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Image created in
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'Divers cullort ribbans': material evidence from the archives

Honourable Mention

Historians rely overwhelmingly on written sources as their principal evidence. They then take that evidence and add more text, using layers of interpretation, analysis, and argument in order to examine and explain past events. My doctoral dissertation explores consumer behaviour in 17th-century Scotland via documents that people created while going about their everyday lives. I use diaries and journals, household account books, receipts and letters in order to understand how average Scots lived their material lives. This photograph highlights a rare occurrence in my research program: an instance in which textual and material evidence exist in a single source. This letter was written in 1660 by a woman in Edinburgh to a cloth merchant in London requesting 'I ell' or 46cm of a specific red velvet ribbon. Generally I can only imagine the particulars of the desired goods or hope something similar has survived in a museum collection. However, since the writer decided to include a cutting of the ribbon 357 years ago I am now able to gain direct access to the object itself, further connecting modern historian and historical figure. This photograph captures a moment of discovery and shows just how familiar and accessible the past can be.