

ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

..... NEWSLETTER



..... NOVEMBER 2017



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Cover image: Michelle Rogers, 'Out of the Shadows' (2003), commissioned as a response to Queen's University Belfast's preponderance of male portraits; photographed on the RHS' October visit to QUB, where, amongst many issues, we discussed the Society's ongoing work on gender equality. Information about the QUB Gender Initiative is available here: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/QueensGenderInitiative/>. This year, three RHS Presidents and other officers also participated in an exhibition and celebration of London's women historians at the Institute of Historical Research: <http://www.history.ac.uk/exhibitions/womenhistorians/>.



PRESIDENTIAL LETTER

MARGOT FINN

This November issue of the newsletter is designed to alert you to policy developments that affect History in the UK, to update you on our funding and activities since the last newsletter, and to introduce you to the programme for the 150th anniversary year, which starts after our AGM on 24th November. Do please join us for one or more of the anniversary events.

For historians across the UK, 2017 has been a year of looming known unknowns.

What shape will Brexit take and (when) will it happen? What cultural and educational services that engage historians (notably archives, libraries and museums) will local governments reduce or cut to maintain social programmes for an ageing population in the face of a decade of austerity?

What fee regimes might best serve student needs whilst supporting the higher education (HE) sector in an increasingly competitive global market—and how might short-term political

gaming influence policy-makers' answers to that question?

Which constituencies remain excluded from higher education's expanding ranks—at student and staff levels—and how can these persistent patterns of absence be reversed?

Can excellence in either teaching or learning (much less both) be measured at university level by metrics in ways that are both fair and meaningful?

Will the consolidation of the individual UK Research Councils under the aegis of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) strengthen or disadvan-

tage historical research? Will open-access publishing policies tailored for the sciences (such as the UK Scholarly Communications Licence) disable or enable humanities-based disciplines?

Will the submission criteria for the next Research Excellence Exercise (REF2021) ever be finalised?

It has often appeared in the past several months as if the ground is shifting under our feet with increased speed whilst travelling in ever more eccentric orbitals. The Teaching Research Exercise (TEF) provides an obvious example of a policy landscape that



Margot Finn with the 2017 RHS prize winners

seems to have slipped its ostensibly tectonic moorings with unseemly ease and haste. TEF was driven at pace through the English higher education sector (and adopted selectively by Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh universities), at the behest of government ministers and policy-makers enamoured of free market mechanisms.

At its inception, this national-ish audit was designed to reward strong (and punish weak) institutional performances with both reputational consequences and variable university fee regimes. Prime Minister May's announcement (at the 2017 Conservative Party conference) that the

English undergraduate fee will now be frozen at £9,250 fundamentally undercuts much of that underpinning logic, even as it discombobulates university financial planning—not only at English universities but at Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh institutions at which English students study and pay fees.

No political party or think-tank in the UK appears at present to have worked up a credible, balanced HE portfolio that promises investment in people, institutions and 'science' (in the capacious European sense) without mooting potentially swingeing financial burdens for one or more sets of stakeholders. Nor

have university leaders, now under attack for their generous salaries and pension pots and too often fixated on raising their own institutions' rank in national and international league tables, responded with viable proposals for the future.

From the RHS perspective, what stands out most sharply in current HE, REF, TEF and wider cultural and educational policy is the extent to which it has discounted the value of cooperation and collaboration (even as, ironically, funding bodies relentlessly underscore the virtues of inter- and cross-disciplinary research).

A glimmer of more enlightened think-

ing can be seen in REF2021's 'Initial Guidance' (now available at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2017/ref201701/>), which promises 'an explicit focus on the submitting unit's approach to supporting collaboration with organisations beyond higher education' (section 18).

If only supporting collaboration between and among HE institutions were accorded the same recognition and value. One of the great virtues of the RHS and the many cognate scholarly charities with which we work is precisely our ability to mobilise staff from a wide range of different institutions with distinctive profiles and to recognise them as colleagues with shared goals.

Our April 2017 regional symposium at Chester, where the University's historians assembled a first-rate programme on 'Putting History in Its Place: Historical Landscapes & Environments', and the excellent September RHS symposium on 'Researching & Teaching Controversial History', orchestrated by historians at Queen's University Belfast, afforded emphatic evidence both that History can flourish across the full spectrum of the UK HE sector when it is supported and that outward-looking international engagement is the lifeblood of the discipline.

Visitors to The National Archives (TNA) at Kew in August likewise saw cross-sector collaboration at its best. TNA's

inaugural summer lecture series on 'Secrets and Lies', sponsored by the Friends of TNA, the TNA and the RHS, saw packed audiences of academic, family and local historians enlightened and entertained by speakers on topics that ranged from medieval and early modern sorcery, bastardy and arms-dealing to modern conspiracy theories and 'alternative facts'.

Collaboration takes time, money and effort and is not the answer to every problem we face in historical practice today, but it offers an essential counterweight to the prevailing winds of competition that emanate from policy-makers. It's unsurprising and salutary to note that History UK's November 2017 plenary meeting



Seven of the 14 members of the race and ethnicity equality working group

is organised around ‘Working Together: Collaboration in Research and Teaching’. REF and TEF and the exam boards that shape History in schools and colleges would benefit from incorporating this collaborative approach much more fully into their efforts to identify and reward excellence.

More concretely, what has the RHS contributed to the UK historical landscape in the past year and what are we aiming to achieve in coming months? This year’s *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* will catch members up on papers read at recent lectures and symposia (and can be supplemented by the website’s video archive of lectures, <http://royalhistoricalsociety.org/category/rhs-video-archive/>).

The *Camden Series* continues to produce scholarly editions of primary sources, and as it approaches its 180th anniversary in 2018 offers an online backlist of over 325 volumes. The coming year will see publication of the 100th volume of the Society’s *Studies in History* series for first-time monograph authors.

The first volumes for our open-access book (monograph and edited volumes) series, *New Historical Perspectives*, are already under contract, illustrating the appeal to a new generation of authors of this new RHS collaboration with the Institute of Historical Research (IHR).

Joining these scholarly publications in autumn 2017, in time for the launch of the Society’s 150th Anniversary Year, is *Historical Transactions*, a blog that will allow us to reflect in a sesquicentennial manner on what the Society has been and done in the past, and what it needs to be and do in the next decade to work effectively for History in and beyond the UK (the blog will be accessible via our website). We’ll be able to combine that self-scrutiny with some much-needed exploration of the RHS archives thanks to a matching grant generously awarded by the Marc Fitch Fund for that purpose.

Council has devised a packed programme for the 150th Anniversary Year (2018). Constraints of space prohibit reciting a full roster of

these events—the Society’s website and Twitter account will have up-to-date details—but here are a few highlights.

The award ceremony for our second Public History Prize competition will be held in Bloomsbury at Mary Ward Hall on 26 January 2018, showcasing excellence in historical interpretation across the multiple sectors of historical practice and (in conjunction with the Historical Association) including our first student prizes.

February’s annual Gerald Aylmer Seminar, a collaboration with TNA and the IHR, will feature ‘Diversity among the Documents? The Representation of BAME Communities within the UK’s Archives’, part of a wider drive within the Society to ensure that the RHS includes the full range of historical actors, agents and narratives in its ongoing work for the discipline.

April 13th-14th will see these themes elaborated in a conference on ‘Diverse History in Wales’ at the University of South Wales in Cardiff.

Following swiftly after a June 2018 RHS symposium at Oxford on ‘The Future of History: Going Global in the University’, the Society’s July Prothero Lecture will be delivered by Professor Carole Hillenbrand on ‘Saladin’s Spin Doctors’.

Fellows and Members who join us for the annual Prothero reception will witness not only our standard prize-giving for the best books and articles published by early career historians but also our first ‘Jinty Nelson Award for Inspirational Teaching’. This prize recognises both an essential activity that we value as historians and an essential figure in the recent leadership of the RHS.

Rounding out the 150th Anniversary Year will be an autumn programme

which, in October alone, includes a lecture by Professor David Arnold on ‘Death and the Modern Empire: The 1918-19 Influenza Epidemic in India’ at the University of Strathclyde; Professor Tom Williamson’s 2018 Colin Matthew Memorial Lecture for the Public Understanding of History (in co-operation with Gresham College), ‘How Natural is Natural? Historical Perspectives on Wildlife and the Environment in England’; and the publication of both a second, revised report by the RHS on gender equality in UK universities and our first report on race equality in UK higher education.

These are ambitious, demanding plans, and rely on much good will and hard graft by staff, officers, Council, Fellows and Members for their

realisation. Together with our regular series of London lectures, the 150th Anniversary Year programme affords ample opportunity for engagement with the RHS in 2018.

As members of the Society, I do very much hope to see you supporting the RHS by attending one or more of these events, encouraging new applicants to our membership by directing prospective members to <http://royalhistsoc.org/membership/>, and (dare I mention it?) making a donation to the RHS to help underpin the next 150 years of our work to enrich historical practice in and beyond the UK.

Margot Finn



To contact the President:

president@royalhistsoc.org

150TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAMME

2018



Friday 26 January 2018 at 7.00 pm
Public History Prize Awards
Mary Ward Hall, London

Friday 9 February 2018 at 6.00 pm
Professor Diana Paton
'Mary Williamson's letter, or, seeing women
in the archives of Atlantic slavery'
Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL

Friday 23 February 2018
The Gerald Aylmer Seminar
in association with The National Archives & the IHR
'Diversity among the documents?:
The representation of BAME communities in UK archives'
Wolfson Suite, Institute of Historical Research

March 2018, date tbc
'The new schools' History curriculum:
what universities need to know
Workshop at Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL

Friday 13 – Saturday 14 April 2018
'Diverse History in Wales'
Conference at University of South Wales, Cardiff

Friday 11 May 2018 at 6.00 pm
Professor Lynn Abrams
'Pursuing autonomy: self-help and self-fashioning
amongst women in post-war Britain'
Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL

Friday 22 – Saturday 23 June 2018
 ‘The Future of History: Going Global in the University’
Symposium at the University of Oxford

Friday 6 July 2018 at 6.00 pm

The Prothero Lecture

Professor Carole Hillenbrand

‘Saladin’s spin doctors’

&

RHS Publication, Fellowship, & Teaching Awards

Mary Ward Hall, London

September 2018, date tbc

‘History: New to Teaching’

Workshop at the Institute of Historical Research

Friday 21 September at 6.00 pm

Professor Naomi Standen

‘Eastern Eurasia without borders:
 from the Türks to the Mongols’

UCL

Friday 5 October 2018

Professor David Arnold

‘Death & the Modern Empire:

The 1918-19 Influenza Epidemic in India’

University of Strathclyde

October 2018, date tbc

The Colin Matthew Memorial Lecture

for the Public Understanding of History

in association with Gresham College

Professor Tom Williamson

‘How natural is natural? Historical perspectives on
 wildlife and the environment in England’

London

Friday 23 November 2018 at 6.00 pm

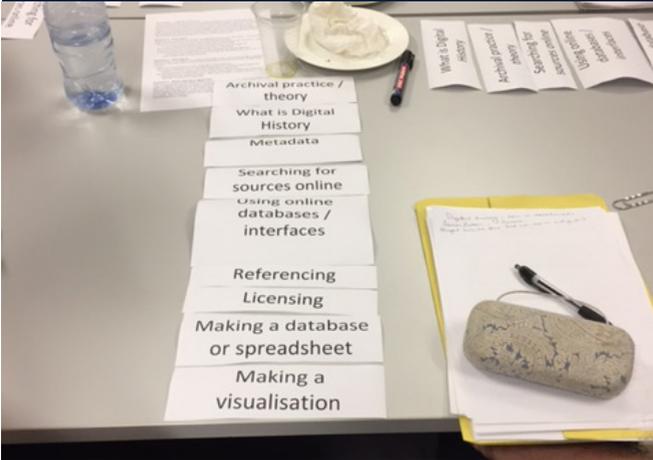
2018 Presidential Address

Professor Margot Finn

‘Material Turns in British History: Part II’

UCL

NEW TO TEACHING WORKSHOP FOR HISTORIANS



Peter d'Sena, Learning and Teaching Specialist at the University of Hertfordshire, reports on the RHS's teaching workshop for early career historians

A one-day 'New to Teaching' event for early career historians took place in early September at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), London. I had run several events of this kind when I was Discipline Lead for History at the Higher Education Academy (HEA). However, in 2014 the HEA relinquished its direct interest in supporting discipline-specific events of this kind and so I sought funding and support from the Royal Historical Society, History UK and the IHR to keep the event going. It's become an annual event since then.

Over twenty people attended the event, and participated in a series of interactive workshops designed to develop their understanding of innovations in teaching and learning with a focus on curriculum design and authentic assessment, teaching seminar groups, using digital technology in the undergraduate classroom, quality assurance and preparing for the academic job market. I opened the event with an interactive session about curriculum design. Historians at Indiana University, such as David Pace, Joan Middendorf and Leah Shopkow have been pi-

oneering the work of decoding the disciplines in order to rethink the ways in which teaching and curriculum design can be more finely tuned to address the conceptual bottlenecks that hinder student progression. In a practical exercise, participants combined this pedagogic strategy with the more well-trodden approach of Constructive Alignment to improve one area of their teaching. Jamie Wood (University of Lincoln), then facilitated a session about small group/seminar work. Some of us may take for granted what a seminar is and what it can be for. By modelling



several best practices, Jamie showed participants some of the ways in which seminars can be used to encourage small groups of students to deepen their historical understanding through hands-on and collaborative learning. James Baker (University of Sussex), carried on this theme in his session, though with a specific focus on improving student engagement with historical information and enquiry through the vehicle of the digital humanities. Not all of our students are so-called 'digital natives' and struggle to understand the ways in which technology can

be used to both support their own learning and interrogate the past. My second session took on the thorny subject of job applications. As you would imagine, in the current climate, this was a session that grabbed participants' attention. Finally, we were also fortunate, on this occasion, to have a session from Adele Nye (University of New England, Australia) about quality assurance and standards in history. Her work about recent changes in the ways in which undergraduate achievement is measured in Australian universities gave participants an opportunity to compare their strategies

and processes with the ways in which expectations for history in higher education in the UK have been set out by the most recent QAA benchmark statement (2014). Also present and supporting participants during these workshops, were Jakub Basista (Jagiellonian University, Poland) and Ken Fincham, Vice-President and Chair of the RHS Education Policy Committee (University of Kent). The next 'New to Teaching' event will be held in September 2018.

Peter d'Sena

UK SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS LICENCE

Jane Winters, Professor of Digital Humanities at the School of Advanced Study and RHS Council member, discusses the implications of the new UK Scholarly Communications Licence



The academic publishing landscape has been subject to considerable change over the past two decades, as digital technologies have shaped how we produce, disseminate and consume the products of research.

As an individual it is hard to keep track of every new development, to decide which can probably be ignored, which are likely to influence how at least some of us work, which are likely to be positively transformative, and which have the potential to be damaging for history and the humanities.

Consequently, the Royal Historical Society Council and Publications Committee have long kept a watchful eye on publishing policy and practice. In relation to open access, for example, the Society recently campaigned very effectively for an acknowledgement of important disciplinary differences around licensing and embargo periods.

With the launch of its New Historical Perspectives series, the Society has taken steps to help shape open-access monograph publishing so that it suits the needs of early-career historians

in particular.

At the last meeting of the RHS Council, Simon Newman, Vice-President and Chair of the Publications Committee, introduced the subject of the UK Scholarly Communications Licence (UK-SCL), which has been proposed as a means to simplify open-access publication for authors and as a solution to the large and growing administrative (and cost) burden faced by university libraries in implementing Green Open Access (Green OA 'means depositing the final peer-reviewed research output in an

electronic archive called a repository ... Access to the research output can be granted either immediately or after an agreed embargo period').

The UK-SCL entails a significant change in the relationship between authors, their host institutions and their academic work – their writing. Under the terms of the new licence, rather than dealing directly with a publisher, whether a learned society or a large commercial entity, researchers will in the first instance be required to grant their university 'a non-exclusive licence to make the manuscript of a scholarly article publicly available under a Creative Commons licence that allows non-commercial re-use'. The university de facto becomes an open-access publisher, to a much greater extent than under current Green OA arrangements, and the author's choices about where to publish are necessarily constrained.

The UK-SCL is designed to address a very real problem, but it raises many questions which need to be further explored. What, for example, will be the

effect of implementing a licence which is specific to the UK open-access context when so many scholars publish internationally? How will third-party rights be accommodated under the new scheme?

This is a question of particular concern to art historians, as has been acknowledged in earlier conversations about Green OA, but is a problem shared by so many humanities researchers who do not own the data – the sources – with which they work and about which they write. And perhaps more fundamentally, as emerged very clearly at the RHS Council meeting in September, what would the adoption of the UK-SCL mean for historians' ownership of their words and work?

At a July meeting of the Universities UK Open Access Coordination Group, the need for caution in moving to a new licensing regime was noted. Given that 'there is a risk of frustrating the OA journey with the model SCL', it is worth taking the time to gather evidence and assess the likely effects of a new system

of licensing, and indeed publication, of scholarly works. The Royal Historical Society is already ensuring that the views of historians are represented in these discussions, and will continue to do so over the coming months.

If you are interested in a more detailed discussion of the implications of the UK-SCL for historians and other researchers in the humanities and social sciences, Simon Newman and Karin Wulf have co-authored an important think-piece for the Scholarly Kitchen publishing blog, which is linked below.

Jane Winters

Karin Wulf and Simon Newman, 'Missing the target: the UK Scholarly Communications License':

<http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2017/07/26/missing-target-uk-scholarly-communications-license>

SUPPORTING EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS

RHS awards around £60,000 per year to post-graduate students and early career historians, helping them pursue research and attend and organise conferences. Grant winners Shensi Yi and David Wilson tell their stories.



I had a great experience with the Royal Historical Society (RHS) grant, and strongly encourage my fellow historians to consider applying for it. One of the most important issues for history PhD students, especially those of us who rely on multilateral archival sources in different countries, is securing sufficient funding to conduct research smoothly.

My PhD thesis focuses on Chinese communists in Shanghai during the 1920s to 1930s, and shows how they lived and developed in the urban sphere from a bottom-up perspective. Since Shanghai was a

global city at the time with a significant British presence, I needed to access UK archives to collect relevant primary sources, none of which are available in microfilm or digital form here in Australia.

Finding suitable funding for this ambitious goal was not easy, since each grant has its own procedures, criteria, timetable, eligibility requirements, etc. Moreover, the vast majority of the scholarly funding in the US and UK requires applicants to be affiliated with local universities, which compounded my difficulties. So I was very grateful to learn that the RHS research expense grants were available to overseas PhD students, thanks to generous funding from the Past & Present Society.

The RHS application process is simple and precise: you only need a short proposal of 250 words, a supervisor's report, and an estimat-

ed budget. Writing the brief project description even helped me refine the key points of my thesis, which was a big help for other grant applications. Once I sent my application and my supervisor delivered his letter of endorsement, I was fortunate enough to get a successful outcome within one month.

The RHS research grant made possible a very fruitful research trip in the UK. This past June, I consulted archives and libraries in London, Cambridge, Oxford, and Exeter, where I collected abundant sources from official diplomatic papers and intelligence reports to private papers and individual diaries. For example, I visited the National Archives at Kew, collecting large numbers of archival materials from the Foreign Office, the War Office, and the Records of the Security Service. I also consulted the Archives and Special Collections at SOAS, photograph-

ing materials from the John Swire & Sons Ltd Archives and from other collections, like the China Association Archives. Afterwards, I went to Cambridge to visit the Cambridge University Library, the Churchill Archives Centre, and the Girton College Library to consult archival sources such as the Jardine Matheson Archives.

Another two useful sites were St Antony's College Library at Oxford University, and the Special Collections of the University of Exeter. There I got access to several kinds of diaries and correspondence, including documents from the Sir Miles Lampson, 1st Baron Killlearn Collection, the correspondence and papers of Sir Owen O'Malley, and the Far East diaries of H. E. Hillman. In addition, I studied in the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, and the National Maritime Museum, collecting invaluable sources from the India Office Records, along with other interesting private papers and diaries. At last, I visited the HSBC Archives and consulted relevant company files there. In conjunction

with the Chinese collections, these British source materials significantly enrich the empirical foundation for my study, providing me with a close observation and a sense of presence, as if I were witnessing early communist history.

Besides the excellent research opportunities in these archives and repositories, the RHS grant also helped me enhance my professional network. While I was in London, I attended a postgraduate conference titled 'Revolution, Reformation and Reformation: Perspectives on Conflict and Change in History'. As part of a panel on theorizing revolution and cultural change, I presented a paper on the early relationship between the Chinese communist party and the youth league in Shanghai, and of course benefited a lot from comments and feedback on my paper. This conference also gave me the opportunity to meet with peers and leading scholars in my scholarly field, and I was able to cultivate several productive academic relationships.

None of these accomplishments would have

been possible without the generous financial support of the RHS. To me, this grant not only offered substantial assistance in facilitating my overseas archival research, but also demonstrated a level of trust and investment in my work. I am honored to be an RHS grant recipient, and I highly recommend the RHS research expenses grant to other PhD students, no matter where in the world they call home.

*Shensi Yi
is a PhD student at
the University of Sydney*



*Library of St Antony's
College, Oxford*

SUPPORTING EARLY CAREER HISTORIANS



Being in the unique position of having submitted my PhD thesis immediately prior to sitting down to write this piece, I can reflect on my three-year journey as a doctoral student and the ways in which the generous support of the Royal Historical Society has influenced my research and shaped my experiences.

As a student of eighteenth-century British Atlantic history, the majority of my sources are held at The National Archives in Kew. Yet, after starting my PhD, I began to recognise that my thesis would greatly benefit from a trip to archives in Spain and the United States as the material held there could provide new

local and trans-imperial perspectives for my research. However, due to the need to undertake several trips to London, I quickly depleted my internal research fund.

In order to facilitate these trips, I began exploring the application processes for various funding bodies and often found that I had either missed the deadlines for that calendar year or my research did not align with the aims and objectives of the organisation. On the other hand, the Royal Historical Society provides an exceptional resource for early career researchers by offering small grants for research expenses at multiple points throughout the year. Better yet, they welcome applications concerning research of all historical topics.

The turnaround for this process is remarkably quick which meant that I was able to prepare the application, apply for funding, learn the outcome, and book the necessary trip in just over a month. The speed of this

process has allowed me to maintain the momentum of my research as I have not had to delay or push back research trips as I waited to hear back. This quick processing means that RHS grants are a vital source for researchers at all stages of their PhD, whether this is utilised for an anticipated trip during the first doctoral year or for an unexpected pre-submission scramble to the archives.

Throughout my three years of doctoral study, the Society has provided me with significant financial support which has enabled me to undertake two research trips – the first to the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, and the second to the New York Public Library and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. My PhD thesis explores the British suppression of Atlantic piracy as the means to discuss the limits of imperial authority and the importance of individual compliance in the early eighteenth

century. The nuance of my research stems from a focus on the significance of contested and unclaimed spaces to the sustenance and decline of piracy. Very little discussion of these spaces appears in the official records held at The National Archives and, as such, access to Spanish archival documents in Seville and local merchant records held in New York and Philadelphia proved crucial to uncovering the role of inter-imperial and transatlantic actors in these spaces. These sources have afforded a deeper examination and analysis of the rise and suppression

of eighteenth-century piracy which not only challenges current understanding of the war against pirates but also calls into question the weight of British imperial authority over the Atlantic world.

As well as strengthening my doctoral project, these trips have proved vital for my professional development as an early career researcher. I have undertaken Spanish language classes to facilitate my research in Seville and this has encouraged me to seek out new avenues for my future research and career. In fact, I am preparing a postdoctoral project which focuses

on an abundance of material uncovered at the Archivo General de Indias during my RHS-funded trip, which significantly builds on the approaches and arguments developed during my PhD by taking on a much wider inter-imperial outlook. Research-related activities aside, I have met many colleagues during these trips who have provided advice, encouragement, friendship, and new insights - particularly during daily coffee breaks at La Rayuela! It has also been a unique privilege to observe and experience the cultures that I study.



Archivo General de Indias, Seville



View from the Torre del Oro, Seville

Alongside funding these research trips, the Society has also helped to facilitate new forums for research dissemination that I have co-organised alongside Siobhan Hearne (University of Nottingham) in affiliation with the Centre for Port and Maritime Studies (Liverpool). Through an RHS-supported conference in 2016 and a public engagement seminar series in 2016/17, we have been able to establish the International Postgraduate Port and Maritime Studies Network and brought together early career researchers

from across the world to discuss a variety of topics relating to port and maritime studies. Not only have these events been beneficial for my research, they have also been an absolute joy to co-organise and participate in, and this would not have been possible without the financial support of the Society.

Grants from the Society have facilitated some of the most memorable, beneficial, and enjoyable experiences of my doctoral studies. I would encourage all doctoral students and early career researchers

to utilise this support, whether to create new forums to discuss ideas and topics, to attend and present ideas at specialist conferences, or to explore archives and libraries that will add depth and nuance to research projects. Such experiences may even shape the future direction of research focus, as they did mine.

*David Wilson
is a PhD student at the
University of Strathclyde*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES SUMMER LECTURES

HANDGUNS & HISTORY

This year, the Society sponsored the National Archives' free summer public lecture series, 'Secrets & Lies', which covered subjects from sorcery to antisemitism to conspiracy theories. Catherine Fletcher, Associate Professor of History at University of Swansea, reflects on her lecture on ambassadors and arms dealers in 16th century Italy.



This August I was delighted to give one of six public lectures on the theme of 'Secrets and Lies' sponsored by the Royal Historical Society, the National Archives (TNA) and the Friends of the TNA. It took place at the archives in Kew and explored the relationship between diplomacy and arms-dealing in sixteenth-century Europe, with a complementary display of documents put together by TNA curators.

This was a first full-length public lecture from my new research project, although I'd previously given a conference paper at the

Renaissance Society of America annual meeting and done a short broadcast for BBC Radio 3's The Essay. It was fascinating to hear the audience respond to the work in progress and to hear at an early stage what sort of questions this topic might prompt beyond academia.

Wider audiences usually have two familiar points of reference in early European gun culture. One is Leonardo da Vinci, who towards the end of the fifteenth century drew a design for a wheel-lock mechanism that could be used to fire a gun without the lighted match that weapons typically re-

quired at the time. (The historical debate about whether Leonardo originated this design or copied a mechanism he knew from elsewhere is an old and lively one.) The other point of reference is the Beretta company, first documented in 1526 when the government of Venice bought 185 gun barrels from a certain Bartolomeo Beretta, and today the chief supplier of the US Army's M9 pistol.

I first came across this topic some fifteen years ago, when I was researching a Masters essay. I decided to revisit it after writing a biography of Alessandro de'

Medici in the 1530s, who had an intriguing collection of guns which I struggled to contextualise. It's a fascinating topic not only for the historical content but for its present-day resonance. When I visited colleagues in Texas a year ago, they were coming to terms with the state's assertion of the right to carry concealed weapons on campus.

Concealed carry was an issue that exercised lawmakers in the sixteenth century, too. There was particular anxiety about wheel-

lock guns because they could be hidden underneath a cloak, produced and fired at once, making them the ideal weapon for assassins. In 1517, the Emperor Maximilian banned wheel-lock weapons in Habsburg territory – modern-day Germany, Austria and the Low Countries. The Italian city-state of Ferrara – known for its duke's interest in arms technology – followed with a ban in 1522.

Yet that did not stop a vast expansion of handgun ownership in the context of the

Italian Wars (1494-1559), during which this technology became increasingly important in military tactics. A very approximate indication can be gleaned from the inventories of the Medici rulers of Florence. In 1492, Lorenzo the Magnificent's possessions included five steel arquebuses, but the 1538/39 inventory of Duke Cosimo de' Medici's wardrobe lists a total of 91 firearms, including four German-style wheel-lock pistols which he took with him when he



16th-century double-barreled wheel-lock pistol, Metropolitan Museum of Art

travelled. By the 1540s it is not uncommon to see orders of guns for city defence in the hundreds per annum.

As today, however, there were concerns about who might get their hands on these weapons. In their 1980 company history of Beretta, Marco Morin and Robert Held recounted a formal complaint to the Venetian Senate from an official in Gardone (where the Beretta factory was located): 'Everyone carries an arquebus,' he wrote, 'and... they're not

content with one, but even the women carry two, one in their hand and the other in their belt, both wheel-locks, and they're a bad breed, untameable overbearing Lutherans.' More states legislated against the possession of wheel-lock weapons, but they could not keep them out of the hands of bandits. In 1578 one Venetian newsletter reported that four members of the Peretti household in the village of Canda, north of Ferrara, had been murdered by a gang dressed as shep-

herds and armed with wheel-lock guns. It's perhaps not surprising that some contemporaries thought guns the work of the devil.

For more information as the project progresses, follow me on Twitter @cath_fletcher or see my website <http://www.catherinefletcher.info>.

Catherine Fletcher



National Archives, Kew

THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- **REPRESENTS** history as a discipline, and historians as a group
- **PROMOTES** the vitality of historical scholarship through support for research and publication
- **ADVOCATES** best practice in history teaching in universities and schools
- **PROVIDES** a forum for all historians to meet and exchange ideas
- **SUPPORTS** and encourages early career historians



NOVEMBER 2017