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Women in the Lacock archives

Synopsis of Paper delivered at the West of England and South Wales Women's History Network Spring Study Day Study Day 21 March 2015: WOMEN IN WILTSHIRE HISTORY: Sources at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre,

My talk looked at the women who are present in an archive collection I am cataloguing for a project called Lacock Unlocked. The archive is of the Lacock estate, a National Trust abbey and village near Chippenham, and we have records from before the abbey was founded to almost the present day. The Lacock estate had several women involved in the running of it through its time, from its foundress, Ela Countess of Salisbury, to the woman who eventually gave it to the National Trust, Matilda Theresa Talbot. I sought to look at the representation of the key women in Lacock's history, who included Ela, Olive Sharrington 1550-1646, Martha Davenport in the 18th century, Lady Elisabeth Fox-Strangways in the 19th century, and Matilda Talbot in the 20th. All these women held Lacock either as abbess, owner outright or owner in trust, and all of them played key roles in the development of Lacock's history. Martha Davenport, for instance, held the estate in trust for her son but ran it solely after her husband's death in 1781, and she can be credited with making several key decisions to try and save the estate from ruin. Lady Elisabeth similarly had to try and keep the estate going for her son who inherited it at the age of only 6 months.

I also looked briefly at the women who were not owners or responsible for the estate, but who are well represented in the archives. The collection is being catalogued in a lot of detail and this has meant that we are able to provide researchers with lots of possible resources for looking at particular women or activities of women. Therefore lots of information can be found about women who are involved in business, for example.

The Lacock archive will be catalogued as collection number 2664 and will hopefully be available to the public for research in the summer.