

# *UWE Regional History Centre and M Shed Seminar Programme 2012-13*

Venue: M Shed, Princes Wharf, Wapping Road, Bristol BS1 4RN  
18:00 -19:30, admission free, all welcome



University of the  
West of England



*Thursday 18 Oct 2012*

*Dr Madge Dresser (UWE, Bristol)*

**Samuel Gist and 'the Gist Slaves':  
Bristol and Virginia History Revisited**

This talk begins with the extraordinary story of Bristol's Samuel Gist which spans Bristol, Virginia and London and whose legacy is still commemorated today by a group of African-Americans. It goes on to reconsider the links between Bristol and colonial Virginia in relation to the slave economy and the social networks it generated. What can an 'Atlanticist' perspective add to our understanding of the role slavery played in both Britain and the colonial South? What archives remain to be explored? What can family historians add to and learn from this 'special relationship'? And what insights about contemporary American politics might such historical investigations yield?

*Dr Madge Dresser is Associate Professor of History at UWE, Bristol*

*Thursday 15 Nov 2012*

*Jenny Gaschke (Bristol Museum and Art Gallery)*

**Who do you think they are?  
Portraits, painters and identity**

In autumn 2011 Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Frances Courtenay, Lady Honeywood and her Daughter (painted in 1784) was accepted by HM Government in Lieu of Inheritance Tax and allocated to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, thereby successfully preserving it for the Southwest. It appears that beyond the identity of the sitter, here a sensitive double portrait of a mother and her vivacious child, a portrait painting itself has an identity – in this case one that ties it so strongly to a geographical region that no other art gallery in the UK could lay an equally valid claim to it. Using examples of known and unknown sitters from Bristol's collections, this lecture will examine some of the issues of portraiture – the construction of identity within pictorial conventions, the role of the sitter, the painter, the viewer and the art historian and also show what remains after you lose knowledge of the name of a sitter or the place and time of its production.

*Dr Jenny Gaschke is Curator of Fine Art at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery*

*Thursday 29 Nov 2012*

*Curators Roundtable*

**History, Museums and Protest Movements**

A panel of M Shed curators and professional historians discuss the challenges of presenting acts of historic protest in modern museums. What are the best ways of presenting past events like the 1831 Bristol riots – or more recent civil disturbances – and what should museums be collecting today to record and commemorate contemporary acts of protest for future generations?

*Thursday 13 Dec 2012*

*David Turner (University of Swansea)*

**Disability, rehabilitation and the body  
in Georgian England: a cultural history  
of the wooden leg**

Physical disability takes many forms, but in the eighteenth century its most conspicuous manifestation was the wooden-legged amputee. In 1799 the French traveller Jacques-Henri Meister noted that there were more wooden legs on display in London than any of the 'great cities' of Europe. Artificial limbs provoked a number of contradictory responses: on the one hand they represented heroic sacrifice in national service (embodied in the figure of the peg-legged sailor), but on the other they represented a state of permanent disablement and potential burden on resources. They might simultaneously mark a person as an object of compassion or a target of mockery. And while artificial limbs were marketed as evidence of the increasing power of medical technology to alleviate suffering, they also raised questions about the motives and skills of surgeons who were accused by some of creating disability by choosing to amputate injured limbs indiscriminately. This talk, presented as part of Disability History Month, uncovers the varied cultural meanings of wooden legs in the long eighteenth century and asks what they tell us about attitudes to – and experiences of – physical disability in the past.

*Dr David Turner is Reader in History at the University of Swansea*

*Thursday 17 Jun 2013*

*Gill Ballinger (UWE)*

**Jane Austen's topographies:  
writing the South West**

West Country locations feature in several of Austen's novels, most notably *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*. After briefly tracing the literary references to places throughout the South West in these texts, this paper will examine the representation of Bristol in the Juvenilia 'Lesley Castle' and the well-known novels *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*. Tauchert contends that 'Austen's realism is defined by a strong consciousness of landscape and architectural form specific to time and place': this is certainly evident in the utilisation of Bristol in the fiction. Written by the teenage author, 'Lesley Castle' is playful and parodic, but the deployment of Bristol as one of the settings in this epistolary narrative indicates the future direction of her work: Austen situates her novels within accurately-drawn geographical and social worlds to serve specific and significant purposes. *Northanger Abbey* counterpoints the architectural landscape of Bristol in the form of Bleise Castle with the natural beauty of Beechen Cliff in Bath to illustrate the folly of an imaginative misreading of the world. In *Emma* the brief references to Bristol are indicative of Austen's mature response to the complexities of her social world and its values: Mrs Elton's Bristol roots raise the spectre of slavery in this novel.

*Dr Gill Ballinger is Senior Lecturer in English at UWE, Bristol*

*Thursday 21 Feb 2013*

*Kath Holden (RHC)*

**Who was family? Familial and service relationships in West of England households during the twentieth century**

This talk discusses the difficulties of researching single women's relationships within families which did not conform to the nuclear norm in early and mid twentieth century Britain, drawing on case studies from rural and urban households located in the west of England. A particular focus will be on service relationships including nannies and

domestic servants and their ambiguous relationship to their employing families. The dominant position of marriage and motherhood and the hierarchies of service have made it difficult to explain the nature of relationships in which strong attachments and romantic or maternal feelings between women servants and women employers were implied and sometimes enacted but could not easily be named.

*Dr Kath Holden is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Regional History Centre, UWE*

*Thursday 7 March 2013*

*Archivists Roundtable*

**The City and its Archive**

A panel of archivists from Bristol Record Office meet with professional historians to explore how archives are collected and managed, and to discuss some of the new ways in which access to Bristol's historic documents, photos and film is now being opened up. As usual, there'll be plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make observations of your own – so come along and join in!

*Thursday 21 March 2013*

*Jim McNeill*

**The Quaker, William Penn - an alternative view of the founder of Pennsylvania**

This illustrated talk will cover the role of William Penn and his family in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and European expansionism in the North Americas. The Penn family was at the very heart of the English Revolution in the 17th century and of every important event of British colonial expansionism including the colonisation of Ireland, Jamaica and the East Coast of North America. Mercantile trade, African enslavement and the displacement of native peoples governed their actions for over 260 years. Yet most citizens of Bristol are unaware of either the Penn family's links to their city or the family's role in shaping the way we live and think today.

*Jim McNeill is a Bristol-based independent researcher*

*Thursday 18 April 2013*

*Brendan Smith (University of Bristol)*

**Bristol and West: Medieval perspectives on Bristol's Welsh and Irish connections**

Interest in Bristol's historic connections with other places has centred on Bordeaux and Gascony in the Middle Ages, and in more recent times on Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. Less well understood are the strong and varied links that the Bristol region has enjoyed over the centuries with Wales and Ireland. Edmund Burke is perhaps the most famous Irishman associated with Bristol, but he was hardly the first. If St Patrick really did reside at Banwell when he was brought as a slave to Ireland in the fifth century, then he may stand as a suitable symbol of a relationship between this part of England and the countries immediately to its west that was often turbulent and yet ultimately fruitful.

*Dr Brendan Smith is Reader in History at the University of Bristol*

*Thursday 16 May 2013*

*Steve Poole (UWE)*

**'For the benefit of example': hanging West Country felons at the scene of their crime, c.1730-1830**

Men and women sentenced to death by the West Country's assize courts were usually executed either at the county gaol or on traditional hanging grounds sited on the peripheries of the region's county towns. By the 1790s, most of these executions were carried out on purpose built scaffolds with trapdoor systems – a practice considered quicker, cleaner and more economically efficient than the older method of rough strangulation from the back of a cart. If we are to read this development as an expression of the civilising influence of modernity, or a humane

relaxation of the Hanoverian 'bloody code', how are we to understand the continuance of the much older practice of processing certain convicts across miles of open country to relatively obscure rural parishes so that they could be despatched at the scene of their crime? Despite the enormous costs, the logistical difficulties, the security issues and the archaic nature of the execution apparatus, crime-scene hangings were still taking place in the region as late as 1830. This talk seeks answers in local geography and in the customary principle of exemplary justice.

*Dr Steve Poole is Associate Professor of History at UWE, Bristol*

*Thursday 20 June 2013*

*June Hannam (UWE)*

**A pilgrimage, a bye election and women's political education: Bristol suffragists on the eve of war (or 1912-14)**

Suffrage campaigning in the years just prior to the outbreak of WW1 is best known for an escalation of militancy and the arrest and forcible feeding of suffragettes. The activities of non militant suffragists tend to be overlooked, but they too stepped up their campaign- they organised demonstrations, including the 1913 Pilgrimage, made a new political alliance with the Labour Party and sought to educate women in the rights and duties of citizenship. This paper will examine how Bristol suffragists responded to this new context. Who participated in the Pilgrimage and how did the local movement deal with the LP alliance and the 1913 bye- election? What was their relationship with the militant movement? The diverse activities and political choices of Bristol suffragists in the war and post war years will also be considered.

*June Hannam is Professor Emeritus at UWE, Bristol*

These are public events at M Shed and open to everybody. If you would like any further information about the series or the Regional History Centre at UWE, please contact [steve.poole@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:steve.poole@uwe.ac.uk) for directions see <http://mshed.org/museum/>