

CALL FOR PAPERS

SERVANTS, LABOURERS, AND THE MANORIAL WORLD: ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

9th ENCOUNTER conference 9-11 October 2025, Denmark

The European Network for Country House and Estate Research (ENCOUNTER) is pleased to invite proposals for papers for the 9th ENCOUNTER Conference, hosted by the network in collaboration with The Danish Research Centre for Manorial Studies and Gammel Estrup – The Danish Manor Museum.

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.

Servants, labourers, and the manorial world: Alternative perspectives.

The manor or country house is often viewed exclusively as an aristocratic monument – 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 should function as a centre of paternalism resting on mutual obligations between masters and subordinates: on one side, providing various forms of care and protection, and on the other, offering work, loyalty, and obedience. This relationship was not only a practical arrangement ensuring the daily household work and land management and the livelihood of a large percentage of the population, but also 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 a steady stream of conflicts involving country house servants and owners or the owners' representatives. Conversely, a strong sense of community could exist among those associated with the manor, which provided the social framework for many people's lives from cradle to grave. Manors offered employment, housing, and protection. As heads of their households, 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, frequently with provisions for old age. Manors funded churches, schools, alms-houses, and gave donations, playing a vital role in rural poor relief. However, manor houses and their communities had to adapt to dramatic social changes from the nineteenth century, as industrialisation drew labour and wealth into the expanding 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 mechanisms behind this complex social balance, which, in various forms, characterised rural life across Northern Europe for centuries, are rarely explored in detail but will be the focus of the planned ENCOUNTER meeting in 2025.

The conference will primarily focus on a bottom-up perspective, highlighting the master-servant relationship in its full paternalistic scope, and addressing household, villages, rural communities, etc. in the early modern and modern periods. 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.

Abstracts – deadline 20 March 2025

Abstracts are therefore invited to explore the conference theme, addressing both the house, the landscape, and the symbolic landscape as arenas from around 1500 to the present day, with a focus on topics such as:

- The Hierarchies of the Manor
 - Organisation
 - Agricultural labour
 - Rural habitation
 - Rural industries
 - Servants, household
 - Lifecycle, career, mobility
 - Gender
 - Recruitment
 - Wages
 - Accommodation
- The Manor and Patronage
 - Protection
 - Benevolence
 - Welfare
 - Religion, ideology
 - Poverty
 - Poor relief
- The Manor and Conflict
 - Confrontation
 - Power, violence
 - Resistance, war
 - Court records, legal conflicts
 - Class, inequality
 - Social change
 - Limitations and options for action

A brief description of the proposed paper (1/2 page + short biography) should be submitted to Signe Boeskov at sb@gammelestrup.dk no later than March 20, 2025. Presentations should be approximately 20 minutes in length and presented in English. Notification of acceptance will be given by April 10.

The conference will be held at Ledreborg Manor, Zealand, Denmark, from October 9-11, 2025, and is expected to consist of 1½ days of conference sessions and 1½ days of excursions to manorial environments in the area.

Information about the conference will be provided in spring 2025 through newsletters and on the website encounter.network. For inquiries, please contact: Signe Boeskov at sb@gammelestrup.dk or Klaus Højberg at klh@gammelestrup.dk.