# Bringing the remarkable history of Margaret

Mind Lab is helping young people see Bolsover Castle in new ways. Credit: © Historic England. English Heritage Trust.

English Heritage's transformative Mind Lab project is challenging assumptions about women, science and the past.

How many women working in science do you know? According to a 2024 survey, a staggering 92% of people couldn't name a single one.

The Margaret Cavendish's Mind Lab project is determined to change that.

Cavendish was a trailblazing 17th-century scientist, philosopher and author. She was the first woman to attend a meeting of the scientific institution, the Royal Society, and wrote one of the earliest works of science fiction, The Blazing World.

Mind Lab is helping share her story more widely and using her ideas to bring a new and engaging perspective to Bolsover Castle in Derbyshire, one of the Cavendish family residences.

Margaret Cavendish.

Working collaboratively with Junction Arts, Writing East Midlands and the University of York, the project is supporting local young people to produce creative writing and artistic responses inspired by her bold questions and imaginative thinking.

These creative contributions will help shape new, family-friendly interpretation, inviting people to see Bolsover – and the wider world – through Margaret's eyes.

## Building community relationships

Strong partnerships with local organisations and community members are at the heart of the project. Their involvement is helping make sure Mind Lab is rooted in Bolsover and will have a lasting impact.

Katy Lewis, Grants and Trusts Manager at English Heritage, says that although Cavendish is a lesser-known public figure, "she lends herself to really authentic co-creation. There are so many fantastic themes in her work to inspire people with. They just naturally get excited when they start learning about her.

"It feels like a step change in the way we're working, because it's been designed with the community from the very start."

## Making science and philosophy more accessible

Cavendish's wide-ranging interests also provide a way to introduce new people to science and philosophy.

For many visitors, these subjects can feel unfamiliar or potentially intimidating, especially in a heritage space where they might not expect to encounter them. Mind Lab's goal is to show that they can be playful, welcoming and for everyone.

Megan Leyland, Senior Curator of History and Project Lead, explains: "We're all philosophers. But the word 'philosophy' can put people off.

"Philosophy is about asking and exploring questions about the world around us. And the questions Margaret asked – like, what are the limits of technology? Do animals think? Do vegetables think? – are still relevant now."

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Cavendish is inspiring children and adults to explore science and philosophy. Credit: © Historic England. English Heritage Trust.

Megan hopes the project will help visitors connect with both science and the past and says: "It's by working together with the interpreters, academics, our communities and our young people that we can draw out those different elements of her story and bring them into the castle."

## Raising voices and rewriting narratives

With women's contributions to history and science still under-acknowledged, Megan believes that creating space for Margaret's voice at Bolsover Castle can pave the way for more unheard stories.

"Women have, of course, always played a vital role in history and in the lives of the sites English Heritage cares for.

“And there's a real present day need to amplify the voices of women who worked in areas that are seen as male-dominated. If we can show that women in the past did work in science or philosophy, that’s really valuable for the present.

“With Margaret, we’re lucky because she wrote so much. But she also had the advantage of status and wealth that others didn’t. We hope the project can become a platform to raise other voices at Bolsover that haven’t had their moment in the sun yet.”

Find out more about Mind Lab at Bolsover Castle and discover other projects helping children and young people to get inspired by heritage.

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Museum of the Moon by Luke Jerram is 6m in diameter and shows the moon’s surface using stunning NASA imagery. Credit: Jenny Harper.

## o mapped the moon

Many visitors have fond memories of the Cascade, but in recent years the flow of water has stopped to prevent further structural decline. Credit: Simon Broadhead.

th’s iconic water feature

Chris O'Donovan.

## Children and young people in heritage good practice guidance