



# WRITING UNDER STRESS

*THE MEANING AND  
MATERIALITY OF  
PAUPER LETTERS*

VENUE:

Carlisle Archive Centre

DATE AND TIME:

16 APRIL 2026,  
10AM TO 4.15PM

*FREE WORKSHOP*

Pauper Letters are a fascinating historical source. They were written in their thousands by paupers to apply for, or negotiate the terms of, relief under the old poor law in England and Wales (1601-1834). In the past, historians have used them extensively to write new and important 'histories from below'; but up to now they have tended not to look beyond the text in order to understand key issues such as how paupers sourced paper and ink, and what it *really* meant for often barely literate writers to put pen to paper.

Join our team of specialists for a one-day workshop when we will truly get 'under the skin' of these enigmatic documents, looking at materials and methods of construction, and exploring what they can tell us about past lives and popular literacy.

## The Writing Under Stress team:

- Professor Steven King, Historian, *Nottingham Trent University*
- Dr Paul Garside, Conservation Scientist, *University of Glasgow*
- Dr Peter Jones, Historian, *Nottingham Trent University*

To book for this FREE event, please use the following link:

[WUS Eventbrite](#)

or contact Peter Jones for further information on:

[peter.jones02@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:peter.jones02@ntu.ac.uk)

**Writing Under Stress: 16 April 2026, Carlisle Record Office, Petheril Bank Road, Carlisle CA1 3AJ**

*N.B. This workshop is particularly suitable for those with an interest in conservation science, archive practice, and cross-disciplinary approaches to historical sources. However, no particular specialism or expertise is required to attend.*

*Please note that repeat workshops will be held at Stricklandgate House in Kendal on 16 and 17 September, 2026. Tickets will be available via Eventbrite closer to the dates, but please contact Peter Jones on the email address above for further details.*

- **10.00-10.15:** Welcome, Introductions, Housekeeping
- **10.15-11.00:** Session 1  
**Pauper letters:** What are they? Why do they exist? Who wrote them? How many survive? How have they been used up to now? *Led by Steve King*
- **11.00-11.15:** Coffee break
- **11.15-12.45:** Session 2  
**The process of writing and sourcing:** Orthography, blots, folds, crossing out, cuts, watermarks, different hands and initial comments on paper and ink. *Led by Peter Jones*
- **12.45-13.30:** Lunch
- **13.30-14.30:** Session 3  
**Conservation science:** perspectives session 1. *Led by Paul Garside*
- **14.30-14.45:** Coffee break
- **14.45-15.45:** Session 4  
**Conservation science:** perspectives session 2. *Team*
- **15.45-16.15:** Plenary Session  
**Why does this matter?** *Led by Steve King*