ABSTRACTS

Kerri Andrews

The Letters of Hannah More: some initial findings
University of Strathclyde

Hannah More is well known as a philanthropist, educationalist, and as an active and committed Christian, undertaking a great many works in the Bristol and Mendips regions of the south west over the course of a lifetime’s residence. During the course of her life in the area she wrote thousands of letters, of which around two thousand survive, scattered in archives throughout the US, Canada, and the UK. The contents of many of these letters are unknown, and their wide dispersal makes it very difficult for individual researchers to access more than a small proportion.

However, a project to collect and make openly available all two thousand letters is underway. It is in the very early stages, with only 5-10% of the total letters so far transcribed, but there are already some curious and interesting findings which are suggestive of the project’s ability to challenge, and maybe transform, our understanding of Hannah More both in terms of the larger contexts of the Romantic period, but also, perhaps, as a human being.

In this paper, then, I will spend a little time describing the Hannah More Letters project – its aims, scope, and methodology, before discussing some of the initial findings from the letters transcribed so far, including the considerable importance of More’s correspondence not only with members of the Clapham Sect but also with her broader intellectual and social circles in co-ordinating and organising counter-Revolutionary activities in the 1790s and early 1800s. Whilst I may not be able to make any grand new claims about More’s life or career in this paper, I hope to demonstrate that the letters transcribed so far already offer valuable insights into More’s activities during the Romantic period as a champion for evangelical Christianity and as a counter-Revolutionary campaigner.
Juliette Wood

Inventing the Welsh Past: Marie Trevelyan, latter day romantic
Cardiff University

Born in Llantwit Major in 1853, Marie Trevelyan lived into the twentieth century. Her books on folklore are still regarded as sources for Welsh tradition, and, in as much as they reflect ‘primitive institutions’, were admired by Edwin Sidney Hartland. Her material owes much to her father’s (Illtud Thomas’) collections, but other material can be traced to literary sources, the influence of Iolo Morganwg, and the speculations of local neo-druids like Morien. The world she creates is that of a richly ritualized Glamorgan which never existed and these attitudes and influences situate her in an earlier world view, that of the romantic period. Examining this prolific, but little studied, folklorist will contribute to a better understanding of romanticism in the South West.

Robin Jarvis

In Pursuit of Robert Lovell: The Forgotten Pantisocrat

Robert Lovell (1771-1796) briefly enters the margins of literary history in the mid-1790s as the friend of Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and a fellow-traveller on the ill-fated transatlantic emigration scheme dubbed “Pantisocracy”. Already the author of a spirited satire on Bristol, Lovell collaborated with Southey on a volume of miscellaneous poems; he also introduced both Southey and Coleridge to the Bristol publisher, Joseph Cottle – a connection that was to prove crucial to both their careers. For these reasons, he usually warrants a brief mention in biographical or critical treatments of his much more famous contemporaries. His story, though, is an intriguing one and deserves consideration in its own right. Lovell’s friendship with Southey began towards the end of 1793 and, apparently sharing political and literary aims, they rapidly became close: it was not long before Southey was referring to Lovell as a “Man of mighty mind”. Yet in the aftermath of Lovell’s tragic early death less than a year later, Southey stated cryptically that his friend “had sunk much in my esteem”. Lovell first got to know Coleridge in the summer of 1794, and the latter was soon sending him “fraternal love” as a kindred spirit in the republican cause. However, despite making full use of Lovell’s Bristol connections, Coleridge felt free to trash Lovell’s poetry and clearly deeply resented Lovell’s interference in his proposed marriage to Sarah Fricker (Lovell’s sister-in-law). What exactly was Lovell’s place in the triangular relations of these three Pantisocrats? Why did his star rise and fall so quickly? What was his precise achievement as a poet? How important was his role as midwife to English Romanticism? This paper will synthesise information from diverse sources about Southey’s and Coleridge’s “eccentric” Quaker friend and accomplice and offer an interpretation of his place in a more granular history of first-generation Romanticism.
Mary-Ann Constantine

Revolutionary journeys: Bristol and Wales.

Mary-Ann Constantine

University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies

“Having made application to go to Bristol my time was come when I was to be received –
The first object I had in view was to learn the English tongue so as to preach in it”

This is the Welsh Baptist minister Morgan John Rhys, who, in the early 1790s, stood in the
ruins of the Bastille ‘feeling the energy of those principles that shake Europe to the centre’.
On returning to Wales he founded the first Welsh-language periodical and then emigrated to
set up a liberal colony – ‘Cambria’ – in the wilds of Pennsylvania. But it is that much shorter
journey from Caerphilly to the Baptist Academy in Bristol which intrigues here – a journey
across the borders of language, but within the shared structures, the rhetoric and imagery, of
religious Dissent.

Welsh would have had an audible presence in Romantic-era Bristol, as all along the Welsh
Back, where the Avon cuts into the city, small vessels unloaded slate and stone from
Glamorgan. Bristol became an important place for another Welsh radical voice, the poet and
stone-cutter Edward Williams (Iolo Morganwg), who spent the early 1790s networking his
way round literary salons and drumming up support for the subscription list to his volume of
Poems, Lyric and Pastoral. Williams’s dramatic reinvention of himself as the ‘last’ of the
Welsh Bards, combined with a labouring-class persona modelled on Burns and Yearsley,
made him an intriguing find, and his literary supporters ranged from Hannah More and
Harriet Bowdler to Southey and Coleridge. His relationship with the city (as with everything
and everyone else) was, nevertheless, far from unequivocal.

Drawing on the work of a four-year AHRC project on Wales and the French Revolution, this
paper explores the importance of Romantic-era Bristol as a site of cultural cross-currents; a
crucible of political, religious and literary ideas for some of Wales’s most vibrant writers and
thinkers.

Marie Mulvey-Roberts

Mary Shelley and Bristol: “A workshop of filthy creation”?

In 1815, Mary Shelley visited Bristol. Even though very little is known about the time she
spent there, the city is connected to several tragic events in her life, which are mirrored in
her most celebrated novel, Frankenstein (1818). These relate to the suicide of her step-
sister Fanny Godwin, whom Percy Bysshe Shelley came to Bristol to try and save, and the
death of her young son, William. Mary Shelley was pregnant with him at the time of her visit.
A year after the death of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley’s father, the
philosopher and novelist William Godwin, proposed marriage to the novelist, Harriet Lee,
and sister of the more well-known Gothic novelist, Sophia Lee, but she turned him down. It is
possible that Mary Shelley might have welcomed the prospect of visiting a nearby fellow-
writer, who lived in Clifton, with a connection to her father, had it not been for the fact that
she was pregnant and unmarried. Mary Shelley gave the character of Victor Frankenstein’s
little brother the same name as that of her son. Rather disturbingly, he becomes the
monster’s first victim. The murder of his fictional name-sake proved to be a grim presage of
young William’s death in Italy from fever at the age of three, the year after Frankenstein was
published. While in Bristol, Mary Shelley may have gestated the idea for the ‘hideous progeny’ of her scientist hero, Victor Frankenstein. The novel has been interpreted as an allegory about slavery, with its master-slave discourse and similarity to a slave narrative relating to a fugitive slave. This will be related to the legacy of Bristol’s involvement in the slave trade, which would have been in evidence at the time of Mary Shelley’s sojourn in the city.

Jonathan Barry

‘Hannah More, John Henderson and the Romantics in Bristol c.1780-1800’

Recent work by Tim Whelan, Paul Cheshire and others has highlighted the interaction between the young Romantics and the intelligentsia of Bristol in the 1780s and 1790s, especially those associated with the Bristol Baptists. There has also been a surge of interest in Hannah More and her Bristol background, which also included the same people, notably James Newton, but also Josiah Tucker, Sir James Stonhouse and others, who had been associated with Edmund Burke’s Bristol phase. Yet there has been surprisingly little consideration of the contrast between the response of More and her circle to the French Revolution, and that of the Romantics. We consider More and her evangelical friends as models of a conservative reaction, turning to literature, including ballads and stories, to promote popular conservatism, and contrast this with the Romantic adoption of ballads to express their aspirations. Yet, in the longer term, none of the Romantic poets sustained their initial radical tendencies. I wish to consider how far the common intellectual background of More and the Romantics, in the Bristol context, might explain both the similarities and differences in their responses after 1789. I will do so in part by considering their responses to the figure of John Henderson, the unfulfilled genius of post-Chattertonian Bristol, whose life and legacy (including his attraction to the occult and the world of spirits) prompted all those in these circles to consider the nature and responsibility of an intellectual and literary life.

Paul Moorhouse

‘Rural Rides and Pedestrian Excursions – Radical Tourism in Hanoverian Wiltshire’

In August 1826 William Cobbett ‘sat on my horse and looked over...Pewsey...my land of promise, or at least of great .... expectations.’ Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* interrogated the Avon Valley and the wider Wiltshire landscape for arguments against ‘the insufferable emptiness...of the monster Malthus, who has furnished the oligarchs and their toad-eaters with the pretence that man has a natural propensity to breed faster than food can be raised.’ Cobbett seems to have been unaware that the Rector of Pewsey, Joseph Townsend, had propounded that ‘pretence’ over a decade before Malthus, in his 1785 *Dissertation on the Poor Law*.

The summer before Malthus published his 1798 *Essay on Population*, the poet and agitator John Thelwall, fleeing harassment from the authorities and loyalist mobs had taken much the same route as Cobbett. Thelwall was seeking sanctuary with Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Quantocks and relished ‘the moral meditation which rocks...brooks and woodlands...inspire’ after five years of urban activism, imprisonment and persecution. However ‘another species of curiosity’ went ‘hand in hand with’ his ‘passion for the
picturesque and romantic': a need to explore the political economy of poverty. ‘Every fact connected with the...condition of the laborious classes [was] important to a heart throbbing with an anxiety for the welfare of the human race’. This paper explores the travelogues of both radical journalists to gain an understanding of Wiltshire’s changing social structure and radical and ruling class responses to poverty during and after the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

As well as considering how Thelwall and Cobbett used the evidence of the Wiltshire landscape to examine the county’s past, present and future, it addresses its wider use in contemporary political social discourses, by writers including Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Hannah More, focussing on the cases of Old Sarum and Salisbury Plain.

Joseph Crawford

‘Behindhand With their Countrymen’: The Literary Culture of Exeter in the Romantic Period

Writing in 1807, Southey’s literary avatar Don Manuel Espriella described the citizens of Exeter as being ‘behindhand with their countrymen’. For him, Exeter was a cultural backwater, its best days manifestly behind it; but within the context of the south-west, the city continued to play an important role as a regional hub of literary culture and the printing industry. For most of the eighteenth century, Exeter had housed the only printing presses west of Bristol, making it the place of first resort for writers from Cornwall, Devon, and the western regions of Dorset and Somerset who wished to see their works in print; and by 1780 an active local literary culture had grown up in the city, which could boast Exeter-based poets, dramatists, historians, critics, and religious writers, many of them educated at Exeter College in Oxford. This paper will briefly map out the literary history of eighteenth-century Exeter, before going on to discuss the literary works written and printed in Exeter between 1780 and 1800, with special reference to the productions of the city’s first literary society, the Society of Gentlemen at Exeter (active 1792-1804). It will explore the ways in which this local literary culture drew upon and differed from the metropolitan literary culture of contemporary London, in order to reflect upon the difficulties and opportunities which confronted those south-western writers who, for personal or professional reasons, chose to continue writing and publishing in the south-west, rather than following the example of Thomas Gay and Hannah Cowley by seeking their literary fortunes in the capital.

Christopher Stokes

The Weekly Entertainer: Periodical Culture in the South-West

The Weekly Entertainer, published in Sherborne between 1773 and 1820 under a variety of titles, was a long-standing periodical which positioned itself explicitly as a provincial title covering the West of England. Although publishing work by figures like Coleridge and Charlotte Lennox, and despite running for the entire length of the Romantic period, classically conceived, it is a text more or less unstudied. Documentary evidence nevertheless strongly suggests it had an important place in the cultural life of the West of England. A later provincial title The Crypt, aiming to define itself as a Western periodical, grudgingly concedes that The Weekly Entertainer has preceded it. Jacob Halls Drew, who acknowledges the Entertainer as almost his sole source of cultural education in Cornwall, describes a system of private messengers relaying the periodical between Plymouth and
Penzance for educated households. And Richard Polwhele recounts the poet William Mason asserting that ‘Cornwall produced nothing good but junket, and the *Weekly Entertainer*’ and avowing plans to set up a similar title in York.

This paper gives a brief account of *The Weekly Entertainer*’s history and format, before turning specifically to the place of Exeter in the periodical. As a dominant regional centre, albeit declined from its earlier rank near the top of the English urban system, Exeter and its immediate Devon surrounds (e.g. Tiverton) represented an important part of the Western circuit and its readership as envisaged by the *Entertainer*. Although Exeter had a relatively strong print and newspaper culture itself, it had no periodical to rival the *Entertainer* and we see the importance of the Exeter clearly apparent in the latter publication. Whilst the magazine functioned as a miscellany – collecting the ‘best’ of the national periodical sphere and relaying it to the provinces – there is an equally strong local bent and we see a considerable amount of poems, letters and essays which attest to specifically Exeter’s regional identity. The paper shall conclude by considering where a more sustained study of the large archive of *Entertainers* could take us in a understanding of Exeter’s civic and regional self-imagining.

Andrew Rudd

George III in Exeter

On 12 August 1789, George III, the Queen and other members of the Royal Family arrived in Exeter as part of an extended tour of the south west. Across the English Channel, the first stirrings of the French Revolution were taking place; at home there was occasion for national rejoicing as the King emerged from his first serious bout of illness, thus bringing to an end (for a time) the Regency Crisis. The south-western tour was the King’s first major outing since his recovery and the levee held in Exeter on 13 August was his first large-scale public appearance. For a regional cathedral city anxious about its continued relevance in the modern world, for Exeter the visit for was both an honour and an occasion freighted with symbolism. The populace was acutely aware that the King’s presence effectively revalidated their ancient rights and privileges and was equally glad of the opportunity to showcase the city’s ancient and modern delights. Yet the published accounts of the visit, which this paper will examine in detail, expose what appears to have been a worrying gulf between the civic ritual performed for the King’s benefit and the erratic behaviour of George himself, who, the evidence suggests, had not fully recovered from porphyria and committed several serious gaffes. After a brief overview of the itinerary and the reports contained in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* and Exeter-based histories, the paper will examine the satirical account *The Royal Visit to Exeter* (published in 1795) by Peter Pindar (a.k.a. John Wolcot), where the events are reimagined from the point of view of a fictitious Devon farmer (Wolcot was of course a Devonian) and suggest ways in which the text establishes a ‘regionalist’ perspective that was capable of resisting metropolitan impositions. Officially, at least, such sentiments had to remain unexpressed, but Wolcot raised the possibility that the south west could write back to power.
Dafydd Moore

“Her Monarch’s friendly smile Devonia hails”: Patriot Identity in Poetry in the far South West of England in the Early 1790s.”

Published in Exeter in the spring of 1792, the 2 hefty volumes of Poems Chiefly by Gentlemen of Devonshire and Cornwall offer an insight into a highly self-conscious effort by a group of writers based in and around Exeter to stake a claim to a regional poetic identity. Edited by the reactionary clergyman Richard Polwhele (who would later in the decade find notoriety as the author of The Unsex’d Females), the volumes include poems on a range of subject matter, genre and mode stretching back some 30 years in the case of some of the authors. That said, the construction of regional or local identities based upon loyalism and resistance to foreign aggression is a recurrent preoccupation amongst the volumes and amongst the wider output of those responsible at that time.

This paper will consider the various ways in which regional identity is articulated in these poems, and the particular impact of events such as George III’s visit to the region in 1789 and the events in France on at least this section of South West society. It will demonstrate the various forms in which this loyalist patriot identity was asserted, from bardic visions and heroic pastorals to sermons and essays, and to the very notion of collaborative work by divers hands itself.

Kevin Grieves

A Benevolent and Humane Subscription: Philanthropy during the French Revolutionary Wars

This paper will explore the voluntary contributions made by the public during the French Revolutionary Wars as they appeared in the Bath newspapers. It will include a general survey of the charitable relief offered to injured servicemen, as well as the widows and children of those who died in action, and later voluntary donations towards the defence of Britain.

The main focus for this paper will be the donation of warm winter clothing to the troops serving under the Duke of York during the Flanders campaign. Originally suggested by the Lord Provost and magistrates of Edinburgh, it became a national venture due in no small part to the efforts of John Heriot, proprietor of the Sun newspaper. The Bath newspaper articles and announcements provide an insight not only into loyalist sentiment in a late-eighteenth century society under the strain of military and ideological conflict, but also into the class and gender relations within that society.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s formative years coincided with a period of great international social and political unrest. The period 1772-1797 was punctuated by the outbreak of the French Revolution (1789) and the American War of Independence (1775-1783) overseas, and the onset of the Industrial Revolution at home, and the subsequent war between Britain and France (1793-1815). Given these global revolutionary conditions during his youth, it is hardly surprising that as a young man, Coleridge dreamed of living in a ‘Pantisocracy’ – a utopia built on a classless society, where any form of slavery was unheard of, and where freedom of worship and religious expression was encouraged. Like the thousands who had previously emigrated, Coleridge hoped this dream could be realised in the New World – America.

The ideals of liberty, equality, and religious and political freedom enshrined within the American Declaration of Independence were attractive to Coleridge, becoming the main pillars of his proposed Pantisocracy. The difficult acquisition of adequate funding for the Pantisocratic experiment was the catalyst for the explosion in creativity which Coleridge experienced in Bristol in 1795. He explored several creative fundraising avenues, one of which was to present a series of public lectures on politics and religion.

Coleridge took considerable risks through his works of this time, which were designed to be inflammatory, and garner as much public interest as possible. Habeas Corpus, the right of a prisoner to challenge the legality of their imprisonment, had been suspended by Parliament in May 1794; if Coleridge had been arrested for sedition during his 1795 Lecture series, he could have legally been imprisoned, indefinitely, without trial.

This paper considers Coleridge’s 1795 Lectures on Politics and Religion, in terms of their content and political relevance, their delivery, and their impact both on Coleridge himself, and on his audience.