

## Telling your family story

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**Start date** 21 February 2020 **End date** 23 February 2020

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge

**Tutor** Derek Niemann **Course code** 1920NRX031

**Director of ISP and LL** Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on this course, please contact** Head of Academic Centre Administration, Zara Kuckelhaus  
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**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

**Derek Niemann** is a freelance writer and editor specialising in natural history. In 2012, he interrupted a career writing about bees and butterflies to begin researching and writing a family history story that was published in 2015 as *A Nazi in the Family* (Short Books), based on the SS grandfather he never knew. His most recent non-fiction book *A Tale of Trees: The battle to save Britain's ancient woodland* was published in October 2016 (Short Books). Derek's other non-fiction title was *Birds in a Cage* (Short Books, 2011), telling the story of four Prisoner of War birdwatchers in World War II. Derek is a country diary columnist for the Guardian, and edits the magazine of the Small Woods Association. Formerly he was children's magazines editor for the RSPB (1998-2014) and has written a number of wildlife books for both adults and children.

## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 **Who do we think we are?** A gentle introduction in which we share our family stories and discuss our aspirations for the course.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 **Taking a creative approach** Reflecting on what we discovered last night, we look at imaginative options for telling a family story, examining a range of approaches by different writers.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 **Building the evidence** We'll be examining how to use archives and documents to illuminate stories and explore how to conduct interviews.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 **A sense of place** Every story happens somewhere. What are the tricks for turning locations into written reality? How can you make use of the places where your family stories are set?

18:00 Free

18:30 Dinner

20:00 **Fact is stranger than fiction?** We'll be using the sumptuous surroundings of Madingley Hall as our practical laboratory for an imaginative outburst!

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 **Bringing objects to life** How we can animate inanimate objects to give colour to our stories, with a special emphasis on photographs and practical examples provided by participants

10:30 Coffee

11:00	<b>Where do we go next?</b> Gathering all the loose ends, touching on topics we haven't covered, and helping you to be ready for wherever you want to take your stories.
13:00	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

1. To explore a range of styles and techniques in life writing.
2. To develop participants' skills in researching and capturing life writing in words and give them confidence and direction in taking their stories further.
3. To increase participants' awareness and appreciation of the tools that go to producing life writing and resources that are available for them to mine the past.
4. To hone research skills in using official and unofficial records.

### Content:

This course enables students to come to Madingley with the essentials of their family story and gain insights into how they might tell their story creatively. We will be examining the work of a wide range of writers of different backgrounds and nationalities to find ideas and inspiration. Participants will learn about resources available for researching their family story and to explore the imaginative possibilities in documents, letters, everyday objects and places.

### Presentation of the course:

This course will involve a mixture of class discussion and practical work.

### As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. Recognise the techniques in which life writers make their subject real for the reader.
2. Feel confident in researching and interpreting records, as well as investigating and drawing from archives.
3. Be able to identify other sources of material to follow up family history stories and, if they so wish, feel empowered to write up their own family history.
4. Find a direction and impetus for writing up their family story.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk \*

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Appignanesi, Lisa	<i>Losing the Dead</i>	Random House (1999)
Cline, Sally and Angier, Carole	<i>Life writing: a writers' &amp; artists' companion</i>	Bloomsbury (2013)
Edemariam, Aida	<i>The Wife's Tale</i>	4 <sup>th</sup> Estate (2018)
Flyn, Cal	<i>Thicker than Water</i>	William Collins (2016)
Gidla, Sujatha	<i>Ants Among Elephants</i>	Daunt Books (2018)
Morrison, Blake	<i>Things my mother never told me</i>	Chatto & Windus (2002)
Niemann, Derek	<i>A Nazi in the Family</i>	Short Books (2015)
Sands, Philippe	<i>East West Street</i>	Weidenfeld & Nicholson (2016)
Verzemnieks, Inara	<i>Among the Living and the Dead</i>	Pushkin Press (2018)
Westover, Tara	<i>Educated</i>	Hutchinson (2018)

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## Website addresses

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 13 January 2020