



## 1759: An Interdisciplinary Conference

15 – 17 April 2009

**Keynote Speakers:** Professor Thomas Keymer (University of Toronto)  
Professor Nicholas Rogers (York University, Toronto)

2009 sees the 250th anniversary of the events and publications of 1759, a crucial moment in British and global history, culture and ideas. To mark the occasion, the Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies at Queen's University Belfast will be hosting an interdisciplinary conference on the theme of 1759. The conference will present an opportunity for discussion and critical assessment of a year that, according to Frank McLynn, should be 'as well known in British history as 1066'.

In the international realm, 1759 represented the turning point in the Seven Years' War and a watershed moment in Britain's drive for colonial dominance over France, with British military and naval victories making national heroes of men such as Pitt the Elder, General Wolfe and (to a lesser extent) Admiral Hawke. In literature, 1759 also saw the publication of 3 canonical novels of ideas: Voltaire's *Candide*, Samuel Johnson's *The Prince of Abissinia* (later *Rasselas*), and the first two volumes of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. In the arenas of moral philosophy and aesthetic theory, Adam Smith outlined a rational model of sympathy in the first edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, while Edward Young published his *Conjectures on Original Composition*, Alexander Gerard an *Essay on Taste*, and Edmund Burke the second edition of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, with its important new introduction on 'taste'. Elsewhere in culture and commerce, 1759 also saw the opening to the public of the British Museum; John Harrison's completion of chronometer Number 4 (the eventual Board of Longitude prize-winner); the formal suppression of the *Encyclopédie*; the deaths of Handel and William Collins; and the founding in Dublin of the St James' brewery, by Arthur Guinness.

The 1759 conference will enable discussion of all of these topics and anniversaries, and of the possible relationships between them. As we shall ask: if 1759 was a key year not just in political and military terms but also in literature, culture and thought, what are the links between these events and achievements, and how can we account – historically, culturally and theoretically – for their concurrence at this specific moment? More broadly, we shall hope to explore the 1750s as an understudied decade in the field of culture (as for instance in the history of the novel), and the national and political repercussions of the events of 1759, both within the Seven Years' War and beyond (for instance in Ireland and in relation to Jacobitism). In the spirit of the period itself, the conference will also encourage more general enquiry into the relationships between history, literature, philosophy and culture, along with self-reflexive debate about the academic 'anniversary' industry and the merits, and limitations, of focusing on a single year in history.

300-word proposals are invited, for 20-minute papers. **The deadline for submission is 31 July 2008.** Proposals should be emailed to the conference organiser: Dr Shaun Regan, School of English, QUB (s.regan@qub.ac.uk)

### Possible topics

Papers and panels might address the following topics:

- The international / global significance of 1759
- Understandings of 'empire' at this time
- The experience of war in Britain, France, Europe, India, and the Americas
- The European theatre and/vs the 'French and Indian War'
- Maritime power; invasion threats and scares; engagements at sea
- Reassessing the key figures and events of the 7 Years' War
- The making – and debunking – of political and military reputations
- Neglected figures – and victims – of the 7 Years' War
- Women and the 7 Years' War
- 1759 in/and Ireland
- Historicizing *Candide*
- The place of *Candide* in the career and reputation of Voltaire
- *Rasselas* and/against historicist criticism
- *Rasselas* and the 'rise of the novel'
- *Tristram Shandy* – esp. volumes 1 & 2
- The importance of 1759 in Sterne's literary career
- The philosophical novel, or 'novel of ideas'
- The literary culture of the (late) 1750s
- The first edition of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and its relation to later editions
- Ideas about 'sympathy', pre- and post-Smith
- Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition*
- New ideas about 'originality' at this time
- The notion of 'taste' in 1759
- 1759 and Enlightenment / 'modernity'
- Ideals of rationality and citizenship, in 1759 and the present
- Culture and commerce: the opening of the British Museum; the completion of chronometer Number 4; the founding of St James' brewery
- Anniversary papers re: key deaths: Handel; Collins; Maupertuis
- Other historical events: eg the accession to the Spanish throne of Charles III; the assassination of the Mughal emperor, Alamgir II; the ending of the Jacobite threat
- Other publications: eg Robertson's *History of Scotland*; Goldsmith's *The Bee* and *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*; Sterne's *A Political Romance*; Sarah Fielding's *The History of the Countess of Dellwyn*; *The Histories of Some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House*
- Theatrical performances: Garrick, *Harlequin's Invasion*; Macklin, *Love à la Mode*; Goldoni, *Gl'Innamorati*.
- Paintings: Boucher, *Madame de Pompadour*; Hogarth, *Sigismunda*; Reynolds, *Kitty Fisher as Cleopatra Dissolving the Pearl*; and paintings that refer back to this year: West, Penny, Hayman, etc.
- The year in newspapers / journals (eg the *Annual Register*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, etc.)
- Other texts written in 1759, or that refer back to 1759: letters; (auto)biographies; etc.
- Anniversary papers re: important figures born this year (with reference to 1759 specifically): William Wilberforce; Pitt the Younger; Mary Wollstonecraft; Friedrich Schiller; Robert Burns; Georges Danton; Dean Mahomed
- More general examination of the relationships between the following: history, literature, philosophy, politics, empire, 'ideas', culture
- Academic 'anniversary' culture
- The uses, and limits, of single-year case studies

We particularly encourage proposals that make links across these themes, and across disciplinary boundaries. For conference updates, please see the Centre's website:

[www.qub.ac.uk/schools/CentreforEighteenth-CenturyStudies](http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/CentreforEighteenth-CenturyStudies)