



## Claire Macht

CCSF Award Winner 2017-2018, McCarthy Tétrault Scholarship

### **Scholar Claire Macht explores late-medieval monasticism.**

*At first glance, there is little connection between the deliberately cloistered world of monasticism, and contemporary Canadian debates on identity and belonging. However, as our McCarthy Tétrault scholar Claire Macht explains, her DPhil thesis on how medieval monks perceived their identity yields valuable insights for Canadian community-building. Claire's research project is her latest intellectual adventure in a journey that has taken her from New Brunswick to the Yukon, and now the University of Oxford.*

What did it mean to be a monk in England between 1350 and 1550? The question may be esoteric, but Claire's research shows that modern debates about identity arise out of how communities create and communicate this identity. How late-medieval monks wrote about their vocational identity has resonance for modern

communities. Monks were, as Claire emphasised during her interview, the writers of history during the late middle ages. She is painstakingly examining these writings (often in the original Latin), whether chronicles, sermons, biographies, or spiritual writing. The dearth of written material from this time period is a testament to her perseverance and dedication.

Claire has had a remarkable professional journey. A decade ago, she was working at Yukon College, Whitehorse: as far away as you can get, distance-wise and culturally, from

Oxford. However, her passion for the medieval world has been a constant. At Yukon, she taught Medieval art and literature, focusing on primary sources of music and theatre. Then, with an MA in Medieval Studies from the University of Bristol in hand (her dissertation topic: The Role of Mystics in Religious Communities), she enrolled in a Postgraduate Certificate in Historical Studies at Oxford. She not only achieved a high distinction, but involved herself with the student community, serving as Academic Officer and then Vice-President.

A former professor of Claire's at Oxford has remarked how "fascinating" it was to discuss

the research with her as it related to current events. Her meticulous research has indeed led to intriguing insights into contemporary issues, in particular the awareness that creating and communicating identity and belonging narratives is, in Claire's words, a "fallible and mutable" process.

Claire sees the existence of these fallible

and mutable narratives in public debate as reflecting a tension between the historical record, and how it is interpreted by those who can influence its communication. This has implications when it comes to, for example, asking who allocates museum and heritage funding, or whether we can develop techniques to enable students to look at their own histories. As Claire enters the final year of her DPhil, the public discussion around identity and belonging in Canada is intensifying. We are excited to be a part of her journey and to see where her research into community-making leads.



Claire Macht