cavendish to explore central scientific and philosophical ideas of the day. And also, say something about her own views on this subject.

Josie: So, it's totally packed.

Keith: Yes. Yeah. It does a lot of things. It was originally published in 1666 as an appendix to a work called *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. And in this work, Cavendish was criticising members of the Royal Society which was newly formed and kind of key figures such as Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke, who was his assistant. *The Blazing World* presents Cavendish's criticisms of experimental philosophy in a very different way. So *Blazing World* describes a utopian paradise and it's populated by different talking animals that represent different academic and scientific disciplines. So for instance, we've got ape men who are chemists. We've got spider men who are mathematicians. Yes, and then the experimental philosophers, people like Boyle and Hooke and the other members of the Royal Society, they are bear men.

Josie: Did they recognise themselves in it? And did they take kindly to it?

Keith: Probably not, although, it's very clear that this is directed at them. During a central passage of the story, Cavendish has an alter ego called the Empress and she summons representatives of the different academic disciplines in turn and basically just criticises their ideas.

Josie: So how did she react to kind of people like Hooke and Boyle and Descartes in turn, like how does she take on each of their ideas and their practices?

Keith: When it comes to the experimental philosophers, the bear men, they come along and they show her their telescopes and their microscopes and she basically criticises what these telescopes and microscopes are able to do.

Josie: She's not impressed.

Keith: She's not impressed at all. So they come along for instance, and they show the microscope. And so one of the things that they show is an enlarged image of a flea and a louse.

Josie: Oh, so we know that that's what Robert Hooke did.

Josie: Exactly. Yeah. So this is a reference to Robert Hooke's kind of iconic image in his *Micrographia* in 1665, which is just a year before Cavendish describes the Empress as almost falling into a swoon; and she criticises them because it turns out these microscopic images are going to be no use for the beggars who actually have lice and fleas.

Josie: What kind of an impact did her ideas make with relation to other people of the time?

Keith: At the time her ideas weren't really taken up. So, she was trying really hard to make an impact in the kind of the intellectual environment that she was working with. So she sent copies of her books out to key intellectual figures of the day and also to kind of key institutions as well. But there was never really any discussion in print or at least not explicitly of her criticisms, the Royal Society or also of her own positive philosophical and scientific views.

Josie: Ah right, so she was kind of shut out in a way.

Keith: A little bit. Yeah, so she was, I mean, it was definitely a male-dominated environment and it was seen to be unusual that a woman was interested in subjects like science and philosophy and politics which Margaret was. And these weren't really considered to be kind of fitting subjects for a woman. Now, she wasn't alone. There were other women in the 17th century who were working in similar areas – less so on what we'd consider to be science, more so philosophy, but it was certainly unusual at the time.

Josie: So tell me more about the kinds of philosophical ideas that she was reacting to.

Keith: So this was a period during which our modern scientific understanding of the world was really starting to develop, and there are a number of different theories around at the time that tried to explain how the natural world works and how different parts of the natural world work. So for

instance, the movements of the stars and the planets, the growth of plants, nature of air and light, things like that. One of the key developments in this period was the development of a new theory of matter. And there was this idea that we can explain a very large part of how the natural world works in purely physical terms. As if the natural universe is kind of like a large machine, that works a little bit like a mechanical clock. And so that was one of the one of the ideas that she was responding to.

Josie: What was her impression of that school of thought?

Keith: Well, so she disagreed really strongly with this rather austere view of the natural world, according to which it's this kind of large, unthinking machine. So she insisted instead that all matter, even physical matter, has some degree of perception. It's got some degree of reason, and also it's got this ability to move itself.

Josie: Who were the other women who were contributing to science and to philosophy at the same sort of time?

Keith: There are number of women philosophers who were working at the same time. So just to give you a couple of names, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Anne Conway, Damaris Masham, Catharine Trotter Cockburn and Mary Astell. So I can give you a little bit more detail about some of them. So Elizabeth of Bohemia, for instance, was a friend of Descartes. She didn't leave any formal writings of her own, but Descartes described her incomparable sharpness, and his *Passions of the Soul* was developed from their letters.

Josie: Wow, so she was sort of an intellectual sparring partner for them.

Keith: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah, so they correspond and discuss their ideas in letter form. So someone else who's interesting to mention is Anne Conway, so she's described as a woman learned beyond her sex and she was a contemporary of Margaret's. So she worked more closely within principles established by other philosophers and presented her work more systematically, which isn't really something that Margaret's known for, and perhaps because of this she was slightly better respected perhaps than Margaret.

Josie: But also that to me speaks to kind of historically male criticisms of historically female writing like they're like, no no, unless you're setting things out in the way that we've decided is the way to set things out, we won't take you seriously.

Keith: No one actually responded to it. At least not explicitly in print.

Josie: Gosh. That's really, it must have been really hard going for her to sort of be trying so hard to engage and to contribute and being kind of rebuffed like that.

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Josie: Talking to Keith about women philosophers of the 17th century, it was really interesting to see how many of them already had wealth and connections that they could harness as a platform for their ideas. Given that formal education for women at that time focused on needlework and accomplishments and all that stuff, it makes you wonder how many other women were thinking along such lines and self-educating themselves as Margaret did, but without that platform. It also makes you wonder how much of the work done by male philosophers, who are held up, has been actually moved forward and developed by women who were working out of the public eye, in letters and conversations that we don't have records of.

Margaret was exceptional in that she did publish. And for that reason, we have a figure to hang our perceptions on. She may not have given the most systematic arguments, and she may not have shown interest in fitting into everyone else's conventions, but she has given us a record of women participating in our history of ideas in science and she doesn't apologise for it. She brings her own ideas, her own concerns and her own passions. Her story is one of an ambitious woman carving out a place in history and even just her insistence that she should have a place at the table is such a giant contribution.

Also, I feel for her because she's somebody who really tried to connect with her peers in terms of her work and her ideas, and quite often those connections were snubbed and ignored. It must have been frustrating and exhausting for her to have a brain that's constantly inventing and appraising the fabric of human consciousness. And at the same time, having to jump through hoops simply to be heard on the subject. And even when she does, just to be described in terms of her looks, or to be dismissed in terms of her looks. It's definitely still the case that it's more acceptable for a man to be eccentric and brilliant, you know, so many ways that Margaret might have been criticised would have praised in a man.

Margaret seems to be challenging and subverting this in her stubborn singularity, causing society to this day to ask questions about how it values ideas on the merits of their speaker. In the end though, there's one place where Margaret has the last word and that's in the legacy of her writings, which continue to confound, delight and challenge us today.

On the next episode of Speaking with Shadows:

> [clip] It's very easy, particularly if you've read *Oliver Twist*, to think that picture you get, you know, of this big, gloomy, cruel workhouse was how it always was. And that's, I think, unfair.

Josie: You can find more stories from hidden corners of history by following this podcast and checking out our back catalogue of episodes, or just go to the website, at english-heritage.org.uk/speakingwithshadows.

I hope you've enjoyed meeting the amazing people we've met in this series and are inspired to visit some of these places yourself. If you think this story should be heard, share this podcast on your social media with the hashtag #speaking with shadows. I'm Josie Long and thanks for listening to Speaking with Shadows.