# THE BIRKBECK EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

# BULLETIN

**Issue 14**
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# CONTENTS

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Early Modernists,

Welcome to the fourteenth edition of our Bulletin. We have had a busy spring term at the Society, and our events have covered subjects from differing parts of our defined historical period. We have had a paper on relics after the English Reformation from Alex Walsham and a talk by Tim Knox on Sir John Soane. As I type this out Michael Hunter is due to address us upon the subject of the decline of magic and the paradoxical role of the Royal Society. The events have been well attended and the papers generated lots of good comments and discussion. We still have some three more lectures to look forward to this academic year with Dr Richard Williams discussing word and image in Reformation Europe, Dr Malcolm Jones talking about death in Early Modern English prints and book illustrations and Professor Julian Swann reflecting upon despotism, public opinion and the crisis of the Absolute Monarchy.

The committee have began work on securing some top-class speakers for next year's programme and I am delighted to announce that we have already managed to book John Ashdown-Hill who will speak to us about Lady Eleanor Talbot in October and David Starkey who will speak to us in December on the Reformation and royal ritual. In addition to this the committee are busy at present planning the fourth annual student conference which will take place in July.

Please don't forget that the committee is always happy to hear suggestions from members, be they connected to a speaker that you have in mind that you'd like us to book, or another type of event such as a trip to the theatre or a gallery etc. Suggestions can be e-mailed to our secretary Anne Byrne at anne.m.byrne@gmail.com

With best wishes,

Stephen Brogan

President, Birkbeck Early Modern Society

http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hca/current/societies/#earlymodern

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# THE BULLETIN: EDITOR'S WELCOME

Welcome to Issue Fourteen of the *Birkbeck Early Modern Society Bulletin.* This edition continues with the usual mix of a wide and lively range of articles, reviews and forthcoming events.

With a very cold winter finally leaving us and Spring now upon us, many of us will be visiting historical places of interest. If so, why not write a review? This could be a stately home, a battlefield site or any number of things. As long as it falls within our period then we would love to hear about it. Likewise, if you have read a good or bad history book or a historical novel recently, or a seen a play or a film with a historical theme, then why not send us a review?

As I have grown older whenever each new Spring approaches I feel quite positive about the year ahead; the prospect of warmer weather, a long and glorious cricket season, and new historical discoveries all beckon. Now, the rain may continue until autumn and Middlesex may not win a single match but I am certain that there will be plenty of new talking points for us historians to discuss and argue over. Despite being somewhat marginalised in the school curriculum, history has never been more popular; both television and radio regularly feature historical programmes, researching family history is widespread, history books fly off the shelves in bookshops, and a historical novel won the 2009 Booker Prize. In addition, our own Society has gone from strength to strength since its foundation in 2006. History is one of the major academic subjects and recent trends have shown that more and more people are becoming interested in events of the past.

I hope that you all have a marvellous Spring. The next issue will be out in the Summer of 2010.

John Croxon
Editor
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# RECENT EVENTS

## Skeletons in the Cupboard: Relics after the English Reformation

### Professor Alex Walsham

Professor Alex Walsham specialises within the field of the religious and cultural history of Early Modern Britain, focusing especially on the immediate impact and long-term repercussions of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations set within a European context. It was from this prospective, using the Protestant Reformation of sixteenth-century England, the brief Catholic revival under Mary Tudor and the further religious upheavals that followed under Elizabeth, the Stuarts, and during the Commonwealth, that she discussed the issue of reliquaries within the context of Early Modern British history.

In a fascinating lecture, Professor Walsham addressed a packed meeting on the topic of the relics associated with Protestant and Catholic martyrs in the fraught years of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Professor Walsham discussed the body-parts of saints, the impact of the Protestant campaign to remove relics, their survival after the Reformation, and Protestant and Catholic martyrs.

Professor Walsham began by citing the attacks upon relics made by Protestant campaigners such as John Calvin, and the sacred items found by Thomas Cromwell's team of commissioners from the visitation of the religious houses. The commissioners claimed to have found a number of fabrications. For example, the Holy Blood at Hailes Abbey in Gloucestershire that turned out to be the blood of a duck.

Professor Walsham highlighted the differences between how martyrs were treated by Protestants and Catholics. Catholics would often soak their napkins in the blood of martyred priests, or collect items of clothing or body-parts, while some would take ashes from the pyre and mix them with ale to drink as a medicinal beverage. There were occasions when fights broke out when people strove to recover items from the martyred person.

These martyred Catholics were treated very differently by Protestants. Many viewed the whole process of reliquary and martyred remains with distain whilst others treated the remains with contempt and outright hostility, as in the case of Hugh Green whose severed and bloody head was kicked around for six hours in a macabre game of football.

Relics were kept by individuals who evaded priestly control. In one instance a man rescued a piece of the 'true cross' removed from a dissolved abbey. When it was taken away from him he revered the impression where it had lain in the case. Some Catholic relics took on a more unorthodox turn as in the case the pieces of straw in which some saw the miraculous image of the martyred Henry Garnet.

Some saints were treated differently. For instance Patron saints, such as Saint George or St David, were not subjected to the same degree of contempt as they were seen as a flexible symbol of national identity.

Professor Walsham made the point that we have to be aware that much of our knowledge comes from hostile sources that try to undermine belief.

One interesting factor was the stance taken by some Protestants when venerating their own martyrs. This led them to be accused of hypocrisy by Catholics and many historians have seen this as an indication of a continuance of belief in reliquaries amongst Protestants. However, Professor Walsham disagrees with this view; instead, she argues that one must see it as memorial or commemorative tokens, a clear distinction from the Catholic relic. This was remembrance only with a didactic purpose, to remember or honour someone, as in the case of William Pyrnne who, when he had his ears cut off, people mopped up his blood. Or it could be for the purpose of pledging vengeance for the killing of a Protestant as in 1661 when Scottish covenanter ladies dipped napkins in the blood of an executed covenanter, and when challenged about superstition replied that it was so they might hold them up to heaven and cry for vengeance and divine intervention.

Protestant relics could cover a wide range of artefacts. For example the Charles II oak was nearly killed by the large amount of people taking cuttings. Here we stray upon royal artefacts, the most famous being handkerchiefs soaked in the blood of Charles I that were reputed to cure blindness or scrofula.

In some ways the Bible replaced the bones of saints and became used for oath-swearing. This could be taken to extremes and Professor Walsham quoted the case of an old lady in Hampshire who used to eat the pages of the Bible with bread and butter, believing that she was digesting the very essence of the Bible.

To emphasise how the issue of reliquary was not totally straightforward, Professor Walsham referred to an interesting diversion from medieval bones and artefacts and Protestant/Catholic conflict, when the catacombs in Rome were opened and a trade in ancient relics began with the rest of Europe.

Gradually, the historical artefact came about and a secular interest in antiquities began. The bones of saints were viewed with greater detachment and the word 'relic' lost its Catholic meaning. The 'cabinet of curiosities' housed a wide range of articles

with the artefacts of saints mixed with secular items. Here we saw the birth of the museum, an intelligent interest opening a window into a past age once thought lost.

This was a fascinating talk by Professor Walsham that produced an enthusiastic response and elicited a large number of questions. In exploring the subject of reliquaries, remains of martyrs, and divergent Protestant and Catholic attitudes towards them, Professor Walsham managed to convey a sense of religious enthusiasm and of religious conflict, and of changing the attitudes over time that led ultimately to the secular interest in our past.

John Croxon

## The Strange Genius of Sir John Soane

## Tim Knox

Born in September 1753, John Soane was the son of a bricklayer from Goring-on-Thames. Little is known about his modest origins as his memoirs make no mention of these early years though it seems likely that Soane learned the trade of brick-laying, perhaps from an older brother, since he constantly exploited those techniques in his later work. In spite of these humble beginnings, Soane was lucky enough to attend a private school in Reading and, in 1768, to be taken on as a messenger in the office of George Dance the Younger. Dance had spotted a talent for draughtsmanship in the young Soane and aimed to encourage this natural bent.

Soane closely observed Dance's work as Clerk of the City Works, especially the commission to rebuild Newgate Prison, and benefitted from the office's architectural library, eventually becoming an apprentice and enrolling in the Royal Academy. His transcription of the lectures he attended are preserved in the library at the Museum. In 1776, Soane won the gold medal in the annual exhibition of architectural drawings at the Royal Academy. The real prize was the three year travel scholarship. This opportunity was clearly a pivotal moment in Soane's life – journeying to Italy, especially Rome, was thought to be the essential finale to an architect's education.

Sir John Soane by Thomas Lawrence

He left London on 8 March 1778, travelling via Paris, arriving in Rome on 2 May. His constant industry in studying and drawing the classical remains make it clear that Soane knew that these studies would provide inspiration for the duration of his career. He came to know potential patrons among the Grand Tourists and remained in contact with some of them, such as Thomas Pitt, for the rest of his life. When one of these contacts, Frederick Augustus Harvey, became Earl of Bristol in 1780, he summoned Soane to his Episcopal seat outside Derry with grandiose plans of improvement to his home, Downhill. Soane travelled back via Switzerland where, in a mountain pass, many of his drawings and his gold medal were lost. This disaster was followed by a very disappointing trip to Downhill as the Earl and Soane could not see eye to eye on the prospective works. Soane left Ireland with debts and without a patron. His prospects were rescued by Dance who ensured he had small jobs to do. He received a commission from Thomas Pitt and, subsequently, worked successfully on a number of houses in Norfolk and Suffolk in a stripped-down, neo-classical style where his ability to stay within budget and on time won him many admirers. A grand plan to remodel Chillington Hall did not come to fruition due to the owner's debts.

Soane's good fortune continued when, in August 1784, he married Elizabeth Smith, the niece of the famous builder George Wyatt who settled £20, 000 on the couple. In 1786, their first son, John, was born and they took the lease of a house on Wellbeck Street. In 1789, George was born. In the same year, Soane won the competition to become the architect of the Bank of England and, over the following 45 years, he was responsible for rebuilding the entire complex. This was demolished in the early twentieth century, leaving only Soane's screenwall.

Soane's fascination with complex top-lit rooms was clear from his phased rebuilding of the Bank, characterised by large domed halls, courtyards and light-wells. The design, the 'pride and boast' of Soane's life, was not universally popular but, by 1800, Soane was a very rich man, a well-established architect and receiving private commissions from the directors of the Bank. In that year, he bought Pittshanger Manor in Ealing for £4,500 and, inevitably, rebuilt large portions of it. This included the construction of an artificial ruin in the gardens. The interior made extensive use of dramatic modelling, light and paint effects in order to show off his many classical acquisitions, both from his travels and from the antique markets of London. The manor also gave the Soanes the opportunity to entertain the likes of J M W Turner.

By 1802, Soane had become a full member of the Royal Academy. His former master, Dance, held the professorship of architecture at that time. The ever-industrious Soane evidently could not tolerate Dance's lax attitude to delivering lectures as in 1806 Soane wrested the post of professor from him and was assiduous in his duties. His lectures, essentially a course in art history since cave-paintings, were comprehensively illustrated by large posters drawn in his office.

Soane's success in the business of architecture was secure though his hopes of establishing an architectural dynasty were to be severely dashed. The two boys were sent to Cambridge but showed little aptitude for study. In 1808, John, who had failed to get a degree, was sent to Liverpool to gain experience in an architect's office. His sojourn there was memorable only for his poor health and unsuitable marriage. George, who had dabbled in medical studies, married without his parents' consent and became estranged from them. George's demands for money from his wealthy parents, even from prison, were met with refusals from Soane. Pittshanger Manor was sold as it became clear that neither son would live in it as had been hoped. In 1815, the resourceful George vented his ill-feeling in print with coruscating attacks on Soane's work in 'The Champion'. Soane did his utmost to keep the articles from Elizabeth. When she eventually did read them, she felt she'd been dealt her death-blow and, indeed, was dead within the year. Soane himself was not above setting a private detective to track his son and publishing the unedifying results in a privately circulated pamphlet. In 1823, a month after Sir John's seventieth birthday, John died of consumption, leaving a widow and several children.

What of the Soane presence on Lincoln's Inn Fields? When Elizabeth inherited a sizeable portion in 1790, the Soanes purchased 12 Lincoln's Inn Fields for £2, 100. Soane demolished the seventeenth-century building and rebuilt it in his own style. The new structure included an office where Soane's assistant and four to six pupils worked. In 1807, the freehold of number 13 was acquired and the rear of the property used to house the substantial collection of marbles and casts. Then, Soane swapped houses with the tenants and rebuilt the front of number 13 with a distinctive loggia. Number 14 was secured in 1824 and rebuilt for letting out, though part of it was annexed to construct what Soane called 'the monk's parlour and yard' and the room above became the purpose-built picture gallery, which visitors can see today. In 1824, Soane purchased a sarcophagus for £2, 000 and held a three day long celebration of its arrival during which hundreds of visitors viewed it by oil-lamp in the basement. Given his disappointment in his remaining son, George, it is perhaps not surprising that in 1833 Soane chose to vest his property, particularly his vast collection, in a trust with the purpose of creating a museum which would be freely open to the public. Soane died of a chill in 1837, described in his old age by his secretary as 'a very odd fish indeed who lives in a very odd shell'. George brought a case in Chancery in an attempt to take possession of his father's goods. In proper Dickensian style, this dragged on until it was thrown out in 1870.

The Museum remains Sir John Soane's main legacy. The recognisable Soane style became passé in his own lifetime with the rise of Pugin and the Gothic revival. Though about sixty of Soane's pupils have been identified by historians, it is difficult to say that a Soane school emerged. Indeed, attempts were made in the 1860s to close the Museum which was little frequented at that time. In 2010, the Museum regularly experiences long queues for entry which remains free.

Anne Byrne

# VISITS

## Oxburgh Hall, Oxenborough, Norfolk

**The South-West corner**

There has been a settlement at this place since Saxon times and it is recorded in the Doomsday Book as Oxenburch ‘a fortified place where oxen are kept’. It was acquired by Sir Edmund Bedingfeld upon the death of his grandmother, Margaret Tuddenham, in 1476 and he decided to build a new house on the site, and was given royal permission by Edward IV on the 3rd July 1482, although by then it was probably already nearing completion. This magnificent moated fortified manor house, in lovely countryside in Norfolk, has been home to the Bedingfeld family from the fifteenth century until the present day.

During the Wars of the Roses Edmund Bedingfeld supported the Yorkists, firstly Edward IV and then at the coronation of Richard III he was created a Knight of Bath. However, he soon came to accommodation with the Tudor regime. His son, also named Edmund, was given the thankless job of Steward of the household of Katherine of Aragon after her divorce from Henry VIII. His son Henry was a devout Catholic and was one of the first to come out in support of Mary Tudor. He was gaoler to Mary’s sister Elizabeth at Woodstock and when the latter came to the throne he lost his position at court. He also came under suspicion for refusing to sign the Act of Uniformity in 1569. In the following century the Bedingfelds were loyal to the crown and fought for Charles I and another Henry Bedingfeld was imprisoned in the Tower of London for two years, and in 1652 most of his estates were confiscated. After the Restoration of Charles II yet another Henry Bedingfeld was rewarded with a baronetcy but Charles refused to reimburse Bedingfeld for the money that the family had lost fighting for his cause. The Bedinfelds continued to adhere to Catholicism and suffered over the next number of years from punitive taxes levied on Catholics. Over

the centuries the family made a number of marriages that link them with other wealthy families. One such family that the Bedingfelds became linked with through marriage were the Pastons. In 1826, Henry Bedingfeld married Margaret Paston, who was the last of the family line made famous through the Paston Letters written during the second half of the fifteenth century. In 1951 the 9th Baronet sold the house and there were fears that it might be demolished but Sybil, Lady Bedingfeld bought it back and arranged for the National Trust to acquire the Hall.

According to the guide book ‘no one ever forgets their first sight of Oxburgh’ and it is certainly true that it has that ‘wow factor’ when first viewing it. Approaching through the walled garden the glorious sight of the house surrounded by a moat is truly breathtaking. The house is constructed out of bricks. Most people think of brickwork as a Tudor invention but of course a number of houses were constructed out of brick in the late-fifteenth century with Oxburgh being one of the loveliest.

The magnificent Gatehouse dominates the approach and is the best preserved part of the original 1482 building. Medieval bricks are flatter and longer than those used in later periods and the Gatehouse is a true masterpiece of late-medieval brickwork and quite beautiful. Although performing a security function with a porters lodge to the east and ante-room to the west the Gatehouse contains quite a number of windows, and no proper fortress would have had such large expanses of glass in such vulnerable positions.

Passing over the moat via an eighteenth-century bridge one enters the courtyard. The medieval Great Hall, which was sadly demolished in 1775, originally stood opposite the Gatehouse where the South Passage now stands, and entry into the house is by the South Passage which was designed to link the private family apartments with the public rooms.

Entering the Saloon one is struck by the neo-classical design, a real contrast to the rest of this largely Gothic building. Designed by John Tasker for the 4th Baronet it was built in the 1770’s on the site of the old kitchens. It was re-decorated in Victorian times by the 7th Baronet who had the interior decorator J.D.Crace make a Pugin designed red flock wallpaper and some neo-Gothic curtains. The pictures of Hanoverian royals are Victorian copies of originals that were sold in the twentieth century.

The West Drawing Room was created out of three small servants quarters by Tasker in the late-eighteenth century. The stunning ceiling was again created by Crace while, in an allusion to the family’s previous Yorkist adherence, stylised versions of the Yorkist rose appear on the cornice, the upholstered sofa and chairs and the red carpet, all the work of Crase. The walls are decorated with various seventeenth-and-eighteenth century portraits.

**The North and West Fronts**

Passing through the West staircase hall with its late-seventeenth century staircase, one enters the Library, which was created by combining a breakfast room and a bedroom. As it stands now it reflects its mid-nineteenth century heyday with ornate Gothic cresting on the tops of the bookcases, flock-on-gilt wallpaper, and a very distinctive carpet which incorporates the arms of the Paston family. One possible highlight of this room is the fireplace which has an overmantel made-up from medieval carved woodwork originating from continental churches, whilst the sides of the overmantel incorporate the Tree of Jesse. The painted coats of arms on the fireplace represent families with whom the Bedingfelds were connected by marriage.

The Small Dining Room is a beautiful room with rich flock and gilt wallpaper and dark wood. The Yorkist falcon and fetterlock badge is much in evidence here. The beautifully carved fireplace features the arms of the Bedingfelds and the Pastons. The sideboard with exquisite marquetry dates from the seventeenth century.

Climbing the North Staircase with its collection of seventeenth-and-eighteenth century portraits one passes through the lobby into the North Room with its sixteenth century central section. Until 1985, this room was used by a former owner, Mrs Greathead, as her bedroom. The room has a very Victorian-Gothic feel to it, with dark wooden panelling and beautiful green wallpaper. The flying tester bed is made up of antiquarian woodwork assembled in the nineteenth century and includes the Paston arms. On the walls are portraits of various members of the Bedingfeld family. The adjoining Boudoir was used by Mrs Greathead as a dressing room.

**The Small Dining Room**

The Marian Hangings room contains three wonderful needlework panels made by Mary Queen of Scots and Bess of Hardwick. These exquisite pieces of work, still vivid after all these years, contain complex imagery expressing their belief that hope would triumph over adversity. After fleeing Scotland in 1568, Mary was held in captivity by her cousin Elizabeth I for eighteen years, her warder for the majority of this time was George, earl of Shrewsbury, whom Bess had married in 1567 as her fourth husband. The small appliqué panels are worked in cross-stitch or tent-stitch depicting birds, beasts and fish. The large central panel in the centre of each hanging displays a personal emblem, one of which bears a knife pruning a vine which was meant to contrast Mary's fruitfulness with the barren Elizabeth.

The short flight upstairs leads to the King's Room which was occupied by Henry VII during a stay in August 1487, indicating that although at heart Yorkists, the Bedingfelds were definitely pragmatists. Once beautifully furnished the room is now quite spartan. In a glass case there is a collection of old documents, all relating to aspects of the Bedingfelds past, such as the original licence to build Oxburgh with the Great Seal of Edward IV.

The adjoining Priest's Hole was converted from a former garderobe and the staunchly Catholic Bedinfelds would have used it to hide priests and fellow recusants during the years of religious persecution under the Tudors and Stuarts. If one twists round one can just squeeze into the small hole, which would certainly have been terribly claustrophobic for anyone hiding there for any length of time.

The circular Gatehouse Stairway leads to the Queen's Room which Elizabeth of York occupied whilst her austere husband stayed in the room below. Seventeenth-century tapestries depicting the Queen of Sheba at the Court of King Solomon hang on the walls.

From the Queen's Room a flight of stairs takes one to the roof which has great views across the flat Norfolk countryside.

The Armoury was used as an ante-room, controlling access to the stairs leading up to the high status lodging. Some Civil War armour is displayed here in the room.

There are frequent guided tours of the gardens throughout the year and Oxburgh boasts a parterre and a walled garden as well as woodlands, but when we visited in March it was still too early to see anything of any real interest.

The Roman Catholic Chapel of the Immaculate Conception and St Margaret stands in the grounds. Built in 1836, it is made from brick and contains a family pew made from finely carved sixteenth-century choir stalls from the continent and a magnificent altarpiece.

Close by the Hall is St John's the parish church of Oxborough village. In 1948 the steeple collapsed, destroying the nave and south aisle. One of the surviving parts of the church is the Bedingfeld Chantry Chapel, added to the church in about 1500, and which contains rare sixteenth-century terracotta screens and Tudor windows, as well as various monuments to members of the Bedingfeld family.

The restaurant was fully booked so we popped over to the nearby Bedingfeld Arms for lunch. The pub would not win any prizes for outstanding beauty and was minimally furnished but the meals were extremely good and reasonably priced.

Bedingfeld Hall is a lovely place to visit. The exterior with brickwork and moat is a glorious sight and there is more than enough inside of the Hall to maintain one's interest. Inside the Hall the architecture and furnishings are engrossing whilst the family's political and religious history is revealed in a number of diverse ways.

John Croxon

# ARTS REPORT

## THEATRE

### King Lear
### Royal Shakespeare Company
### The Courtyard Theatre
### Stratford-Upon-Avon

Greg Hicks as Lear and Kathryn Hunter as the Fool

Lear has always been considered a somewhat demanding play for audiences and it has not been staged as often as the more accessible works. Indeed, it is some twenty years since I last saw King Lear with Brian Cox as the king. However, there have been a number of productions recently with others planned. Here, at the RSC's small Courtyard Theatre, David Farr directs a new production of the play.

I have mixed feelings about this production. Farr presents with an ancient Britain falling apart. Jon Bausor has designed a dark, hard, industrial set, complete with broken windows, damaged metal panelling, twisted girders and strip-lighting that fizzles and blacks-out while the walls collapse during the storm. This is meant to symbolise a collapsing kingdom but becomes a tedious distraction. Farr gives us a confusion of costumes; furred robes, medieval, First World War soldiers, doctors and nurses, whilst swords and rifles strive to compete and the crisp uniform of 'General' Cornwall seems incongruous against the medieval robes of Lear's men. Medieval chants vive with barked-out orders. This contrast may be what Farr is highlighting but it merely succeeds in irritating.

Weighed against this mess are a number of major performances; chiefly amongst these is a superb Lear by Greg Hicks. At first, Hick's Lear is a tyrant, dominating his court though fear. When he enters from a direction that no-one expects the court freezes in nervous anticipation and he proceeds to unsettle everyone with his verbal thrusts. His authority is absolute and he compels his daughters to stand on wooden boxes when they declare their professions of love for him. When Cordelia refuses to play his narcissistic games he subjects her to a humiliating harangue. This is what makes his decline from all-powerful monarch to the frail, bewildered old man out on a windswept, stormy heath so dramatic.

Hicks gives us a performance that is packed with genuine feeling. In the early scenes he is tyrannical, angrily kicking away the ruined map of his kingdom in disgust, and when confronted with his elder daughter's perfidiousness he unleashes a series of terrifying curses upon Goneril. In exile, Lear's disintegration is handled magnificently, transforming before our eyes from ferocious ruler to pathetic old man, his long white hair dripping in the rain, invoking our pity and, in the heath scene with the blinded Gloucester, switching from madness to piercing sanity denouncing the authority that he once embodied. The ending is truly heart-rending and Hicks speaks the words with real grief and pity.

Hicks is supported by some fine performances particularly from Kelly Hunter as Goneril, Katy Stephens as Regan and Darrell D'Silva as Kent. Hunter is excellent as Goneril, moving from scheming daughter to needy killer, while Stephen delivers a wonderfully forceful and sensual Regan, and D'Silva imbues Kent with a jocular roughness. However, there were some other performances that strained the ear and in a small auditorium such as the Courtyard that is inexcusable. I was also unconvinced by Kathryn Hunter's Fool. Her acrobats and running about the stage distracted from the poignancy of the Fool's remarks.

On this particular evening the theatre had plenty of empty seats and whether this was due to the inclement weather, the state of the economy or the perception of Lear as a play that demands something of the audience; it must be disappointing for both cast and management. Despite the fact that this production straddles far too many periods, it is well worth seeing, particularly for a masterly performance by Greg Hicks. Farr has given us an angry production with huge power and in Hicks we witness a majestic Lear.

John Croxon

# CONCERT

## Bristol Brass

## Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire

The beautiful Holy Trinity Church in the small Gloucestershire town of Minchinhampton was the venue for a concert by the ten piece Bristol Brass Consort on a chilly Sunday evening. The church was packed and as people settled down on the hard wooden pews wrapped up in their coats against the cold the orchestra began warming up.

Formed in 1985 the Bristol Brass Consort is a symphonic brass ensemble that aims to provide audiences with high quality performances of the established brass repertoire as well as lesser known works and new commissions. Regarded by many as the foremost brass ensemble in the South West, the Bristol Brass Consort is certainly the most active, and has also taken a significant lead in promoting the work of young local composers in its recent series of concerts at St. George's, Bristol. For this performance Bristol Brass utilized twentieth-century instruments consisting of piccolo trumpet, trumpet, flugel horn, French horn, trombone, bass trombone and tuba.

The programme for the evening covered a variety of pieces, with the first half a collection of early modern music and after the break more contemporary tunes. Holy Trinity Church is a lovely medieval building celebrating its 750th anniversary, although there are sections rebuilt in the Victorian period. It possesses absolutely superb acoustics and the sound of brass resounded beautifully within its stone walls.

The performance began with *'The Earle of Oxford's March'* by William Byrd as arranged by Elgar Howarth. Byrd was one of the most versatile composers of his day. A pupil of Thomas Tallis, he became Organist and Master of the Choristers at Lincoln Cathedral and married there in 1568. Byrd was a convinced lifelong Catholic and pro-Jesuit and much of his work reflected and celebrated an English Catholicism that was barely tolerated during the harsh years of the latter part of Elizabeth's reign. However, one must not forget that Byrd also wrote a large amount of music for the Church of England and the court, and the beauty and passion that these works displayed led the authorities to ignore his Catholic sympathies. This martial march is found in *'My Ladye Nevells Booke'* a volume consisting entirely of keyboard music by William Byrd. This arrangement of Byrd's work was beautifully played by Bristol Brass. The seemingly effortless rendition, combined with superb control and technique was an indication of the sheer quality that was to follow in the rest of the evening's programme.

The second piece was *'Mal Sims'* by Giles Farnaby as arranged by Elgar Howarth. Giles Farnaby was born about 1563, his birthplace is unknown but it was possibly in Truro, Cornwall, England. These short but vigorous pieces originally appeared in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, a primary source of keyboard music from late-Elizabethan England. The band superbly played this dynamic piece, bringing energy and a freshness to this work.

The third piece played by Bristol Brass was *'The King's Hunting Jigge'* by John Bull as arranged by Elgar Howarth. John Bull, born in about 1562, also has an uncertain birthplace, possibly Somerset, but perhaps London, he later lived in the Low Countries and died in Antwerp. This is another piece arranged by Elgar Howarth from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. Here, the band played with exuberance and passion producing a wonderfully energetic rendition of Bull's piece.

It was at this point that the orchestra switched from English composers to a Frenchman. *'Old French Dances'* by Claude Gervaise as arranged by Peter Reeve. Claude Gervaise was a French composer, editor and arranger of the mid-sixteenth century. As yet, little research has been done into his life and details are only known of the period in which he was active in Paris. It is said that he served as a violist and chamber musician to kings François I and Henri II, but all that is known with any confidence is that Gervaise was active between roughly 1540 and 1558 as an editor for music publisher Pierre Attaignant and later Attaignant's widow, who took over the business. Gervaise supervised Books 3, 4, and 5 of Attaignant's Danceries, and he wrote Book 6 himself. This consists almost entirely of four-part dances, mainly pavanes, gaillardes, and various species of branles. Bristol Brass played the following works:

*1. Allemande*

*2. Gaillarde*

*3. Pavane D'Angleterre*

*4. Basse Danse "La Volunte"*

These tender and expressive works featured long drawn out melodies which were beautifully and sensitively scored. The whole band to a person gave the music the justice it deserved.

The next work was *'Sonata Pian'e Forte'* by Giovanni Gabrieli as edited by Philip Jones. Giovanni Gabrieli was an Italian composer born in Venice in the mid-1550's. He was one of the most influential musicians of his time, and represents the culmination of the style of the Venetian School at the time of the shift from Renaissance to Baroque idioms. San Marco in Venice had a long tradition of musical excellence and Gabrieli's work there made him one of the most noted composers in Europe. Gabrieli was not, as once thought, the inventor of instrumental dynamics in this piece. Adriano Banchieri had used similar instructions in a 1596 "echo" canzone, but Gabrieli deployed the markings "pian[o]" (softly) and "forte" (strongly) throughout this sonata, allowing the dynamics to distinguish the choirs from the larger tutti sections. In addition, he specifies the instrumentation of both choirs: a cornetto and three trombones for the first choir, and a violin (or viola) with three trombones for the second. For this arrangement Bristol Brass split into two with one half retiring into the ancient Lady Chapel, and the distance between the two sections produced a beautiful contrasting sound that filled the church with stunning melody that was totally enchanting.

For the next work the orchestra turned to *'Wachet Auf! (Sleepers Awake!)* by J. S. Bach as arranged by Peter Reeve. Bach composed Cantata BWV 140 with seven movements and was first performed in 1731. BWV 140 is a chorale cantata; its primary melody and text are drawn from a Lutheran chorale, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*. The ensemble played the first movement which is a chorale fantasia based on the first verse of the chorale, which is a common feature of Bach's cantatas. This arrangement showed off the band in all its technical glory in a spectacular rendering of this Bach masterpiece.

The final arrangement before the interval was *'Symphony for Brass'* by Jan Koetsier. This was the first of the modern works performed this evening. Jan Koetsier, born in 1911 in Amsterdam and died in 2006 in Munich, was a Dutch composer and conductor. In 1950, Koetsier became the first Kapellmeister of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. As a composer, he wrote chamber music, and orchestral and choral works, as well as the opera *Frans Hals*. From 1966 to 1976, he taught conducting at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München. A well-known example of his composition is this Brass Symphony from 1979 commissioned by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble. The work demonstrated Koetsier's sympathy for the medium and the composer's remarkable understanding of musical form. Bristol Brass played this piece with great understanding and remarkable empathy with the work.

Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton

Following the interval the orchestra brought up the familiar rhythms of *'Rags'* by Scott Joplin as arranged by John Iveson. Scott Joplin, born about 1867, was a black composer and pianist, born near Texarkana, Texas, into the first post-slavery generation. He achieved fame for his unique ragtime compositions, and was dubbed the "King of Ragtime." During his brief career, Joplin wrote forty-four original ragtime pieces, one ragtime ballet, and two operas. One of his first pieces, the Maple Leaf Rag, became ragtime's first and most influential hit, and remained so for a century. Joplin's music was rediscovered and returned to popularity in the early 1970s with the release of a million-selling album of Joplin's rags recorded by Joshua Rifkin, followed by the Academy award–winning movie *'The Sting'*, which featured several of his compositions, such as '*The Entertainer'*. In 1976 Joplin was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize. This was a sparkling rendition of *'Rags*, and glancing around I found people tapping their hands and feet, all enjoying the sheer sense of fun that Bristol Brass brought to this familiar piece.

The ensemble then played a couple of highly popular works, both enthusiastically received by the audience. '*Londonderry Air'*, traditional as arranged by John Iveson and *'Battle of Jericho'*, traditional as arranged by Peter Harvey. Both pieces were expertly played with a beautiful crystal clear sound.

A return to the sixteenth century then followed with *'Greensleeves'*, Traditional, as arranged by Elgar Howarth. Most people still think of *Greensleeves* as being written by Henry VIII, but it is generally recognised now that he didn't actually compose any works himself but merely tinkered with arrangements and that a lot of the works, including *Greensleeves*, originated on the continent. Technically flawless, Paul Tomlinson on French horn, brought the music to the fore with a real sense of panache and brought a new beauty to this familiar tune.

We then returned to the twentieth century with *'A Londoner in New York'* by Jim Parker. Jim Parker (born 1934) is a British composer graduating as a silver medallist at the Guildhall School of Music, Parker played with leading London orchestras and chamber groups. After a while he concentrated upon composing and conducting. He had early success with a series of recordings in which he set to music the poems of Sir John Betjeman. These and subsequent records, including Captain Beaky which topped the charts as both a single and album, led to work in television as well as in the London West End theatre where he has had productions of three musicals. His work in film and television ranges from 'Moll Flanders',' Tom Jones', 'Midsummer Murders' and 'The House of Eliott', to the contemporary score for the political thriller 'House of Cards'. The arrangement consisted of five pieces:

1. *Echoes of Harlem*

2. *The Chrysler Building*

3. *Grand Central*

4. *Central Park*

5. *Radio City*

The band thrilled the audience with a sparkling performance of these works by Jim Parker. The sounds from the trumpets, trombones and tuba all swirled around the room to create a wonderfully melodic and texturally delicate working of these pieces.

For the finale the orchestra played a rousing version of *'I Got Rhythm'* by George Gershwin as arranged by Roger Harvey. This was a glorious way to end the concert and as the final notes of Gershwin's modern masterpiece faded the audience responded with loud applause.

During the course of the evening the band gave fine performances of completely different styles of music. From beautifully constructed early modern works to toe-tapping renditions of modern classics. All the players were superb and from their demeanour and broad smiles it was quite evident that they enjoyed the performance as much as the audience. All the musicians played with such beautiful clarity, producing a thrilling and buoyant performance.

Overall, this was a concert that provided much variety and interest and a wonderful evening of entertainment. From the first strains of the opening piece it was evident that this was to be a night, not only for the connoisseurs of brass music but for anyone who appreciated good music generally, and on the evidence of this evening's concert, Bristol Brass is in great shape to remain as a real top class band.

John Croxon

# Lecture

## The 4th Thomas Browne Seminar: Early Modern Libraries

## University of York

## Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies

## 18th March 2010

The Shambles, York for SE6051

After a very long walk from the delightful streets of the City of York, I found my way to the University of York for what turned out to be a fascinating seminar on the theme of Early Modern private libraries. The libraries were once the possessions of very different individuals and were assembled for different purposes.

**Bill Sherman** (York) opened the proceedings with the fascinating story of Hermando Colón's library and legacy. Colón's famous father was Christopher Columbus and Sherman put the case that the now less known son deserves consideration as the bibliographical equivalent of his parent. The younger Colón spent his life assembling a magnificent collection of books in an attempt at creating a universal library that would contain all knowledge. Colón not only collected books but also recorded them with extreme bibliographical care and learning. He and his librarians developed a catalogue which used a hundred symbols to describe the collection in their care. Colón provided details about the place of acquisition and the price paid for most of his books. His dream was to create a national library for Spain where all books would have a place and would be studied by a staff who would write about them to increase the spread of the ideas they contained. After Colón's death in 1539, his collection was (and what remains of it still is) housed in Seville Cathedral. The Bibliotheca Colombina features shelves made of New World wood in recognition of the family's achievements in exploration. Unfortunately the library went into decline after its founder's death when Philip II created his own royal and national collection. Colón deserves much more recognition for his remarkable investment of time, money, and scholarship in the service of learning.

**Lisa Skogh** (CELL) revealed new information about the private library of Queen Hedwig Eleanora (1636-1715) of Sweden which shows that she was a patron of the arts and more learned than has been thought. In addition to the royal library in Sweden, Hedwig Eleanora had her own private collection of books. This small collection of 214 titles shows that the queen was an active patron of the arts – especially theatre – and of theologians and learned court ladies. Many of her books were probably gifts from grateful recipients of her patronage. Some featured elaborate bindings and some were dedicated to Hedwig Eleanora. The queen's patronage benefitted top rank scholars like the court historiographer and legal theorist Samuel von Pufendorf (whose ideas were welcomed by the absolutist Swedish monarchy) and the librarian and scholar Adam Olearius. The queen also collected books relating to national and family history. A painting by David Klöcher Ehrenstrahl of 'Historia et Fama' features allegorical figures representing these and a pile of books which contains them. The books depicted were part of Hedwig Eleanora's library. The queen can now be reassessed as a collector of books in her own right.

Daniel Starza-Smith (UCL) examined the book collecting habits of Edward, second viscount Conway (1594-1655). Conway's library, like Hernando Colón's, was an attempt at gathering together the state of contemporary knowledge. The library grew to some 13,000 volumes and was split between Conway's Irish estate and London. Both sections of the collection suffered damage. The Irish section was damaged when Conway's house was attacked in an uprising and the London part was impounded by Parliament in 1643. Happily, other evidence survives. The Irish collection was catalogued and acted as a finding aid while the London collection was recorded when it was offered for sale after it was seized. Conway was an active buyer. His accounts show that he interacted with booksellers who advised him of the best books and

prices. He liked to buy his books in bulk and he collected book sale catalogues to keep up to date. Conway's collection was varied and ranged from serious works of history and law to plays, romances, and jest-books. His theatre books are particularly interesting since he had some early editions of works by Shakespeare.

The second part of the seminar was devoted to John Donne's library.

Hugh Adlington (Birmingham) focused on introducing Donne's library and his ways of using his books. More of Donne's books have been discovered than are recorded in previous bibliographies. His books were dispersed after his death and can now be found in institutional libraries around the world. Many of them can be identified by a combination Donne's signature and an Italian motto he wrote across the top of their title pages. Others are less easy to identify. These may have small anonymous pencil marks throughout their texts. When these marginalia can be matched with his writings, a rewarding way of attributing ownership opens up. Donne may have had up to 500 books if his collection was similar to those of similar wealth and status. Of these less than 270 have yet been traced. Most were published before 1610 and most are theological texts. He also had books on law, history, current affairs, philosophy, and natural sciences. There is a curious lack of literature in the library of someone who is now remembered mainly for his literary work.

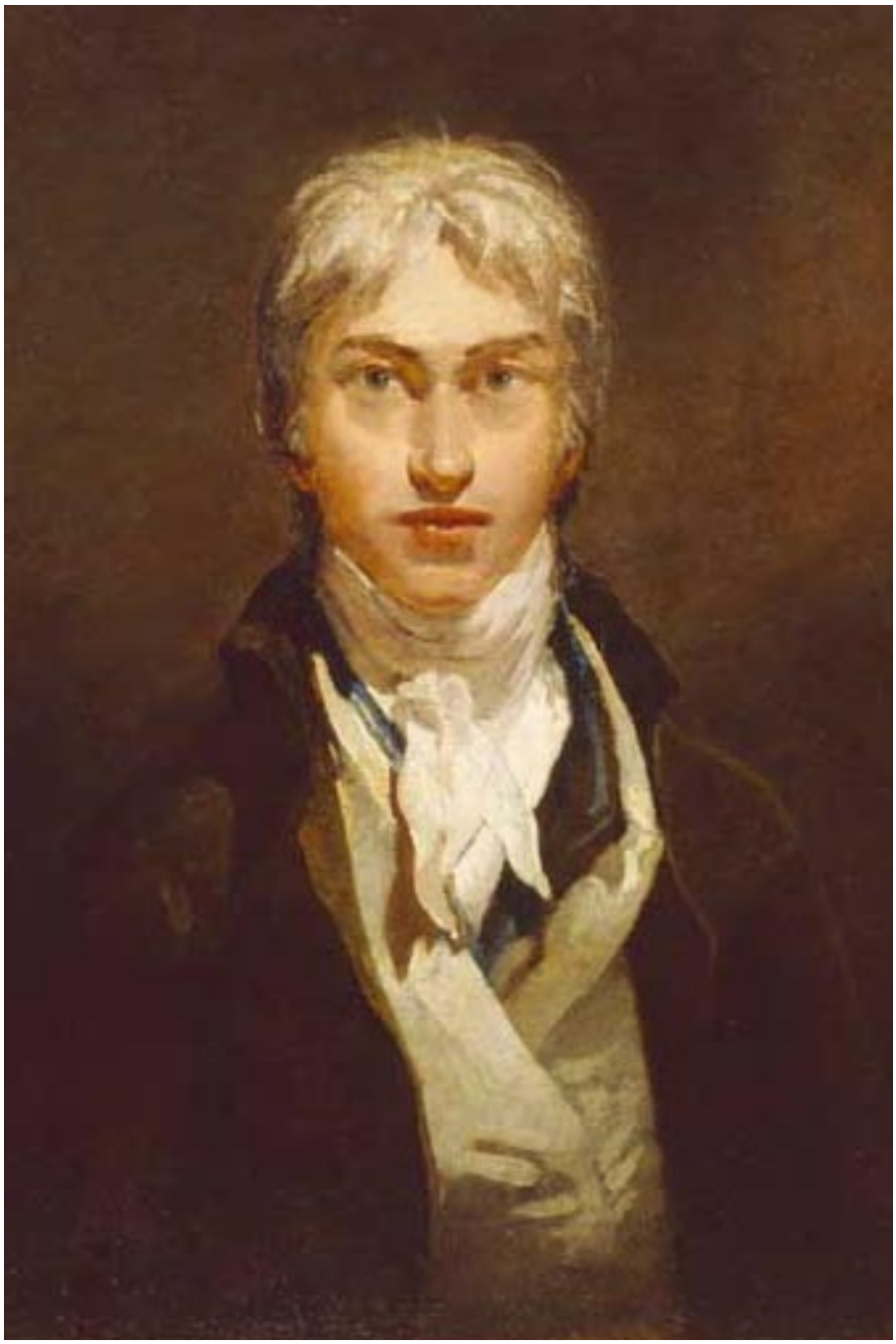
Piers Brown (York) took a different approach to Donne by thinking of him as someone going 'literate work' in early modern England. Where and how did Donne read and write? Donne has left some valuable clues. His closet, library, or study – he used various terms – was a place where he read the books that were his companions. His writing, however, was done at the fireside while surrounded by his numerous and noisy family. Some of Donne's thinking about books can be teased out from a poem he wrote to his friend Dr Andrews. Andrews had borrowed a book from Donne but his children had destroyed it while playing. Andrews wrote out a manuscript copy of the text to make amends. Donne was touched by his gesture and decided that the book written by hand by his friend was much more valuable than anything a printing press could ever create. Donne's poem *De libro cum mutuaretur, impresso, domi a pueris frustratim lacerato, & post reditto manuscripto* (1635) offers new insights when re-translated with an understanding of early-seventeenth-century book culture that previous translators have missed.

This afternoon was an enjoyable one with well-presented talks providing much food for thought. As I'm working on an Early Modern library myself, it was extremely useful and interesting to see how others are approaching and analysing their subjects. I hope very much that there will be a 5th Thomas Browne Seminar next year!

Karen Baston

# ART EXHIBITIONS

## TURNER'S SOURCES IN EARLY MODERN TIMES: REFLECTIONS ON TURNER AND THE MASTERS AT TATE BRITAIN



Turner, 1775-1851, was born in the Early Modern period but was by the end of a long life both chronologically and creatively well outside it, as was Sir John Soane, subject of an EMS lecture by Tim Knox on 5th March. As the recent Tate exhibition convincingly sought to show the artist, who is so often thought to be a precursor of Impressionism, was also in thrall to earlier masters. That he admired Claude is well known, the hanging of two of his works in the National Gallery alongside two

Claudes, as requested in his Will, making this point to countless visitors. Most commentators would see the connections with Claude and Poussin as immensely fruitful. Some of Turner's other numerous exercises in discipleship are more questionable and a few frankly a waste of time, or so we can say with the luxury of hindsight.

The reasonably well-informed gallery visitor may well believe Tuner was a vital step on the road to Impressionism. In the most literal sense of a traceable series of influences this comes down to a question of what Monet and Pissarro may or may not have looked at in London when they fled conscription into Napoleon III's army in 1870. In more general terms Turner was part of a trend towards painting light that can be regarded as one of the signs that what we might call the High Modern, as opposed to the Early Modern World had emerged. Even this trend lacks a pseudo-Marxist inevitability. The other great artistic transitional figure in painting in Turner's period was Goya, 1746-1828. As a young man Goya may have watched Tiepolo do his last great ceiling paintings on the Oriente Palace in Madrid.

The painting of bright outdoor light was not entirely new: Piero della Francesca and Veronese managed it without, it would appear plein-air methods, or the early-nineteenth century ready-mixed thick oil colours in thin, squeezable metal tubes that encouraged speed of execution, not too far in arrears of actual light conditions, as well as more general spontaneity. Tiepolo, known to Goya, revived Veronese's manner. Some early Goya works seem to show Tiepolo's influence, but in the end for the most part Goya veered off in another direction eventually producing the late Dark Paintings. Turner ventured into this psychologically and tonally dark world with explorations of calamities some in gloomy settings, a good example being the horrendous scene of the first night to descend on Waterloo after the battle, "The Field of Waterloo", exhibited 1818, Tate. Some of the vignettes could be isolated and, with a great deal of working up, turned into Goya's Horrors of War prints. Goya can, even in middle period work, use strong light and this trend was eventually assisted by the new medium of lithography of which he was one of the first serious practitioners late in life.

The Field of Waterloo by J.M.W. Turner, exhibited 1818

In some respects Turner and Monet were alike. In both, the figurative was progressively de-emphasized. A Monet painting of idlers and fishermen in a wood by a body of water, “The Pond at Montyeron”, 1876, Hermitage, in a recent Royal Academy exhibition at least symbolically marks the stage at which the figures vanish. You can see and count them but they are disappearing into the dappled light and shade. Some very late Monets of the reflections in water of his famous lily pond at Giverny are about pure light and colour all but disconnected from the surfaces on which they fall. Perhaps the largest concentration of these wonderful works is to be found in the Marmatton in Paris. There are no horizons or shorelines much as some late Turners are hazes of light un-tethered to objects. Oddly Monet, late in life, stating from the reflections he saw, perhaps confusedly through his cataracts before they were removed, was still more tied to the patterns perceived by the optic nerve than Turner but Monet’s reflections of shadow become probings of depth. Turner’s liberation from sense impressions starts remarkably early in that zones of light shade or colour drift free from land, sea and sky, or at least become highly choreographed as the relatively early Bridgewater Sea-Piece, cat. No. 20 (see below). This tendency at first seems to be a mere exaggeration of the formal organization of a painting either through selection of the viewpoint or alterations of reality widely practiced by the seventeenth century masters to whom Turner owed so much. In many respects the closest Pre-Impressionist approximation of Impressionism was Pre-Raphaelitism, not in the subject matter or the painted surface, but in the bright naturally lit colour. Turner never achieved this mid-nineteenth century light.

The last observation is not a criticism for what he did was of breathtaking originality and it brings us to an important point. When Turner looked at some of the works by his great predecessors, many of which were also in the exhibition, he did not necessarily see what we do. He may have been presented with something far murkier, for instance, when, as a youth of 18, he could have seen Rembrandt’s “The Mill” 1645-8, National Gallery, Washington, cat. No. 58, first exhibited in London in 1793. Failure to point this out is one of my few serious reservations about this exhibition. “The Mill” was involved in one of the periodic cleaning controversies that bedevil the museum world. It used to be, and probably was when Turner saw it, far more uniformly yellow and brown than it is now. The Washington National Gallery’s cleaning brought out the silvery blue sky under the layers of varnish and grime in the process shattering an icon, perhaps a false icon, of stereotypical Rembrandtesque tonality which covered up one of his (limited) forays into the bright world of Vermeer and Saenredam.

“The Mill” is a Rembrandt that takes an everyday thing and transmutes it into an almost cult object in a reverse procedure to that in his religious paintings, in which the sacred is made to look like an every day scene. Another everyday phenomenon turned into a cult object is in the print of “The Three Trees”, 1643, which can be related to the three crosses on Calvary, but this specific reference, though perfectly valid, is hardly necessary as the trees exude such a remarkable innate presence. Another work with such presence is Paul Nash’s presumably derivative mixed media work, “The Three Trees in the Night”, 1913, Coll. Margot Eates, in the Dulwich Picture Gallery Nash exhibition, which overlapped with the Turner exhibition. “The Mill” also in its own Northern way reveals an impulse towards classicism. It is one thing to make a convincing landscape, another to create a sense of repose, but another again to place an object in an environment that seems exactly suited to it while not looking

contrived. This is in effect the object in a landscape version of the classical work in which nothing can be added or taken away without ruining the whole. “The Mill” does what many eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings, including Turner’s, tried to do with the ruin of the round temple in Tivoli, but with unpretentious material. (The temple was so famous that Soane copied it on a corner of the Bank of England. The temple, near the top of a cliff, dominates the gorge blow it. The procedures by which the mill building acquires its special power are worth analysing in detail. A puff of cloud to the left of the structure, in reality far behind in the distant sky, seems to point to the back of the mill while the great swathe of light expanding from left to right widens to just the extent of the mill’s sails. (Sails where of enormous importance in Turners maritime paintings).

In “The Mill”, as in so many Baroque and other paintings, coincidences on the picture plane matter as much as those in fictive space, but spatial illusionism is preserved. In some cases, however, the alignments on the picture plane are taken almost to the point of destroying the illusionism as in Turner’s “Port Ruysdael”, exhibited 1827, Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven, Conn., cat. No. 70. In “The Mill” the conventions of spatial illusionism are better preserved but on careful consideration are perhaps not quite believable or, at the very least, the result of the most careful positioning of the artist’s vantage point. For instance a lower rock formation or manmade object is vertically aligned with the mill. The lowered mast on the little boat, and the foreground ripples that it partly follows, nearly create a detached foreground pond such as those Poussin liked to place in his works. Rembrandt turned down a chance for a subsidized trip to Italy, while the Frenchman Poussin spent most of his adult life in the peninsula, yet they produced similar effects.

“Port Ruysdael” was one of the high points in the exhibition. The title is taken from an entirely fictional place, which was Turner’s way of doing homage to a distinguished earlier master. It is a painting that has an apparent childish simplicity in its horizontal band composition without the effects of Baroque compositional devices, enduring long after the style’s heyday, to which Turner was more or less addicted. Had he been a primarily figurative artist like David, from whose work Baroque devices are progressively expunged, he might have seen the need to get rid of them. Instead, as he was most interested in atmospheric and light effects, he let these swirl round or partly mask the old tricks. In “Port Ruysdael” the mask slips, perhaps revealing on some level how unimportant elaborate compositional devices were in Turner’s endeavours, and in the process allows us to relate the Turner to a much earlier Dutch work (not in this exhibition) and considerably later paintings of the sea.

The Baroque compositional drama is not wholly absent in that the harbour mouth in “Port Ruysdael” is seen aslant in the foreground. But for some wispy, linear projections or related features, the harbour mouth is kept well below the watery horizon. Far more than most landscapes, excluding those of places such as the Netherlands or East Anglia, the sea is most notable for its horizontality and that is what with a remarkable simplicity and directness Turner conveys in “Port Ruysdael” in a remarkable combination of near primitivism modified to make it acceptable to the expectations of his early nineteenth century audience. The great diagonals of ships heaved up on waves, or harbour structures, or, failing these, waves and clouds differentiated by tone or colour, are moderated or avoided here so that the horizon is the predominant motif. The most similar works may be, from the very beginning of

the Dutch Golden Age, such as Jan Porcellis' "Rough Weather", 1629, Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Slive, "Dutch Art and Architecture", Pelican History of Art, ill. 294), or Impressionist period paintings in which a rigorously horizontal foreground garden or beach compliments the sea as in Monet's "Terrace at Sainte-Adresse", 1867, Met., New York; or Degas' "Beach Scene", 1869-70, National Gallery, London; or to a limited extent Seurat's "Bathers at Asnières", 1884, National Gallery, London. In the latter admittedly only showing the Seine, foreground objects except at the side and the middle seated figure, are well below the horizon line and the far bank of the river and the foreground is diagonal. The Monet is closest to "Port Ruysdael" in that there is something decidedly peculiar about the perspective of the foreground terrace while the flagpoles rather than navigational aids break through the horizon. The hulls of the shipping are parallel to the picture plane. The scattered people on Degas' beach echo the shipping adrift on the sea.

'Fishing Boats Bringing a Disabled Ship into Port Ruysdael' by J.M.W.Turner

Another very interesting contrast is with versions of a van Gough composition in the current van Gough exhibition at the Royal Academy, the painted version being "Boats at Sea, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer", June 1888, Pushkin State Museum, Moscow; two large derivative drawings Guggenheim, New York, Thannhauser Collection; and Royal Museums of Belgium, Brussels respectively cat. Nos. 53-5; and a sketch in a letter to Emile Bernard, letter 622, Morgan Library and Museum, New York. The boat's hulls are more or less parallel to the picture plane. In the painted version the two larger boats' masts protrude into the upper frame. The foremost waves are a bit diagonal but more or less parallel to the horizon but in the sketches are disrupted by energetic graphic swirls, especially in the letter. We hardly think of van Gough as a last echo of the Baroque yet he struggles, perhaps more than Turner in "Port Ruysdael", to return to return to something like the simplicity of Porcellis.

Van Gough's slightly diagonal waves are analogous to the nearer side of Turner's harbour mouth except that the latter slopes up towards the centre of the work and the latter up away from it. Turner's far side of the aslant harbour mouth is far away and almost lost in the swell and the diagonal is tamed by the horizontal band of dark water into which visually it merges. The detached bits of harbour wall, except for the odd pole, are kept not only well under the horizon line but also below their combined

upper edge and that of the dark water. This is in striking contrast to what happens in the work hung next to the Turner, “Rough Sea at a Jetty”, ca. 1652-5, Kimbell Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, cat. No. 69, by Jacob van Ruisdael. (The different spellings, which I have reproduced from the catalogue, merely reflect different usages, the artist, Jacob van Ruysdael/Ruisdael, 1628/9-82, directly or indirectly referred to being the same). Ruisdael’s dark foreground sea merges into a detached section of jetty under a navigational mast and in turn is tonally amalgamated with a boat whose sails cross the horizon line under an almost biblical column of cloud. For all the smallness of his solid objects van Ruisdael enters with gusto into the Baroque, concocted inter-relation of objects, linked as though by a divine order. Some commentators see the forced nature of the inter-relationships as a perhaps unacknowledged, but almost modern, questioning of the place of the deity. Turner’s boat, with billowing illuminated sails, is as potent an object as Rembrandt’s mill with its sails, but establishes itself, while physically lost in some sense on the horizon, by colour and tonality as an object in itself rather than as part of a system.

The peculiar power of Turner’s stunning painting derives from its combination of intimacy and immensity. The joined up whitecaps to the left seem to travel straight to the horizon, which is also brought closer by the bright lighting that extends from the middle distance to the horizon. Distance is minimized by the effect of tonal bands, repeated more loosely in the sky, and the almost linear apparent connection through the crests of the waves to the left, an effect augmented by the placement of the ship all but on the horizon for which it is improbably large. There is almost a sense in which the water to the right seems to crash down above not beyond the harbour wall having already engulfed the bottom of the pole, which may be some distance out from the jetty. The blown over basket and the dead fish scattered from it are a small disaster within a potential larger one. Turner deftly combines the difficulty of judging distances at sea with visual devices that minimize spatial recession while playing on an elemental fear of the deep. Residual if downplayed compositional virtuosity is present in the illuminated mountain of cloud in the upper band, directly over the luminous sails of the single ship, which is also more or less over the darkened bits at the end of the jetty.

The banded effect can also be seen in seven stripes, one produced by a division of a sky into two zones, in “Three Seascapes”, ca. 1827, Tate, cat. fig. 41, painted as a stack on a vertical canvass. Elements of the enticing primitivism of “Port Ruysdael” are present in “Peace – A Burial at Sea”, 1842, Tate, cat. fig. 63 (not in the special exhibition) and “Helvoetsluys; - the City of Utrecht, 64, going to Sea”, exhibited at the RA 1832, Fuji Art Museum Tokyo, cat. No. 72. A far more normal Turner seascape, with one of his irritatingly precise titles, is, “Dutch Boats in a Gale: Fishermen Endeavouring to Put their Fish on Board”, also known as the Bridgewater Sea-Piece, exhibited at the RA 1801, on loan to the National Gallery, cat. No. 20. This was commissioned by the third Duke of Bridgewater to hang with his van der Velde the Younger, “A Rising Gale”, ca. 1672, Toledo Museum, Ohio, cat. No. 19. In both, boats, at the end of a short trail of foaming water leading in from the lower frame, are tossed up so their hulls break the horizon line and their sails intrude deep into dramatic cloudscapes. In both works a line indents a billowing sail, seen from behind in the van der Velde, and from the front in the Turner. In the Turner the sail is disconcertingly like female buttocks, part brightly lit, partly in shadow, but as though amidst ambient light from secondary light sources as recorded by a brilliant artist on a

canvass seen obliquely. Despite the middle to late Turner's decreasing interest in the human form in exhibited paintings, he produced a vast output of erotic sketches destroyed after his death by Ruskin for what Ruskin believed was the good of Turner's reputation.

History painting was the most prestigious genre in the Britain and even the Europe of Turner's time. Fortunately for Turner "The Battle of Trafalgar, 21 October 1805", 1823-4, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, cat. No. 89, allowed him to combine his interest in the sea and atmosphere with a history painting. This great work, his only royal commission, was hung in the exhibition next to de Loutherbourg's "The Glorious First of June, 1794", 1795, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, cat. No. 88. For a time, after the completion of the Turner these two works were hung on either side of Lawrence's portrait of "George III" in St. James Palace. The Turner, intended as a companion to the de Loutherbourg, in many ways reveals that Turner was straining at the lease of convention. The main two ships in the earlier work viewed receding from the bows are largely concealed in cannon smoke while Turner has HMS Victory about to sail into a clear head on view of its broadside like a grand fenestrated façade seen slightly obliquely. Turner's rescued sailors just inside the picture plane wave, gesticulate or watch the action like a Greek chorus while de Loutherbourg has a series of rescues and rather histrionic efforts to give comfort as though acts of individual heroism, to some extent comparable to that in John Singleton Copely's "Watson and the Shark", 1778, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, just happened to be taking place in front of an epic naval battle. In his anxiety to give what emphasis he can to the emotions in the individual episodes de Loutherbourg employs facial types not far off Rowlandson caricatures. As a result his figures don't achieve heroic stature. Turner's faces, by contrast are barely visible and hardly worked up. Turner's essentially passive figures have much in common with many of those on Gericault's slightly earlier "Raft of the Medusa", 1819, Louvre, though less meticulously delineated, both sets of figures being essentially archetypal reflections on the human condition without specific props and actions to perform. The idea of rescue in the Trafalgar painting is movingly conveyed by a single dark, pulling figure to the lower left who may be saving two people or none. Moreover de Loutherbourg spreads his figures out on a kind of highway of masts and boats across the foreground, like the saved in a Last Judgement but vertical rather than horizontal.

Turner is, if possible, more didactic. The foremost figure, drastically foreshortened is at the bottom most point of the painting in the middle at the convergence point of the framing lines of an angle of light between un-natural darks. He can be traced back at least as far as the bottom figure in Rosso's "Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro", ca.1523, Uffizi, a work Turner is unlikely to have known though reflections of it appear in countless works, even British parish church wall monument reliefs. This figure holds an oar or staff, as would Turner the RA lecturer, to point things out, but the vacant eyes tell us he is dead. The dead as though pointing to their final glimpse of life call on us to reflect on their sacrifice for the nation. While de Loutherbourg tries to show the surface of the sea as it is, Turner, aided by the device of a sinking sail still catching the light of the world above, invites us to look into a kind of underworld. Interestingly in the "Second Sketch for the Battle of Trafalgar", ca. 1823, Tate, not in the exhibition, the "sail" is a huge Spanish flag still mostly on the surface as though Turner had not yet extracted the symbolic from the particular.

Through the sail/flag in the finished work we can link this naval victory painting to another so much earlier that stock pieties could be more conventionally expressed, the two versions of El Greco's "Allegory of Lepanto", 1577-9, National Gallery, London and El Escorial, in which Philip II, the Doge and the Pope pray in front of a gaping Mouth of Hell. The hellish and the grotesque can by no means excluded from Turner's works, such as in "Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon coming on", exhibited RA 1840, Museum of Fine Arts Boston; or more explicitly still in, "Sunrise with Sea Monsters", ca. 1840-5, Tate. The uncanny appears in the Trafalgar canvass somewhat disguised much as the underworld is abstracted. To the lower left, floating in the water is a huge block and tackle rather like the hideous head of some beaked sea monster. Turner's underworld under the waves is, compared to El Greco's, semi-abstract, almost modern.

"Sunrise with Sea Monsters" by J.M.W. Turner

This ambitious work, showing a battle fought just outside the Mediterranean, in some respects reconciles Northern and Mediterranean seventeenth century influences. Over HMS Victory's bows and behind them billowing sails and crashing masts are in effect a bleached version of the almost alive curtains and draperies in Baroque painting. These draperies can appear in the most improbable places as on a cliff face in a portrait of "Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick", by van Dyck, ca. 1633, Met. N.Y., mentioned in one of my previous reviews, and taken from Italian models. The chaos of the right hand side of the painting is contrasted with the almost serene avenue between, on the one hand the bows, and on the other the sterns of two enfilades of warships. Two types of Baroque imagery come to mind. One is one of Claude's harbours lined with stately buildings extending towards a distant horizon, but here the flanking structures do not lead to a setting or rising sun, the light source being elsewhere. The other is one of Rembrandt's prints in which there is an exaggerated contrast between a densely worked foreground and a hazy, deliberately under-worked background as in "The Mill", etching, 1641 (a completely different composition from the painting); "The Omval", etching, 1645; and the "Marriage of Jason and Creusa",

1648, etching, fourth state. Often the division between foreground and background treatments is arbitrary. The area in the Turner with the pulling, saving figure, mentioned above, silhouetted against more distant figures towering over equally dark debris is almost a translation into paint of a Rembrandt print.

As has been said some of Turner's attempts to work in the styles of previous periods were disastrous, a few so much so it best to pass over them in silence. However the rationale behind the exhibition meant that the more plausible endeavours could be looked at in a fresh way. Turner had the sense not to try to work in Raphael's manner, which could hardly have been more alien to his natural inclinations. It is interesting that in "Rome, from the Vatican. Raffaelle, Accompanied by La Fornarina, Preparing his Pictures for the Decoration of the Loggia", exhibited at the RA 1820, Tate, cat. no. 63, there is an attempt at a rhyme between the Solomonic (barely sugar) columns in a replica of the design of "The Healing of the Lame", ca.1515-6, for the Sistine tapestries, cartoon in the V&A, on a panel held by Raphael and the balustrades of the Loggia. Turner was clearly trying to respond to those aspects of Raphael which were within his grasp. He reacted to Poussin's "Winter" or "The Deluge", 1660-4, Louvre, cat. No. 29, which he saw in 1802, and about which he was ambivalent (cat. pp. 132-3), by producing his own more epic version, exhibited 1805(?), Tate, cat. no. 30, in which Poussin's isolated figures struggling for individual survival are replaced by (restrained) sub-Rubensesque torrents of figures set in a Turneresque torrential storm. Interestingly, in view of my observations on the "underworld" in the Trafalgar painting, Poussin's figures are somewhat like those in a van der Weyden "Last Judgement", such as that in the Hôtel Dieu in Beaune, ca. 1443-50, in which a few fragile representative people stand in for all of humanity. Poussin's figures struggling to stay above the water are like the resurrected emerging from their graves while on the left figures descend and on the right, momentarily, ascend. Poussin thus reverses the conventions of a Last Judgement while illustrating the final occasion on which God condemned virtually all of humanity.

Last Judgements may have been well outside the rather tame imagery of eighteenth century Anglicanism but Turner, after the trip to Paris during the cease fire resulting from the Peace of Amiens, was aware of at least a limited selection of such images, if El Greco's adaptation of this type in the Lepanto works is almost certain to have remained unknown to him. El Greco was still decades away from a return to critical acclaim. Turner of course cannot be explained simply by reference to his sources, perhaps rather less so than most of his contemporaries. The exhibition related Turner's "Jessica", exhibited at the RA 1830, usually in Petworth House, cat. No. 44, to Rembrandt's "Girl at a Window", 1645, Dulwich Picture Gallery, cat. No. 43. This is perfectly plausible connection but, as a man of his time, Turner changed his source material so much, not withstanding historicising detail, that today we are reminded more of Manet's "The Balcony", 1868-9, Musée d'Orsay; or even "The Bar at the Follies Bergère, 1881-2, Courtauld; or Renoir's "The Box", 1874, Courtauld, than the Rembrandt.

Though "Port Ruysdael" was for me the major discovery of the exhibition I want to end with a discussion based on Turner's "Venus and Adonis", exhibited at the RA 1849, Stanley Moss, Riverdale, New York, cat. No. 36. This is a painting that, but for a few awkwardnesses, could almost be lost in the Rococo galleries in the Wallace Collection. Given the wrong label most people would fail to detect the correct

attribution. Once seen, the minor “mistakes” are fairly obvious. The way in which the reclining goddess has her hands on both Adonis’ wrists as he walks off presages an undignified fall from the bedding. Her one beady eye visible beside his neck hardly fits into the graceful Rococo ambience. What makes Turner’s totally unexpected success as a painter of a faux eighteenth century boudoir canvass so surprising is that it is in fact based on Titian’s lost “Death of St. Peter Martyr”, 1530, represented in the exhibition by a small copy, cat. No. 35, which he studied on his eye opening visit to the Louvre, then stuffed more than now with foreign loot, in 1802. (Had the original Titian not been returned to Venice it would not have perished in a fire, an observation that has no bearing on the Elgin Marbles and the new Acropolis Museum). Turner toned down and prettified his heroic Venetian source. The monk fleeing with flailing arms becomes the excited hunting dog pawing the air.

What most viewers will take to be an elaborate headboard, to go with the disordered sheets, putti and a couple of doves vaguely suggestive of love, is very precisely Venus’ dove drawn chariot as depicted by, among others, Rosso in “Venus and Adonis” Gallerie de François 1er at Fontainebleau, early 1530s; and Poussin in “Venus Weeping over Adonis”, 1626, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen. Turner is in no way diminished by identifying the type of material he quotes and much better understood as a result. Where Turner alters the Titian format is in showing two paths into the distance. The two main figures have slid down one of these where there is an alfresco bed and Adonis seems to be about to stride off to his death, perhaps in the rugged mountains to the left, following the other path. These divided pathways are in fact a feature of several works in the exhibition including the pseudo-Watteauesque “What You Will!”, Clark Institute, Williamston, Mass., exhibited at the RA 1822, cat. No. 53; “Boccaccio relating the Tale of the Bird Cage”, exhibited at the RA 1817, Tate, cat. No. 77; and the utterly wonderful landscape, “Palestrina”, 1828, cat. No. 26. Turner could almost be churning out settings appropriate for one of the great set piece classicising subjects, the moralizing Choice of Hercules, though, ironically, Adonis might have been saved by staying with Venus to make love to her again. Poor Venus is about to have a life changing experience. Delacroix, an artist whose career substantially overlapped with Turner’s, set his “Jacob Wrestling with the Angel”, westernmost south nave chapel in Saint-Sulpice, Paris, 1861, in front of two diverging pathways into the distance one more elevated than the other, remarkably like Turner’s. As are great all artists Turner was caught between a past, on which he may have at times been too dependent, and an only partly visible future. Looked at from our vantage point connections with Monet, Manet and Delacroix seem as valid as those with Rosso, Titian, Poussin, Claude, Rembrandt and Watteau.

Timothy Alves

**The Print Maker's Art**

**National Gallery of Scotland**

**20th February – 23rd May 2010**

http://www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/exhibition/5:368/18442

'The Print Maker's Art' displays thirty fine examples of printing from the past 500 years. The selections reveal the changes in the ways pictures were added to paper from woodblock to mezzotint. Most of the prints date from the Early Modern period and some are the most famous and celebrated examples of the art of printmaking.

The exhibition starts with two examples by Dürer. The woodcut *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1511) is energetic and powerful. His engraved *Adam and Eve* (1504), the only print he signed, is elegantly based on classical poses. The contrast between the works is a useful introduction to the differences in the techniques. Dürer, of course, was skilled at both. The contrast is interesting: the older picture looks more modern. Next we go back in time for two plates from Israel van Meekeman's 'Passion of Christ' series. These engravings from c. 1480, feature oddly proportioned people. In one of them, a dog seems fairly normal by comparison with its human co-stars. To contrast this is Claude Mellon's mesmerising *Head of Christ* of 1649. This engraving, a depiction of what the artist imagined the face on St Veronica's veil would have looked like along with descriptive text, was created from a single line. The effect is truly hypnotic.

*Adam and Eve* (1504) by Dürer

Having established some of the technical feats prints can achieve, the exhibition takes on a more chronological approach. Dominico Beccafumi's woodcuts illustrating alchemical practices from the 1530s seem quite crude alongside the likes of Dürer but they are full of cartoon-like action. Hendrick Gultzius's chiaroscuro woodcut, *Tethys* (c. 1588-90), was printed using three blocks inked with black, ochre and brown inks. The white in the image is where the paper was allowed to show. Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving of *The Judgement of Paris* (c. 1510-20) is an engraving based on the painting by Raphael. It is an example of the artist collaborating with the engraver to create an accurate record of the artist's work. Marcantonio and Raphael even started a school for engravers together with the engraver at its head.

The seventeenth century is represented by Wenceslaus Hollar's etching on paper of *The Realms of Juno, Pallas and Venus* (1646) and Rembrandt's drypoint etching portrait of *Jan Lutma, Goldsmith* (1656). Etching as a technique allows the artist to capture contrasts between light and dark and even darker. This is strikingly demonstrated in Rembrandt's *Christ Crucified between Two Thieves* (c. 1660) where the edges of the picture surrounding the action seem devoid until at a second look figures begin to emerge from the dark. Hendrik Goudt's *The Flight into Egypt* (1613) combines engraving and etching to achieve a nocturnal scene. The painting it derives from by Elsheimer was the first moonlit scene in European painting and included the first artistic representation of the Milky Way. Goudt's use of combined techniques ensured that the painting's effects were maintained.

*Christ Crucified between Two Thieves* (c. 1660) by Rembrandt

The eighteenth century's torchbearers are William Hogarth and Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

Hogarth's famous engravings *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane* (both 1751) are often on show in various exhibitions but looking at them afresh is always rewarding. Piranesi's etching on paper of the Colosseum of 1761 shows the grandeur of the ancient monument and would have been especially appreciated by Grand Tourists. This was one of a series of views of Rome showing it at its dramatic best for souvenir hunters.

**Giovanni Battista Piranesi**

***View of the Flavian Amphitheater, called the Colosseum***

***from The Views of Rome,* 1761**

The eighteenth century section of the exhibition also offers examples of mezzotint. James McArdell's *Lady Mary Campbell* (c. 1762) was taken from the portrait by renowned Scottish artist Allan Ramsay. Richard Earlom, a self-taught mezzotinter, used his skill to recreate the effects of light and dark in his *A Blacksmith's Shop*, after Joseph Wright of Derby, of 1771.

The exhibition goes on to include examples of work by Goya, Toulouse-Latrec, Whistler and D.Y. Cameron but since none of these fit the Early Modern focus of this journal, I will leave the display cases here and move to a conclusion.

'The Print Maker's Art' is a small but comprehensive exhibition which demonstrated the different techniques and skills needed to achieve some of the remarkable effects that can come from the combination of tools, ink, paper, and talent. The examples by Dürer, Rembrandt and Hogarth are the most famous and amazing but the other artists are also well worth a close look.

Karen Baston

# *FORTHCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS*

***Events 2009-2010***

***All events start at 6.30p.m. unless otherwise stated, and are followed by refreshments and questions***

25 March: Prof. Michael Hunter (Birkbeck), 'The Decline of Magic: The Paradoxical Role of the Royal Society', Malet Street, Room B30.

29 April: Dr Richard Williams (Birkbeck), 'Culture Clash: Word and Image in Reformation Europe', Malet Street, Room 320.

20 May: Dr Malcolm Jones (Sheffield), 'Death in Early Modern English Prints and Book Illustrations', Malet Street, Room 320.

24 June: Prof. Julian Swann (Birkbeck), 'Despotism, Public Opinion and the Crisis of the Absolute Monarchy', Room tbc; followed by our end of term party.

For further information on membership and activities contact the secretary, Anne Byrne: Membership is £5 for the year. Non-members may attend events at a cost of £3 each.

# Film Night

As a Society we are constantly looking at ways of extending our scope and entertaining our membership, one such innovation is a monthly film night, held on a Friday and shown in one of the lecture theatres at Birkbeck.

Film Night has been running for a while now and has proved a popular event for our members. Why not come along, see a great film and meet other members. We show a variety of British and foreign films, all dealing with subjects associated with the Early Modern era. Film Night is free to members and we also provide wine and snacks.

For further information on Film Night contact Laura Jacobs at: l.jacobs@english.bbk.ac.uk

# FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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

## The Historical Association

**Central London Branch**

**Meetings are at the Institute of Historical Research, Senate House**

**Contact the secretary, Bill Measure on**
**measure@btinternet.com or 020-85585491**

Saturday, 17th April 2010, 2.00 p.m. Neil Lloyd, 'Martin Luther'

## Emphasis

**(Early Modern Philosophy and History of Science Seminar), 2009-2010**

Venue: Room G34 Ground Floor, Senate House, South Building, Malet Street, London. WC1E. Time: Saturday, 2-4 p.m. Refreshments provided.

17th April 2010
Pamela H Smith (Columbia University)
'What is a "How-To-Book"? Technical writing in early modern Europe'.

15th May 2010
Wouter Hanegraaff (University of Amsterdam)
'Historians of Error: The Protestant Attack on Platonic Orientalism'.

5th June 2010
William Poole (New College, Oxford): 'Early-modern scientific innovation and heterodoxy: only connect?'
Richard Serjeantson (Trinity College, Cambridge): 'Heterodoxy and the natural history of religion, 1641-1757'.
Rhodri Lewis (St Hugh's College, Oxford): 'Heterodoxy and scribal culture in and around the early Royal Society'.

For the most up-to-date information on the seminar please consult the seminar website: http://ies.sas.ac.uk/events/seminars/Emphasis/index.htm

# BOOK REVIEW

## NON-FICTION BOOKS

I hope that many of you will send in your reviews of newly published books and the occasional old book. The only criteria being that it deals with a subject within the Early Modern period, roughly from the Renaissance (the middle of the fifteenth century) through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that the book is still in print.

John Croxon

**Eleanor: The Secret Queen by John Ashdown-Hill**
**(The History Press)**

This is the first full-length study of Eleanor Talbot, daughter of John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury. Eleanor is not a major figure in her own right; she did not achieve anything of significance and bore no children to continue her line. Yet, by her marriage, Eleanor Talbot changed English history.

When Edward IV died in April 1483 the throne seemed destined to pass to his eldest son, the thirteen year old Edward, Prince of Wales but the Yorkist succession was called into question by doubts about the validity of Edward IV's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville and the legitimacy of their offspring. The royal children were declared bastards and the crown passed to their undoubtedly legitimate uncle, Richard duke of Gloucester. However, Richard III's reign lasted only two years, ending in the treachery of Bosworth Field. The House of York had appeared secure on the throne, confident in its Plantagenet bloodline and military prowess, but when Edward IV secretly married Eleanor Talbot in 1461 he unleashed a timebomb that would explode after his death, ending not only the House of York but also the Plantagenet dynasty that had ruled the country since King Henry II in the twelfth century.

Controversy has raged ever since over the reality of the Talbot marriage and of the fate of the so-called 'Princes in the Tower', with many historians over the centuries decrying the doubts over the Woodville marriage and accepting the Tudor myths as fact. However, in this fascinating study John Ashdown-Hill argues that Edward IV did indeed marry Eleanor Talbot and therefore Edward's subsequent marriage to Elizabeth Woodville was bigamous, making their children illegitimate.

Dr Ashdown-Hill presents a very persuasive case in arguing that a marriage did indeed take place between Edward and Eleanor in 1461 and makes a number of pertinent points. It is clear that the couple first met in 1460 in East Anglia where Eleanor was residing with her sister, Elizabeth, the duchess of Norfolk. Elizabeth was reputedly beautiful and there is no reason to believe that Eleanor was not, and therefore attractive to Edward.

After Edward's death Bishop Robert Stillington told how he had attended the marriage of Edward and Eleanor. It could well be that Edward simply sought to deceive her into sleeping with him. However, we need not assume that Edward's intentions were nefarious from the outset. He may have meant his promises at the time but changed his mind later. We have to remember that Eleanor was the daughter of a very wealthy earl and of royal descent. She was certainly suitable as a queen. One of the reasons why Edward may have changed his mind was the issue of child-bearing. One of the undoubted attractions of Elizabeth Woodville, in addition to her great beauty, was her proven ability to have children; she already had children from her first marriage, whereas Eleanor's first marriage was childless. Also, there is some evidence that her sister Elizabeth had some difficulty conceiving. Another reason may have been Elizabeth Woodville's great strength of character and determination, whereas Eleanor appears to have been a rather quiet, private and spiritual person.

There are a number of events that the author uses to illustrate how Eleanor appeared to be held in great favour. Dr Ashdown-Hill discusses how Eleanor acquired her land-holdings in Wiltshire and concludes that these were a gift from the king, perhaps in order to keep her quiet. Another factor is the different way that Edward treated Eleanor's father-in-law, Ralph Butler, Lord Sudley before and after Eleanor's death. In 1461 Lord Sudley was exempted from attending parliament due to his debility and age. He was also granted 'four bucks in summer and six does in winter within the king's park in Woodstock'. Sudley was also exempted from various duties on commissions, and in 1468 was granted a pardon for trespass and debts. However, following Eleanor's death Lord Sudley was once again forced to serve on various commissions and attend parliament, and he was compelled to grant away most of his lands and property, so much so that when he died his once vast holdings had dwindled to just a few properties in Warwickshire and Worcestershire, with none of his ancestral holdings in Gloucestershire remaining.

The career of Robert Stillington is another factor to consider. He enjoyed no preferment until after the Woodville marriage was made public, but in early 1465 he was appointed bishop of Bath and Wells. This particular bishopric was actually in the hands of the pope and Pope Paul II proposed his own candidate. The appointment of Edward's own candidate must have provoked some dispute between the papacy and the king. The pope's candidate then died and so Stillington was accepted by both parties, but the fact that Edward was prepared to oppose the pope on this matter suggests that for Edward promoting Stillington was vitally important.

The author makes good use of contemporary sources and he quotes Mancini that when under threat from the duke of Clarence, Elizabeth Woodville appeared particularly anxious because, according to Mancini, she was not the legitimate wife of the king.

The question why did Eleanor not cite the king before the ecclesiastical courts can be answered simply in the fact that Edward would not have taken this action quietly, and as king had the power of life or death over all of his subjects. Quite simply, Eleanor was presented with a *fait accompli* and had no real alternative but to live quietly away from public life. Her inclination to privacy and her strong religious beliefs also made it unlikely that she would want to move into the limelight.

The author highlights a number of factors in his efforts to demonstrate that a marriage between Edward and Eleanor was not just a possibility but was almost certaintly what actually happened.

The first one of these is that Eleanor was not just some ordinary woman: She was Lady Eleanor Talbot, daughter of John Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury and hero of the wars with France and her sister was married to the duke of Norfolk. Tudor apologists either ignored her altogether or referred to her by her married name of Butler as part of their attempts to devalue her standing in society, and to assign her the role of just one of Edward's many mistresses. But her status as a member of the nobility in late-fifteenth century England clearly belies this. Vergil misrepresented Richard's claim to the throne as being based upon the illegitimacy of Edward IV, but if one reads the *titulus regius* it is quite clear that Richard's claim was indeed based upon the illegitimacy of Edward IV's children. Thomas More even confuses her with one of Edward's mistresses Elizabeth Wayte (Lucy) in a deliberate attempt to blur the memory of the bigamy allegations.

Secondly, throughout her life Eleanor showed devout piety and a particular devotion to the Carmelite order. Indeed, Dr Ashdown-Hill has uncovered evidence that she was a tertiary (someone who wished to join the Carmelites without giving up their lay status), associated with the Carmelite priory in Norwich.

Thirdly, Henry Tudor was desperate to grasp some legitimacy for his claim to the throne and so he needed to remove the stain of bastardry from his intended bride Elizabeth of York. He made a unique provision for all copies of the *titulus regius* to be destroyed upon pain of imprisonment. But instead of disproving in Parliament the key contentions contained within the act, Tudor chose to suppress the act entirely, suggesting that the case against the Woodville marriage was true.

Another significant factor is that not one member of the Yorkist royal family or the Talbot family raised an objection to the disinheritance of Edward IV's children or to the accession of Richard III. Is it credible that someone as forthright as Cecily Neville or Margaret of York would remain quiescent if they disagreed with the actions of Richard III? Likewise, after Bosworth surely one of the Talbots, many of whom were prominent amongst Henry Tudor's supporters, would have come forward with evidence that the marriage between Eleanor and Edward was a fabrication, yet not one did.

Although it is through her secret marriage to Edward IV that Eleanor is known to us, Dr Ashdown-Hill also devotes several chapters to her childhood, her family, the Talbots, her marriage to Thomas Butler and to her in-laws, and to her widowhood which started at the age of twenty-three in 1459. Indeed, the author draws the striking comparisons between Eleanor Talbot and Elizabeth Woodville and the fact that both were young, good-looking widows when Edward IV married them.

The author also discloses that a skeleton discovered in Norwich in 1958 is probably that of Eleanor. He offers some convincing evidence for this assumption, chiefly, by itemising the list of twenty female burials at the Carmelite site and eliminating each one by age. He further reduces the list considerably from analysis of teeth, which suggested a refined diet containing sugar, it is clear that this person must have been a

member of the nobility, the height being comparable to that of John Talbot, and most importantly the fact that members of the Talbot family had a congenital absence of some back teeth, a condition evident in the skeleton.

This is a remarkable study of a little known individual from the late-fifteenth century. The story of Eleanor Talbot is vitally important for if her marriage to Edward IV had been acknowledged in her lifetime and if she had become queen then all subsequent history would have been different. As the author makes clear, the House of York may have ruled for hundreds of years, the despotic Tudors would probably have been unknown outside of Wales, there would probably be no break with Rome, the Stuarts would have remained in Scotland, there would be no civil war, no republic and no Great Britain.

John Croxon

### *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms 1660-1685 by* Tim Harris (London, 2005, paperback 2006)

In *Restoration*, Tim Harris has written a somewhat revisionist history of the reign of Charles II. The public euphoria at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 soon dissolved and the country was beset by problems. As every student of the seventeenth century knows, England was hit by three major disasters in the 1660s: plague, fire, and the war against Holland. In the 1670s and 1680s, there were further problems: the Exclusion crisis, the Popish plot, the crown's quarrel with the City of London, not to mention Charles II's relationship with parliament. These episodes have been well reported over the years but Harris incorporates them into his overall study of the period. This is, necessarily, a detailed read but Harris has chosen to divide his analysis into two parts. Part one, comprising 39% of the text, analyses events from 1660 to 1679, but Part 2, in which Harris tackles the turbulent six final years of Charles's reign, take up 46% of the text. This is a good move: the events of 1660-79 are dramatic enough, but almost pale into insignificance compared to those of 1679-85.

In order to understand the events above, they must be examined and evaluated from many different perspectives: political, religious, social. Not only that, but the perspective varies depending on factors such as who you are: e.g. crown, parliament, minister, ordinary subject. It also depends where you are: Charles II was ruler of three kingdoms: England, Scotland, and Ireland. Harris makes the very good point that the king's policies could not just be thought up and rolled out without considering the knock-on effects elsewhere. A policy of tolerance towards Roman Catholics in Ireland, for example, might be perceived very differently in Protestant London. This is where Harris's work scores highly: an extraordinary wealth of detail is seamlessly woven into a structured narrative which drives forward the theme of this book.

The rose-tinted picture of the Restoration as depicted in film and television dramas, with tracking shots through beautifully decorated rooms and costume parties on bowling greens, performed to a never ending soundtrack courtesy of Henry Purcell, is not recreated here. This is a hard edged political analysis. Harris's Restoration is less that of the popular historical picture of England under the Merry Monarch, but of a

fragmented society held together by fear and distrust. The very measures that Charles II intended to reinforce his kingdoms often served to compound the problem. Charles was keen to maintain a professional army to deal with potential uprisings. This may been as a prudent precaution by a new monarch of what had recently been a republic, but also helped to reignite the old argument about keeping standing armies. The idea of keeping armies ready to crush opposition was unlikely to be popular, as for most people the Civil Wars would have been a recent memory and a standing army was more likely to be regarded as a threat rather than a reassurance.

Harris's main theme is that the Restoration, and to some extent the Civil Wars and aftermath, did not address the underlying faults that had developed in early seventeenth-century England. The political dynamic of seventeenth-century England had shifted and whether the Civil Wars was the cause or effect of that shift, Harris' premise is that the situation could not be resolved by simply winding the clock back to 1641, or any other other 'ideal' date. In the optimistic acclaim for the return of monarchy in 1660, however, that is more or less what was attempted and the results are well documented.

In fairness, Harris makes the assertion that Charles II, however was more politically astute and luckier than his father had been. Although Restoration England seemed to lurch from crisis to crisis and the solutions involved playing one faction against another and settling for the lesser of two evils, Harris also asserts that Charles II was not trapped by events as Charles I had been. In addition, thanks to some nimble footed political footwork and his ability to win people over, two qualities which were lacking in his father, Charles was able to recover from each crisis and build up his popularity - and temporarily that of the crown.

Restoration is a fascinating and thought provoking work, but students new to the Stuart period may first wish to read themselves in via a more general work such as Mark Kishlanky's *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*, (London, 1996, p.b. 1997), or Barry Coward's *The Stuart Age: Britain 1603-1714*, (Third edition, Harlow, 2003).

Tim Harris completes his survey of the latter seventeenth-century British monarchy in *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685-1720*, (London, 2006, p.b. 2007).

If you like this, why not try:
Adrian Tinniswood. *By Permission of Heaven: The True Story of the Great Fire of London*, (New York, 2003).

'As dawn broke bright and clear on the first day of September 1666, no one dreamed they were waking to the last sunrise the old city would ever see'. The Great Fire of London in 1666 is one of the defining episodes in British history. This is a fast flowing account of the fire and its aftermath, drawn from official records and using the voices of various figures of the day, including King Charles II. Includes thirty plates and fifteen text illustrations.

Robin Rowles

**Cardinal Wolsey: A Life in Renaissance Europe by Stella Fletcher (Continium Publishers)**

Thomas Wolsey has been the subject of numerous biographies, the first and most sympathetic, by George Cavendish, the cardinal's gentleman usher. However, most have followed the lead of Polydore Vergil and have been hostile, portraying Wolsey as a corpulent figure, vain, self-serving, arrogant and ravenous for power and wealth. Yet for many who have delved deep into the machinations of late-fifteenth century and early-sixteenth century politics, experience has meant that the scribblings of the embittered Tudor apologist Vergil are treated with great scepticism. In addition, Wolsey has suffered in comparison with the supposed integrity of Thomas More but this is because the writings of More's son-in-law William Roper were taken as factual, rather than as the misleading and biased writings of a close member of the More family.

In this handsome volume, Stella Fletcher aims to correct this myth of a disgraced cardinal. The Wolsey who emerges from these pages is a consummate politician who both dominated the government of Henry VIII for fourteen years and bestrode the European stage. As Lord Chancellor he garnered a reputation for favouring the poor whilst harrying nobles who flouted the law, for instance, in his strict implementation of the anti-enclosure acts and in his use of the courts of chancery and Star Chamber to remove legal logjams to ensure swift justice for poorer claimants. Granted legatine authority by the pope he was just as interventionist in his dealings with the English Church, and was quite prepared to close down badly run or too small religious houses. He endeavoured to appoint the best candidate for a position even if this meant that he made enemies amongst the powerful nobility.

Yet for all his great diligence and skill in domestic matters it is on the European sphere that Wolsey revelled, and it is this that the author focuses upon in her study. In dealing with monarchs of the great European powers and with popes and fellow cardinals, Wolsey was able to exercise his taste for spectacular events and noble enterprises. At the same time he relished his status as a high-ranking churchman and appeared devoted to the symbolism of the cardinals red hat.

Wolsey was the son of an Ipswich butcher who rose to fabulous heights and was therefore always going to fall from grace at some time, particularly when serving such a capricious monarch as Henry VIII. When Wolsey failed to persuade the pope to grant an annulment of Henry's marriage to Katherine of Aragon and therefore lost the King's support, his many enemies ensured that he was brought down.

Using her knowledge of political, cultural and ecclesiastical European Renaissance history Stella Fletcher has cast Wolsey in the heart of European matters. His intelligence, scope of ambition and zest for action allowed England to operate much higher on the diplomatic stage than its position merited.

This is a broadly sympathetic portrayal of the major figure in early-sixteenth century England but the author does address Wolsey's faults. Fletcher does not omit mention of Wolsey's avarice in obtaining numerous church offices that brought in payment, but does partly excuse him as he was expected to pay for a number of Henry's great symbolic events and therefore needed different sources of income. Also, although a

cleric, Wolsey had a son, Thomas Wynter, and he obtained offices for him, but it is the human side of Wolsey that emerges as he seeks to provide a secure future for his son. Fletcher also neatly deflects the oft-quoted criticism that Wolsey was soft on heresy, but at the same time demonstrates his humanity in dealing with evangelicals as opposed to the intolerant harshness of the 'saintly' Thomas More.

If I had criticism it is that with the European context at the core of this book the *Field of the Cloth of Gold* is dealt with in just nine lines. However, it is so well known that perhaps the author decided that there was nothing new to be added. It would though be churlish to heap anything but praise upon this book, as it is a masterful account of a major figure who bestrode the European diplomatic and political stage dwarfing all other contemporaries.

This is a truly impressive work of scholarship that plucks Wolsey from caricature and opprobrium and reveals him as a hugely impressive figure, and provides a fascinating portrait of a man of immense political, ecclesiastical and cultural stature who acted on the broad canvass of Renaissance Europe.

John Croxon

## FICTION BOOKS

The criteria for fiction books is the same as that for non-fiction book reviews; that it deals with a subject within the Early Modern period, roughly from the Renaissance (the middle of the fifteenth century) through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and that the book is still in print.

John Croxon

### Wolf Hall by Hilary Mantel (Fourth Estate)

I never expected to have the opportunity to review a history book that has won the Booker Prize. Yet, Wolf Hall, the latest book by Hilary Mantel, swept everything else aside to win the 2009 book prize, the first historical novel to do so.

This is a dazzling, well written book and I am absolutely delighted that a historical novel has won such a major literature award, and although this is not a Rushdie, McEwan or an Amis, it does compare extremely well with some of the recent Booker prize winners.

The action starts with the hero of the novel, a young Thomas Cromwell, in Putney in 1500, being beaten near to death by his drunken father. I use the term hero because in this book that is what he is. The author has clearly fallen for Thomas Cromwell and this is a warm, deeply sympathetic portrayal of the man who would come to destroy the monastic system and co-ordinate Henry's break with Rome, removing a way of life forever and enriching his sovereign at the same time.

Cromwell takes a vessel aboard and he is lost to us until 1527 when he reappears in the pay of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the man who dominated English government during the early years of the reign of Henry VIII, just as Cromwell himself would dominate the following decade.

These are the dying days of the cardinal's power and we see Cromwell assisting his master in making a last ditch stance in defiance of Wolsey's many enemies, namely the high nobility, angered that a low-born could rule England. These would later be the very people who would oppose Cromwell and they would eventually triumph over him just as they triumphed over Wolsey. This book though just takes us through to the King's Great Matter, the break with Rome, and the execution of Thomas More.

England is in turmoil, Henry is desperate for a male heir and he has fallen in love with Anne Boleyn. Wolsey, working within the confines of the papacy fails to secure an annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon and he is brought crashing down. Into the power vacuum steps Cromwell. Son of a brutal blacksmith and brewer, brought up in the rough streets of London, highly intelligent, politically astute, and a brilliant organizer, in his rise to power Cromwell has broken all the rules of a deeply hierarchical society. He adroitly picks his way through court, using equally charm and bullying to secure religious reforms and to obtain what Henry wants most, a divorce. In doing so he reshapes England in a new religious and cultural age.

This is a marvellous book, from the opening page it gallops along at great pace as we follow the rise to power of Thomas Cromwell and along the way see the dismantling of an old way of life and the removal of old certainties. We witness the court politics, the lack of trust, and sheer brutality of Tudor England.

Mantel has done a great deal of research in order to get facts right and to produce the very essence of Tudor England. In a well constructed approach she has woven the real events of the 1520's and 1530's into her story. If I had to quibble it is perhaps that her portrayal of Cromwell is too sympathetic and she places him directly in the action during his early career when perhaps he wasn't so crucial to events, such as during Wolsey's last months in power. Also, she has him as a devotee of Wolsey eager to avenge his master after Wolsey's downfall when there is evidence to suggest that, although he did not repudiate Wolsey, he did not fully support his memory either. For instance when comparing Crammer favourably to Wolsey claiming that the Cardinal *'had lost his friends by haughtiness and pride'*. However, most novels have heroes and Mantel has decided upon Cromwell as her's and this approach does work as we do warm to Cromwell as he achieves his rise in the king's service.

In order to give the hero a decent image there must be a counterpoint. For Cromwell in this book it is Thomas More and there are a number of references to More's use of torture and execution of heretics. It will be interesting to see in the second book, and yes there will almost certainly be a second book, how Mantel approaches Cromwell's part in the killing of churchmen and devout laymen. But for the purposes of this book Cromwell is portrayed as a decent sort of person when put against the fanaticism of More. There is some truth to this; undoubtedly More was a fanatic, he would participate in torture himself and exhibit a certain glee at sending a supposed heretic to his death, whereas Cromwell was always more of a pragmatist and although holding equally sincere beliefs and without doubt sent men to horrible deaths, he did

not seem to display the same enthusiasm for torture and suffering in the name of religion that More appeared to have done.

The Thomas Cromwell that appears in Holbein's painting is not a handsome man; his eyes are small and piggish and his features sharp and hard, but it is an intelligent face. Henry VIII is supposed to have bewailed to his council that *'Cromwell was better than all of you'* and it is clear that Cromwell, like Wolsey, was a political genius. In this book Mantel has presented a likeable, roguish and considerate man who has risen from obscurity and battled through adversity to become Henry's chief minister. Told in the first person this is an unashamedly pro-Cromwell novel that beautifully evokes the Tudor age and engages so strongly with the character so that far before the final chapter the reader is firmly on the side of its hero.

John Croxon

### *Kill-Grief* by Caroline Rance (Hove: Picnic Publishing, 2009)

Caroline Rance's novel is a tale of addition set in Chester in 1756. It is also a mystery which allows its story to unfold via flashbacks and cleverly placed clues and references. The first few pages are deceptively simple. You think you are reading something to set the stage while you are enjoying some excellent descriptive passages. But later on you realise that returning to those first few pages and re-reading them would be a very good idea indeed.

Mary Helsall arrives in Chester with the cold winter weather of January 1756. She quickly takes a position as a nurse at the town's newly opened hospital for the poor. The hospital is next to the gaol and we soon find out that this is important for our heroine. Although she seems young and innocent at first, we gradually find out that Mary has a past and is much worldlier than she seems. This is no Hogarthian *Harlot's Progress* but rather more like a trip to *Gin Lane*.

Mary owes her new position to a local magistrate. She has never been a nurse before and has no training nor is any expected. Her first duties involve getting the hospital ready to receive its first patients. When the patients start to come one of them seems to know a lot about Mary. Things she would rather not have her new colleagues, especially the handsome but alcoholic porter she is falling for fast, know. Mary's life is certainly complicated and it is about to be more so.

Mary used to drink brandy – and I won't say how or where she came by it since I don't want to give away too much of the plot – but now she can only afford gin or 'kill-grief' as it is known. 'Kill-grief' has her lover Anthony in its grasp and Mary soon joins him in wandering through the streets of Chester in search of their fix. It is a grim world of gin houses and poverty. It is a place Anthony and Mary would very much like to leave so they can break their habit and start a new life in London. But Mary has some things to do in Chester before she can go anywhere. These things involve someone who is in the gaol and who is known as 'The Hatchet'. She needs to wait until the circuit court arrives – the judges like to time their visits with the horse racing season – before she can move on. Meanwhile, we begin to see that Mary may be in far more trouble than she knows and that someone she trusts might be lying to her to preserve his own reputation.

Blue Coat Hospital railings for SJ4066



**The Blue Coat Hospital was the Infirmary from 1755-61 and provides one of the settings for *Kill-Grief*.**

Rance has a deft touch at building tension and a true gift for description. Mary's world is one of blood and guts and vomit and sweat. It's not a world of comfort. There is violence and there are hangovers. From the hospital to the gaol to the meanest drinking dens to the cold air of the city walls, Mary travels around Chester in a search for herself and her future while she waits for closure about her past. While working at the hospital she discovers that she has an unexpected gift for surgery. Even the repulsive surgeon Mr Racketta has to admit that she is better at this than many men are. Maybe this is the key to her future? Read this fine first novel and find out.

Karen Baston

PS: You can follow Caroline Rance on Twitter where she is known as @Quackwriter and I strongly recommend that you do so if you are at all interested in medical and other history.

# THE SPRING QUIZ

1. Who died at the Palace of Westminster on the 16th March 1485?

2. Who was born at Greenwich Palace on the 18th February 1516?

3. Which battle was fought on the 9th September 1513?

4. Who died at Hampton Court on the 24th October 1537?

5. Whom did Henry VIII marry on the 6th January 1540?

6. Who was executed at Tower Hill on the 28th July 1539?

7. What did Pope Pius V do to Elizabeth I on 1570?

8. For what was Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, imprisoned in the Fleet Prison in July 1542?

9. For what was Thomas Howard, earl of Suffolk, dismissed from government in 1619?

10. Which priest and composer was born in Venice on the 4th March 1678

11. Which leading Scottish portrait painter was born in Stockbridge near Edinburgh on the 4th March 1756?

12. Which companion and one time brother-in-law of Henry VIII died at Guildford on the 22nd August 1545?

13. Which Scottish architect and designer was born in Kirkcaldy on the 3rd July 1728?

14. Which radical publication was first published on the 5th June 1762?

15 Who wrote the play '*Love for Love'* in 1695?

16. Who pained Thalia, the Comic Muse in 1768?

17. Who painted '*Night'* in 1736?

18. Who wrote '*The Adventures of Roderick Random'*?

19. Who founded the Lock Hospital at Hyde Park Corner in 1747?

20. Who wrote the novel *Fanny Hill* in 1748?

Answers on the following page

# ANSWERS TO THE SPRING QUIZ

1. Anne Neville (queen to Richard III)
2. Mary Tudor (later Mary I)
3. Battle of Flodden Field
4. Jane Seymour
5. Anne of Cleves
6. Thomas Cromwell
7. He excommunicated her
8. For challenging John Leigh to a duel
9. Gross corruption
10. Antonio Vivaldi
11. Sir Henry Raeburn
12. Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk
13. Robert Adam
14. North Briton
15. William Congreve
16. Sir Joshua Reynolds
17. William Hogarth
18. Tobias Smollett
19. William Bromfeild
20. John Cleland

# THE BIRKBECK EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

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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, music, sexuality and, travel and exploration.

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