

THE BIRKBECK
EARLY MODERN
SOCIETY
BULLETIN

Issue 2
Spring 2007



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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Early Modernists,

Welcome to the second edition of our bulletin. Since our first edition of December 2006, we have had two very successful events: Quentin Skinner spoke eloquently about Machiavelli, and Carmen Fracchia took us on our first foray into art history, and discussed Velázquez and Juan de Pareja. We have also had a very enjoyable Christmas party! I hope that you have been able to attend these evenings, and have enjoyed being a member of the Birkbeck Early Modern Society.

Our next event is scheduled for 19 March, when Munro Price will be reappraising a key moment of the French Revolution, July 1789, which promises to be a memorable evening. This is followed on the 24 March by our guided walk of Pepys' London, led by Karen Chester. This event is free to members, and highlights include Wren architecture, Pepys' local church and numerous pub stops en route! For a full resume of our events, please visit <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hca/current/societies/#earlymodern> I am delighted to say that our own website is now up and running, and so our events and news are also available at <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/susocieties/earlymodern/index.htm>

This activity represents the good health of the society, and I am particularly happy to add to this the announcement that we have started to arrange our first one day student conference. It is entitled 'Centres and Margins', and will be held in the summer term, after exams, probably in the last week of June. The theme is open to a wide interpretation, and could include, for example, geographical related histories (e.g. cities and provinces), or ideological problems (e.g. 'otherness'). Papers should be 3-4000 words long. More details, including the date and the deadline for the call for papers will follow soon via e-mail.

Finally, I wish to thank the committee members for their hard work, our speakers for their dedication, and all of the members and friends of the society for being such a high quality audience.

I look forward to seeing you at our next event.

With best wishes,

Stephen Brogan
President, Birkbeck Early Modern Society

THE BULLETIN

Welcome to Issue Two of the *Birkbeck Early Modern Society Bulletin*. I first wish to thank all those people who have made kind comments about Issue One and expressed their support for this venture. Issue One of *The Bulletin* was very much a one man endeavour but I am delighted with the fact that a couple of people have volunteered to write something for this edition and I hope that as more editions of *The Bulletin* are produced that more of you will feel able to contribute.

In Issue Two we have reviews of past society events, theatre and art exhibitions, plus a quiz, as well as notification of forthcoming events both by this society and by other comparable bodies.

I hope that this publication is of interest to all those interested in the Early Modern era and that it will provide information for our membership on what the Society is doing. Remember, this is your Society, so if you have any comments on what is currently included in the *Bulletin* or what you think should be included in future editions then please let me know.

John Croxon
Editor

John M Croxon/Environmental Services/Berkeley/BNFL@BNFL

RECENT EVENTS

A Review of Quentin Skinner's 'Machiavelli and Machiavellianism', Monday 11 December, 2007, Birkbeck College, University of London

Quentin Skinner spoke for one hour without notes, and his eloquent and structured analysis provided the Early Modern Society with a truly memorable evening. He began by providing some essential contexts for both the man and his notorious work, *The Prince*. The book was described as a product of Machiavelli's political misfortune and internal exile. Nevertheless, its energy and originality were appreciated by his contemporaries, even if many of them were aghast at what they read. This is a pattern that has survived into the twenty-first century. Quentin Skinner took his audience through the main themes of the work: his advice to princes, his theory of liberty, and his history of Florence, and in doing so did not provide a revisionist apology, but rather revealed the man as both a product of his society and a catalyst. Whether he was in essence Shakespeare's 'murderous Machiavel' is a moot point, but there is no doubt that he was a highly skilled exponent of *realpolitick*, a man who wrote down what was already known to experienced rulers, and what he believed needed to be made clear to novices.

The talk was followed by a stimulating question and answer session. The audience of 80 or so (the society's biggest to date) approached the subject from various perspectives including political thought, the history of ideas, and cultural history,

which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the society. Finally, everyone made their way to the Christmas party, where the discussion continued and the wine flowed in abundance!

For those that wish to know more, see Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 2006), £6.99.

Stephen Brogan

Dr. Carmen Fracchia (Birkbeck College), ‘Questioning Slave Portraiture in Early Modern Spain: The case of Diego Velazquez and Juan de Pareja’, The Council Room, Birkbeck College, 17th January 2007.

THE BIRKBECK EARLY MODERN SOCIETY was pleased to welcome our very own Dr Carmen Fracchia to Birkbeck College’s Council Room on 17th January 2007.

Dr Carmen Fracchia delivered a fascinating paper exploring the issues of the depiction of the subjectivity of the slave in Early Modern Spanish painting by comparing two works; Velazquez’s superb portrait of his Afro-Hispanic slave “Juan de Pareja” (Metropolitan Museum, New York) and the subsequently freed slave’s self-portrait in his ambitious painting *The Calling of St Matthew* (Prado). Pareja was a paradox, both slave and painter.

Velazquez’s portrait of his then slave Juan de Pareja was painted as a demonstration of the painter’s skill when Velazquez was looking for a commission from the Pope in Rome – the painting shows a black man with a commanding presence, even though at the time, by his colour, the viewer would have assumed that Pareja was a slave – and yet the slave was portrayed in a manner more befitting a gentleman. The painting was a success and Velazquez won his commission. Pareja was freed six months after Velazquez had painted his portrait but Pareja continued to serve Velazquez and the Velazquez family (namely Velazquez’s son-in-law, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo) until Pareja’s death in 1670. Indeed, because of this, even though Antonio Palomino in his artists’ biography (1714-1725) mentions that Pareja had been given his freedom, there was uncertainty over Pareja’s legal status right up to the twentieth century, until the Pareja’s manumission document finally was discovered. Yet, when Pareja chose to portray himself, he does so making himself appear more European, indeed as a Spanish gentleman.

Dr Fracchia through her analysis of these two paintings opens up the question of where the slave who becomes a freeman resides within renaissance Habsburg Spain, demonstrating perhaps a certain social and paradoxical fluidity that affects not only Pareja, but also Velazquez, an expert social climber himself.

Richard Tilbury

ARTS REPORT



THEATRE

Don Juan in Soho: The Donmar Theatre, London

The play is credited to Patrick Marber after Moliere, who wrote the original work in 1663. In this adaptation, Marber re-writes Moliere and re-sets it in modern day Soho. The original was an attack upon ecclesiastical figures who secreted their greed and lust behind the strong church establishment, lush religious vestments and pious sentiment. Religion, at least amongst Western Europeans, has lost its power and it is interesting that, in a scene that the authorities forced Moliere to cut, Marber restores it and instead of God he has Don Juan offer his expensive watch to a beggar if he will curse Allah. It is though the establishment as a whole that Marber attacks; the men and women with their expensive clothes, limousines, and decedent lifestyle, who lecture the rest of us on our lack of morals. The hypocrisy of Moliere's age is still with us today, and although we may blanch at Don Juan's behaviour, we may prefer that to the austerity of Elvira's life. It is interesting that Marber has recast Elvira from a nun to a charity worker; indeed, for me, she was an unsympathetic character, epitomising the people who tour the refugee camps, glorying in their good deeds and virtuous lifestyle, while supporting all sorts of despicable groups, justifying their efforts to maim and kill as a result of their supposed oppression.

Our voice on stage is provided by Don Juan's servant, Stan, wonderfully played by Stephen Wight, who both facilitates his master's lifestyle and is sickened by it. It is though Don Juan himself, breathtaking in his hedonism, who dominates the action. Played with wonderful vigour by Rhys Ifans, he refuses to change his lifestyle, even when the statue issues its dire warning, and although we must deplore his selfishness and depravity, he bravely refuses to offer solace to his attackers in order to save his life. Previously, I have only seen Ifans as Hugh Grant's Welsh flatmate in Notting Hill, and as the creepy Welshman stalking Daniel Craig in Enduring Love, and never before on stage. Here, he drops the Welsh accent for that of an upper class Englishman, and is superb as the dissolute Don, adopting just the right accent, demeanour and rakishness for the part.

I do not believe that we can still be shocked by Don Juan's actions, but, staged in the intimate atmosphere of the Donmar, this wonderful production, is funny, poignant and thoughtful.

John Croxon

The Alchemist: The National Theatre

Ben Jonson wrote *The Alchemist* in 1610, and during the first fifteen minutes I thought that the play had not aged well. However, from then on it got better and better. The story concerns Subtle, a con-artist and pimp, and his associate, Dol Common, a prostitute, who have teamed up with Face, in order to occupy the house of Face's master who has left for the country at a time of plague. The three use the house as the centre of a scam that swindles a number of victims by claiming to be on the verge of discovering the Philosophers Stone, the elixir that can turn base metal into gold, cure diseases, and bestow eternal youth.

This production is set in modern London with Face enticing various victims and introducing them to Subtle, who changes characters, such as an American new age guru and a Scottish Presbyterian, in order to suit the preferences of the victims.

The thought that dominates when seeing this play is how scams were as prevalent in the seventeenth century as they are now. During Jonson's time, the London underground was highly organized and widespread. The importance to the scams featured in *The Alchemist* is appealing to people's greed; there is an old saying that one cannot cheat an honest man. The victim knows that the deal on offer is shady but the lure of a large profit outweighs any feeling of wrongdoing.

All three main actors play their parts well; Subtle is superbly played by Alex Jennings; his comic timing and the ability to change character and accent is wonderfully served by this production. Likewise, Simon Russell Beale is marvellous as Face, as is Lesley Manville as Dol Common, and the three work wonderfully well together.

This is a marvellously funny production; whilst the prevailing thought is that such scams will continue all the while people succumb to greed and the lure of a quick profit.

John Croxon

ART EXHIBITIONS

London: A Life in Maps: British Library

This exhibition displays London's lost roads, highways and green fields, in an display detailing the growth of London from the Roman and Saxon periods through to a projected view of what London might look like after the 2012 Olympics, with basic maps dating from the late-fifteenth century through to the highly detailed ones of the twenty-first century.

The maps highlight a large range of subjects from disease, fire, expansion, war, poverty, immigration and redevelopment, but obviously the main feature is the huge population growth of the capital and how it grew out from the old city in all directions.

Individual maps highlight different subjects; for example, those maps produced to show the devastation caused by the Great Fire of London in 1666, were illustrated by a great swathe of white where a cluttered range of medieval and Tudor buildings once stood. Or the maps that showed the sheer scale of poverty in parts of the east-end in the nineteenth century, that had the desired effect of shocking the nation into dealing with the problem. Or the maps that tracked the range of German bombing during the Second World War.

People naturally look for their own areas to see how it has changed over time; we looked at the development of West London and there was a little cry of glee when we found a map featuring my place of birth, Acton.

This is a superb exhibition that will be of interest to all Londoners and everyone who is interested in maps and the development of a major city.

John Croxon

FORTHCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS

Events 2006-7

All events start at 6.30pm, and are followed by refreshments and Questions

- 19 March 2007 – Prof. Munro Price (Univ. of Bradford), ‘July 1789: A Reappraisal’, Room 255

- June 2007 - Dr. Filippo de Vivo (Birkbeck College), provisional title: ‘Rumour in Early Modern Europe’, date and room to be confirmed

For further information on membership and activities contact the secretary, Laura Jacobs: l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk

Membership is £5 for the year. Non-members may attend events at a cost of £3 each.

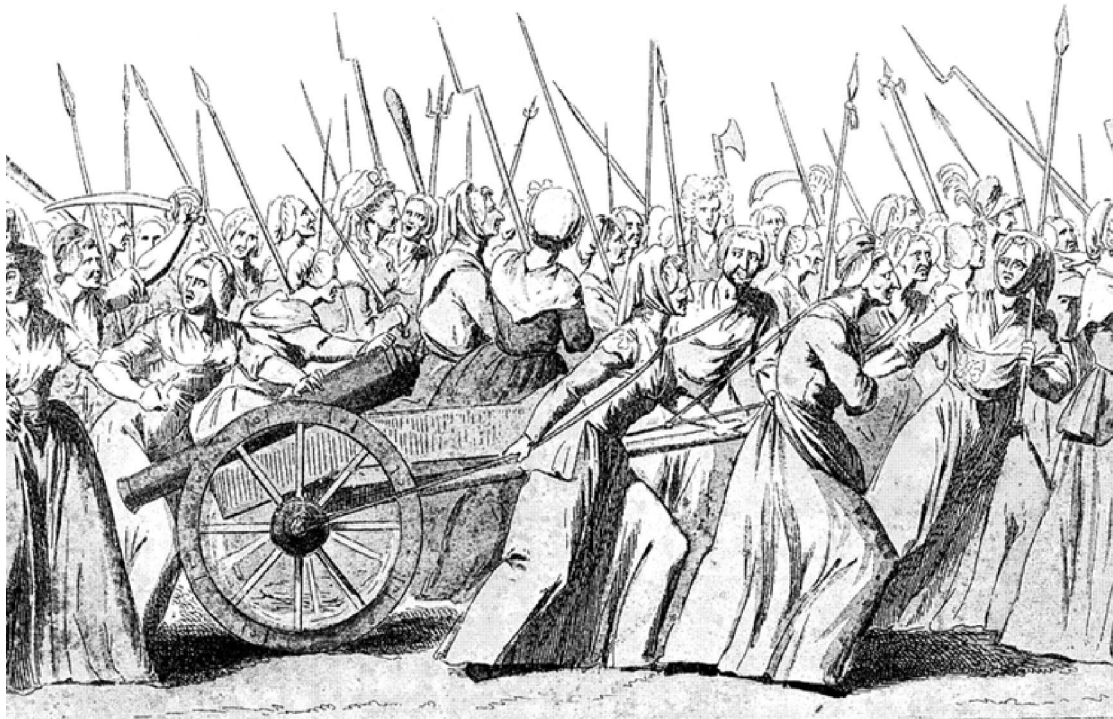
THE BIRKBECK
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SOCIETY

‘JULY 1789: A REAPPRAISAL’

Prof. Munro Price (Univ. of Bradford)

19th of March, 6:30 pm, Room 406, Malet St

Free to members £3 non-members £5 membership



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

This section concerns those events staged by other societies which we feel might be of interest to our membership.

Society, Culture and Belief, 1500-1800

Institute of Historical Research, Ecclesiastical History Room, IHR (all at 5.30 p.m.)

- 1st March 2007 - Holly Dugan (George Washington University), 'All Oiled in Ambergris: Perfuming Gloves in London, 1580-1640'
- 15th March 2007 - Jonathon Gil Harris (George Washington University), 'The Smell of Macbeth'
- 17th May 2007 - Elliott Horowitz (Bar Ilan University), 'The Smell of Jewish meat During Lent: A Case from Sixteenth Century Italy'
- 31st May 2007 - David R. Carr (University of South Florida, St. Petersburg), 'Controlling the Butchers in Late Medieval English Towns'

European History, 1500-1800

Institute of Historical Research, Low Countries Room, IHR (all at 5.00 p.m.)

- 12th March 2007 - Dr Loic Charles (University of Paris X-Nanterre), 'French political economy and the making of public opinion as a political concept (1750-1765)'
- 14th May 2007 - Colin Smith (QM), 'Dirigisme, dialogue or disorder? Regulating the French textile industry, 1700-1725'
- 21st May 2007 - Sue Carr (Birkbeck College), 'Gentilshommes simplement: the Burgundian sword nobility in the eighteenth century'

Religious History of Britain, 1500-1800

Institute of Historical Research, International Relations Room, IHR (all at 5.00 p.m.)

- 13th March 2007 - Rory Rapple (Dublin), 'Magistracy and insubordination in Elizabethan Ireland'
- 24th April 2007 - Juliet Chester (Oxford), 'A cockpit of contention: Particular preaching in post-Reformation England'
- 8th May 2007 - David Smith (Cambridge), 'Sir Benjamin Rudyerd and the Reform of the Early Stuart Church'
- 22nd May 2007 - Arnold Hunt (BL), 'Predestination and popular Culture in Early Modern England'

BOOK REVIEW

This section is concerned with reviewing books. I hope that many of you will send in your reviews of newly published books and the odd old book. The only criteria being that it deals with a subject within the Early Modern period, roughly the end of the fifteenth century through to the end of the eighteenth century and that the book is still in print.

John Croxon

The Yorkist Age by Paul Murray Kendall, George Allen and Unwin Ltd

In The Yorkist Age, Paul Murray Kendall details the events surrounding the Wars of the Roses and the reigns of Edward IV and Richard III. He contends that many of the advances and changes in government, long claimed as Tudor innovations, were in fact brought into place by the Yorkist kings.

Paul Murray Kendall discusses ideas, attitudes, fears, aspirations, dress, love, death, housekeeping, recreation, business, essentially the whole gambit of life. The book covers all levels of society and shows an England that was recovering confidently from the feudal constraints and the upheavals of the late-thirteenth century, and the disasters of Henry VI reign, and had yet to experience the harshness of Tudor rule. For Paul Murray Kendall, this demonstrates that if indeed a 'Merrie England' actually existed then it occurred in the late-fifteenth century and not in Tudor England.

This beautifully written book is produced by someone deeply immersed in his subject; he utilises a variety of sources, including family letters, the correspondence of diplomats, ecclesiastical reports, town records, and household and estate accounts, to successfully bring the late-fifteenth century to light and recreate the flavour of the times.

John Croxon

Death and Burial in Medieval England 1066-1550, by Christopher Daniell, Routledge

Although some of this book concerns events that occurred before our period of interest, there is a large section that details death and burial practices in the late fifteenth century through to the middle of the sixteenth century. I therefore feel entitled to include this book in *The Bulletin* and also thoroughly recommend it.

Death occupied an important and pervasive presence throughout the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period, articulated in literature and art. The funeral procession brought together a whole range of social groups; mourners related to the deceased in rank and family, officers, retainers and servants of the deceased, the poor and the church choir. The procession reflected society, organised by status, visually conforming and functioning as a statement of continuing order and stability. Belief in an afterlife was the predominant force in the rituals connected with death and burial, and a funeral was part of the process of helping the deceased through Purgatory.

Christopher Daniell has produced a comprehensive, compulsive and vivid picture of the whole phenomenon of death and burial. In this book he has detailed the fascinating and complex set of beliefs and procedures that accompanied death during this period.

John Croxon

***Marking the Hours. English People and their Prayers 1240-1570.*
By Eamon Duffy
Yale, 2006. xiv + 202 pp. £19.99**

This carefully written and beautifully illustrated study examines the most widely used of mediaeval books, The Books of Hours. These treasured possessions provided a prayer map both for each individual day, and specific occasions, such as births and deaths. Unlike other studies, Duffy's is not a work of art history. Instead he analyses the contents of the Books of Hours, especially the marginalia and alterations that were made by generations of different readers, and which have hitherto been viewed largely as vandalism. These are then used as a guide towards personal belief. He is thus able to provide an intimate history of reading and lived religion, which begins in the high days of English Catholicism and then charts the radical changes of the Reformation. He is therefore able to discuss the impact of printing on the devotional books, too. *Marking the Hours* is divided into three parts, 'Towards a history of intimacy', 'Sanctified whinging? The voice of prayer in the late Middle Ages', and 'Catholic Books in a Protestant World', that are both chronological and thematic. Duffy's style is engaging and erudite, and he points out the flaws in the works of other scholars that have sought to understand the Books of Hours with deft skill, and sometimes humour. This book is essential reading for anyone who is interested in religion, reading and change during the mediaeval and early-early modern periods.

Stephen Brogan

1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare by James Shapiro, Faber and Faber

The new Millennium saw no let up in the Shakespeare industry and I can hear you saying “Oh no, not another book on Shakespeare!” But this one is different. James Shapiro has decided to concentrate upon just one year in the Bard’s life, and what a momentous year. 1599 saw Shakespeare write *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, and *Hamlet*, as well as investing in the new Globe Theatre. The book also dwells upon the major events of 1599 that Elizabethans would have experienced; the sending of an army to crush a rebellion in Ireland, the threat of another Spanish Armada, investment in the fledgling East India Company, the Essex Rebellion, an aggrieved aristocracy, and uncertainty over the throne and who would succeed an aging queen dominated by a clique.

Much of Shakespeare’s life is clouded in uncertainty, no-one really knows the details of his life, and it is the plays that bring this man to life. Shapiro though, tries his best and offers us some fascinating details about Shakespeare as an actor, businessman, and of course as a playwright. Because there is so little detail about the man, Shapiro has to rely upon speculation and that is a little irritating, but with so much unknown there is little else that Shapiro can do. Shakespeare’s attempts to establish and then improve the family crest gives us a glimpse of a man intent upon improving his status, and the account of the removing of the timbers from London’s oldest playhouse, The Theatre, in order to resurrect it as the new Globe Theatre, evocatively bring the man and his times alive.

Shapiro has taken one important year of the life Shakespeare, arguing that it was in this year that Shakespeare’s talents as a playwright found breathtaking brilliance. William Shakespeare was the greatest Britain that has ever lived, and in this book, James Shapiro manages to give us a flavour of that brilliance and present us with a whole new image of his life, times and achievements.

John Croxon

The Tudor Age, John Guy, Oxford University Press

This book offers readers a chance to assess the reign of a dynasty; by chronicling the momentous events between the usurpation of Henry VII in 1485 and the death of Elizabeth in 1503, John Guy provides a compelling account of the political and religious developments in Tudor England.

The Tudor Age begins by recording the advent of Tudors in the 1460’s and details the far-reaching changes of the sixteenth century; the changes in government, the break with Rome and the Reformation of the Church, first under Henry VIII and then under Edward VI, the return to Rome under Mary, and then the reintroduction of Protestantism under Elizabeth.

John Guy analyses the various political and religious changes, as well as producing studies of the monarchs and politicians who dominated the age, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of Tudor national and local government. He also looks at

the economy, society and political culture, and the careers of statesmen such as Wolsey and Cromwell come to life in Guy's book. The various historical theories are examined, accepted or rejected

Superbly written, *The Tudor Age* presents an overview of the period and provides a valuable introduction to a number of subject matters, explored more fully by various historians, including Guy himself, in more thematic works.

John Croxon

Pepys by Claire Tomalin, Penguin Books

In *Pepys*, Claire Tomalin gives us a wonderful insight into the life of this larger than life character, detailing the social and political life and times in which Pepys lived. All aspects of seventeenth-century life that Pepys either witnessed or experienced are detailed by Tomalin; sex, food, alcohol, plague, fire, music, war, the navy, religion, public executions, marital infidelity, arrest and incarnation in the Tower, the Commonwealth and the Restoration.

As anyone who has read the *Diary* will know, Pepys lived life to the full, and in this highly perceptive, and thoroughly researched book, Tomalin provides a vivid impression of Pepys that goes far beyond the *Diary*, allowing us an insightful look at seventeenth-century life. As in her other works, she has given us a sympathetic and sensitive portrait of Pepys. Beautifully written, this is an entertaining and informative book which presents a thorough picture of a man and his times.

Claire Tomalin is a marvellous biographer, one of the very best, and I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to find out more about this fascinating man and the astonishing times in which he lived.

John Croxon

THE SPRING QUIZ

1. What honour did Pope Leo X grant upon Henry VIII in 1521?
2. Which European explorer wrote his memoirs whilst a prisoner of the Genoese?
3. Where was Christopher Marlowe born in February 1564?
4. What was the name of Shakespeare's only son who died of the plague in 1596?
5. Which battle was fought on the 2nd July 1644?
6. Composed by two Dominicans, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, which influential work was first published in 1486?
7. Where was Mary Queen of Scots executed in February 1587?
8. Which Archbishop of Canterbury was executed on Tower Hill in January 1645?
9. Who was the first monarch to be buried in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle?
10. Born in 1731, he was a physician, scientist, inventor, writer and poet but he has been overshadowed by his brilliant grandson. Who is he?
11. Which great artist was born in Seville in 1599?
12. What was abolished on the 17th March 1649?
13. What was dissolved in May 1640 after only one month?
14. What took place in Scotland in February 1692?
15. Who died in August 1714, the last of a dynasty?
16. Who captured Berwick for England in August 1480?
17. Who was made Lord Chancellor in 1515?
18. Who was overthrown as Lord Protector in 1549?
19. For what reason was the Buckinghamshire MP, Sir Christopher Pigott, sent to the Tower of London in 1607?
20. Who wrote the play Bartholomew Fair in 1614?

Answers on the following page

ANSWERS TO THE SPRING QUIZ

1. Defender of the Faith
2. Marco Polo
3. Canterbury
4. Hamnet
5. Marston Moor
6. The Malleus Maleficarum
7. Fotheringhay Castle
8. William Laud
9. Edward IV in April 1483
10. Erasmus Darwin
11. Velazquez
12. The English monarchy
13. The Short Parliament
14. The Glencoe Massacre
15. Queen Anne
16. Richard duke of Gloucester (later Richard III). Ever since Berwick has remained part of England
17. Cardinal Thomas Wolsey
18. Edward Seymour, duke of Somerset
19. For violently speaking out in Parliament against Union with Scotland
20. Ben Jonson

THE BIRKBECK EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

FOUNDED 2006

This society was founded in the belief that more study, discussion and interest in the Early Modern period is required. The society aims to promote, encourage and stimulate new research and discussion into a wide range of themes, including art and images, consumption, gender roles, literature, magic, politics, religion, science, sexuality and, travel and exploration.

PRESIDENT

Stephen Brogan

SECRETARY

Laura Jacobs

TREASURER

Sue Dale

COMMITTEE

Karen Baston, Nigel Carter, John Croxon, Robin Rowles

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Chair: Karen Baston

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