

Servants, Labourers, and the Manorial World: Alternative Perspectives

9th ENCOUNTER conference
9–11 October 2025



Servants, labourers, and the manorial world: Alternative perspectives

The European Network for Country House and Estate Research (ENCOUNTER) is pleased to announce that registration is now open for the 9th ENCOUNTER Conference. The conference is hosted by the network in collaboration with The Danish Research Centre for Manorial Studies and Gammel Estrup – The Danish Manor Museum.

The manor or country house is often viewed exclusively as a stage for the economic and political elite of the past, a setting for splendour, luxury, and self-presentation. However, the world of the manor also included a well-defined hierarchy consisting of landowning families, tenant farmers, servants, craftsmen and labourers, all negotiating the dynamics of power. Ideally, the manor operated as a paternalistic institution built on mutual obligations: masters provided care and protection and subordinates offered work, loyalty and obedience. This relationship was both a practical arrangement and an ideological framework, a power dynamic and a manifestation of social inequality.

These historical structures could however be a source of both resistance and conflict as well as support and benevolence. On a larger scale, country houses became both targets and symbols during major confrontations, from peasant revolts to revolutions and civil wars. On a smaller scale, historical court records reveal conflicts involving servants and owners or the owners' representatives. Conversely, the manor provided the social framework for many people's lives, offering employment, housing, and protection. Country house owners offered patronage and sought to cultivate the religious and moral development of their staff and communities. Loyal service was rewarded with promotions and comfortable living conditions. Manors funded churches, schools, alms-houses, and gave donations. However, the nineteenth century brought dramatic social changes, as industrialisation drew labour and wealth into the urban centres. To what extent were these changes driven by further political developments and societal reforms? Was social change in a rural context a one-way phenomenon dictated by landowners?

The ENCOUNTER conference will explore these dynamics, primarily focusing on a bottom-up perspective, highlighting the master-servant relationship in its full paternalistic scope, and addressing household, villages, rural communities, etc. This includes shedding light on the conditions and material realities for servants and workers, as well as the organisational structures. And to explore conflicts/resistance and limits within the relationship, as well as changes in the nature and conditions of the relationship over time.

The conference will explore these themes through one and a half days of presentations and discussions at Ledreborg Estate near the city of Roskilde in Denmark, followed by one and a half days of field trips to local manor houses.

ENCOUNTER was founded in Denmark in 2015 and has since provided a framework for interaction between scholars and cultural institutions in Europe sharing a professional interest in the research and interpretation of manor and country house history. The conference thus also marks the network's 10th anniversary.

Programme

9–11 October 2025

Ledreborg, Denmark

Thursday, 9 October 2025

9.30 **Arrival Ledreborg Estate/coffee**

10.00 **Welcome**

10.15-10.45 **Keynote**

Aristocratic Servants in 17th Century Sweden: Gender, Recruitment and Career

Svante Norrhem, Lund University

Session 1: Servants

10.50-11.15 *Servants' Property and Material Culture on Swedish Manors, 1770-1870*

Göran Ulväng, Uppsala University

11.15-11.40 *The Organisation of the Household. The Role of High-Ranking Servants at 19th Century Danish Manors*

Signe Boeskov and Søren Broberg Knudsen, The Danish Research Centre for Manorial Studies

11.40-12.10 **Break**

12.10-12.35 *Behind the Scenes of the Manor – Nobility and Servants at the Count's Court in Larvik, Norway*

Aina Aske, Vestfoldmuseene IKS and Lars Jacob Hvinden-Haug, Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU)

12.35-13.00 *Hidden Doors and Secret Passages; Telling the Story of Servants in Eidsvoll House*

Solveig Therese Dahl, Eidsvoll 1814, The Norsk Folkemuseum foundation

13.00 **Lunch**

14.00 **Guided tour Ledreborg**

Session 2: Labour and Estate Community

- 15.10-15.35 *'When the Sun Shines on both Sides of the Hedge': Nineteenth-Century Labour Relations on the English Landed Estate*
Jonathan Finch, University of York
- 15.35-16.00 *The Vodka Distillery in the Estonian Manor and the Changes in Work and Life Conditions of the Peasants in the 19th Century*
Mirje Tammaru, Estonian Academy of Arts
- 16.00-16.25 *Arm Wrestling. Agency and Negotiations between Tenant Farmers and the Big House. An Alternative Perspective based on four 18th Century Estates within the Netherlands*
Gerrit van Oosterom, independent researcher
- 16.55-17.20 *To Each His Own: Relations between the Manor and the Workers on the Estate Primarily as Evidenced by the Buildings*
Tryggve Gestrin, Espoo City Museum
- 17.20-17.45 *Work, Family, Security—the Strategies and Relationships within the Håkansböle Manor Community*
Eeva Kotioja, Vantaa City Museum
- 17.45 **Discussion and break**
- 18.45 **Conference Dinner, Restaurant Herthadalen**



Friday, 10 October 2025

9.00 Arrival Ledreborg Estate/coffee

9.30-10.00 Early Career Keynote

Early Modern Estates as Communities of 'Care': Servants, Tenants and Medical Practice in Rural England, c. 1650-1750

Emma Marshall, University of Birmingham & University of York

Session 3: Care and Crisis

10.05-10.30 *A Manorial World in Miniature?*

The hospital of Laurvig County in the 18th century

Arne Bugge Amundsen, University of Oslo

10.30-10.55 *The State, the Subjects, and the Lord: Conflicts at Ängsö Manor 1690-1710*

Joakim Scherp, Stockholm University and The Riksdag Library

10.55-11.20 **Break**

11.20-11.45 *Caring Beyond the Grave? The Estate of Denis Roest van Alkemade (1720-1791)*

Thijs Boers, Amsterdam Museum and University of Amsterdam

11.45-12.05 *The Irish Country House and the Great Famine*

Ciarán Reilly, Maynooth University

12.05-12.20 Discussion/recapitulation

12.25 **Lunch**

13.40 **Excursion, Gisselfeld and Vallø**

Saturday, 11 October 2025

appr. 8-16 **Excursion, Gjorslev and Gavnø**

Practical details

Conference fee

Full symposium (9–11 October)	2500 DKK
Conference and half-day excursion (9–10 October)	1900 DKK

The fee includes the conference, transportation by bus from local city Roskilde to Ledreborg Estate, excursions, lunch (Thursday–Saturday), and dinner (Thursday–Friday). Accommodation is not included in the price.

Registration and payment

via gammelestrup.dk/shop. The registration deadline is 25 August 2025 .

Accommodation

It is possible to book accommodation in Roskilde at Scandic Roskilde Park. Book via scandichotels.com/roskildepark by using the booking code BDAN081025. The deadline for using the code is 9 September 2025.

Alternative accommodations in Roskilde are Four Points Flex by Sheraton Roskilde (Prindsen), Comwell Roskilde and Roskilde Danhostel.

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Excursions



Gisselsfeld



Vallo

Excursions



Gjorslev



Gavnø

