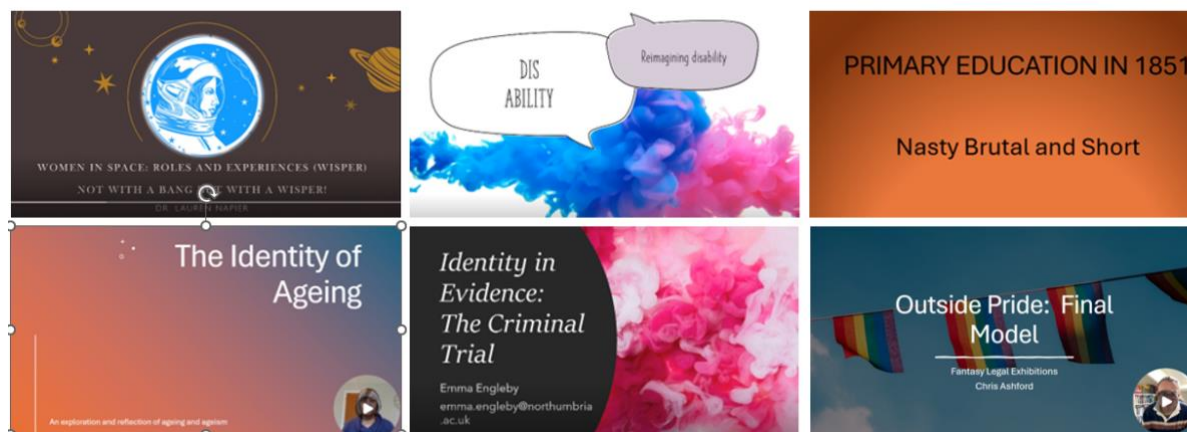


Fantasy Legal Exhibitions: Newcastle 2024/25

Helen Rutherford (Northumbria University)

Title slides from the final presentations May 2025



Fantasy Legal Exhibitions: Newcastle Workshop, Summer 2024

Inspired by the Fantasy Legal Exhibitions (FLE) workshop led by Amanda Perry-Kessaris and Victoria Barnes in the summer of 2023, I organized a similar workshop in Newcastle for colleagues at Northumbria University. Six people signed up, and five attended (one had to drop out due to illness). All participants completed the FLE process with enthusiasm!

Participants

- Lauren Napier
- Elisabeth Griffiths
- Jacky Smart
- Vinny Kennedy
- Emma Engleby
- Chris Ashford

Venues

- **Great North Museum: Hancock:** Self-directed tour (in place of the British Museum)
- **Tyne and Wear Archives:** Tour and afternoon with the archivist and pre-selected items (in place of the Postal Museum)

- **The Common Room (formerly the Mining Institute):** Tour and talk on the building's history, viewing documents linked to NE mining heritage (in place of Middle Temple)
- **Exhibition Park:** Exploration (in place of Spa Fields)

These visits sparked ideas and discussions that shaped the development of fantasy legal exhibitions.

Classroom Sessions

The classroom sessions closely mirrored the original workshops. We used coloured Playdough for the modelling session, which added a unique angle to the finished models as participants traded colours. All online slides were hosted on a Teams site. Participants engaged in regular meetings and tasks to refine their projects, spreading the process over several months due to workload and availability.

Resulting Fantasy Legal Exhibition Prototypes

- **Women in Space: Roles and Experiences (WISPER):** Not with a Bang but a WISPER! – Lauren Napier
- **Dis Ability: Reimagining Disability** – Elisabeth Griffiths
- **Primary Education in 1851: Nasty, Brutal and Short** – Jacky Smart
- **The Identity of Ageing** – Vinny Kennedy
- **Identity in Evidence: The Criminal Trial** – Emma Engleby
- **Outside Pride** – Chris Ashford

Feedback

Being a group from the same university brought the participants closer together as colleagues. The workshop and its follow-up sessions inspired new ways of thinking about research, the development of innovative approaches to journal articles, and consideration of future collaborations. All participants enjoyed the process and were enthusiastic about the benefits to their research and general well-being as researchers – it was a breath of fresh air in a pressurised research environment.

All participants reported that they had benefited from the FLE process. They mentioned the different approach to looking at the law, the importance of input from archivists and curators, and the joy of having time to think, reflect, and share ideas.

The prototypes have not resulted in an exhibition (yet), but the work has led to greater interest in history as part of research into the law. This interest was likely influenced by the venues visited and the legal historical lens suggested by the archives. We hope to present some of the work in progress on posters in the Law School to showcase the breadth and depth of the research ideas.

Individual Outcomes

- **Lauren:** Investigating a nineteenth-century mining engineer and considering health and safety legislation both historically and in a contemporary setting.
- **Elisabeth:** Explored the history of disability activism and spoken on the history of such activism as a guest speaker.
- **Emma:** Developed her work on the powder puff that inspired her application for FLE.
- **Chris:** Incorporating reflections from FLE into an article he is writing.
- **Vinny:** Has a fully realised exhibition and now requires funding.
- **Jacky:** The process opened her eyes (as a barrister) to different ways to engage in and enjoy research.

Postscript

Having participated in FLE and then led a local FLE workshop, I am convinced that this is an opportunity for all law departments. A tailored FLE workshop can work in any town or city, sparking creative research and refreshing jaded academics. It is especially helpful for new researchers who have been practitioners and do not have a traditional research background, if they are willing to embrace the process. It is beneficial for anyone wishing to branch out in a new direction, explore local resources, and make connections with archival and museum-based staff. I enjoyed leading the project and seeing my colleagues develop their ideas and have fun with research.

Thank you for the original idea and your support.

Helen Rutherford

May 2025