



CMCS

Postgraduate Conference

**The Nineteenth Century Now:
Reassessing the Continued Role and Relevance of the Long
Nineteenth Century**

26th April 2023

Room 201, Sandyford Building

Northumbria University

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE1 8QH





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About CNCS: The Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies was founded in 2013 by Professor Bennet Zon to develop research in long-nineteenth-century studies in northeast regional universities in the United Kingdom. We aim to shape research through regional, national, and international collaboration, and advance interdisciplinary studies involving the widest possible geographical and thematic reach. We have roughly 200 national and international members and are currently governed by a cross-institutional advisory board composed of postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and academic staff from Durham, Newcastle, and Northumbria. Membership in CNCS is free and open to staff, students, and independent researchers interested in any aspect of Nineteenth Century studies. For more information or to join our mailing list, visit: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/nineteenth-century-studies/>.

CNCS Postgraduate Representatives 2022-23: The CNCS PG committee is run by volunteer representatives primarily from Durham, Newcastle and Northumbria universities who organise and coordinate the postgraduate research events throughout the academic year.

Angus Howie, Music (Durham University)

Emma Kavanagh, Music (Oxford University)

Annabel Storr, Modern Languages and Cultures (Durham University) - Co-lead PG Rep 2022/23

Keerthi Vasishta, English Studies (Durham University) - Co-lead PG Rep 2022/23

Craig Thomas, History (Newcastle University)

Maddalena Ruini, Classics (Durham University)

Deborah Siddoway, Law and Literature (Durham University)

Margaret Gray, English Literature (Newcastle University)

Eloise Scott, English Literature (Northumbria University)

Sophie Horrocks, Music (Durham University)

To get involved with CNCS PG, contact Keerthi at keerthi.s.vasishta@durham.ac.uk

Image on previous page: Claude Monet, *The Japanese Footbridge, 1899*, The National Gallery of Art, 1899.



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The nineteenth century was a crucial period in the development of new ideas, transnational connections and the widespread professionalisation of disciplines ranging from history to the natural sciences. The Humanities as a whole face new challenges with increasing emphasis on societal impacts from research. Yet, these challenges also present opportunities for nineteenth-century studies to reassess and reshape themselves in new ways, incorporating developments such as the rise of digital humanities and interdisciplinary research methods.

This conference will explore these developments, from nineteenth-century artefacts and texts to reflections on the place of nineteenth-century studies as a discipline, as it considers the ongoing relevance of the nineteenth century, including:

- How does the nineteenth century define itself across disciplines in a contemporary research context? What are the challenges that emerge within and across disciplines?
- How might nineteenth-century studies respond to recent projects such as decolonisation of the curriculum? And what does it mean to study the nineteenth century now?
- How and why do legacies of the long nineteenth century remain important to current society and culture?



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Conference Programme

26th April 2023

09:15-09:30

Welcome and Housekeeping

9:30 – 10:30

Panel 1: **(Re)Encountering Femininities**

Chair: **Eloise Scott** (Northumbria University)

‘Why is everyone trying to persuade us to remain feminine?’:

Valentina Serova and the Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia

Nicholas Ong (University of Cambridge)

‘Unhinged’ Women: Gender and Violence in Rachilde’s *La*

Marquise de Sade (1887) and Eliza Clark’s *Boy Parts* (2020)

Marie Martine (University of Oxford)

Towards a History of Feminist Counter-Language: Insights and

Legacies from the Long Nineteenth Century

Martina Guzzetti (Università degli Studi di Milano)

10:30 – 11:00

Coffee and Tea

11:00 – 11:45

Panel 2: **‘Cleansing’ the Nineteenth Century**

Chair: **Margaret Gray** (Newcastle University)

To Conquer the Filth: Street Cleaners and the Public Space in

Nineteenth Century French Art

Amit Kestenbaum (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)



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The Strangest Creatures: Hybrid People in Weird Eco-Utopianism in William Henry Hudson's A Crystal Age

Charlie Toogood (Newcastle University)

Health Care in the Armies of Nineteenth Century British India: Lessons for the Present Day

David J. Gawkrödger (University of Oxford)

12:00 – 13:00

Lunch

13:00 – 14:30

Panel 3: **Transnational Legacies of Empire**

Chair: **Keerthi Vasishta** (Durham University)

A Re-examination of the Nineteenth-Century Roots of the 'Ulster Problem'

Patrick Duffy (Trinity College, Dublin)

The Female Scot Quebecker in Nineteenth-Century Lower Canada: The Lasting Influence of the Dalhousies and Campbells on Quebec Science/Society

Kimberly M. Glassman (Queen Mary University of London)

Who was King Philip IV? — A Comparative Study of Transcultural Soundscapes in Shanghai Concession through Musical Iconography in the late 19th Century

Teng Chen (University of Southampton)

Sheffield and Atlantic Slavery in the Long Nineteenth Century:



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Charting the Economy, Society and Culture of a British Industrial City

Toby Gardner (University of Sheffield)

14:30-15:00

Tea and Coffee

15:00-16:00

Keynote

Chair: **Annabel Storr** (Durham University)

Reexamining Science, Religion, and, Race through African Collections: British Museums and Colonial Erasure in the Long 19th Century

Dr Nathan Bossoh (Science Museum)

16:00-16:10

Closing Remarks

Abstracts and Biographies

Panel 1: (Re)Encountering Femininities

Title: ‘Why is everyone trying to persuade us to remain feminine?’: Valentina Serova and the Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia

Nicholas Ong (University of Cambridge)

Abstract: Valentina Serova (née Bergman, 1846–1924) is often deemed Russia’s first woman composer, with notable achievements such as her opera Uriel Acosta (1885) and her publication of music criticism in the journal Music and Theatre (1867–68) which she co-founded. These milestones stand at a particularly significant turning point in Russian musical culture, when the intelligentsia’s decades-long contemplation on ‘the woman question’ and the easing of the monarchy’s autocratic rule finally led to the accessibility of higher education for women, including



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in music. Serova's career, however, is also significant beyond immediate music circles, standing as but one example of how women facilitated the national mission of building a civil society in Russia and forged ahead with the motion of women's liberation.

Despite the prevalence of such identifiable individuals in several public spheres, individual studies of women in nineteenth-century Russia remain in incipient stages. More perplexing is the dearth of engagement with the women's liberation movement in extant inquiries of music and politics of this time. Building on studies by Richard Stites (1978) and Barbara Engel (1983, 2004), this paper uses Serova's career to advance close investigations of such individual agents. Drawing on her largely untranslated memoirs, I situate Serova in the musical, social, and intellectual context of late nineteenth-century Russia so as to assess the impact of the movement on Russia's musical world. In doing so, I reveal a more nuanced notion of both entities and establish the foundation for future explorations of women composers in late nineteenth-century Russia.

Biography: Nicholas Ong is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge where his research focuses on critic-composer Valentina Serova (1846–1924) and, more broadly, on women and music in nineteenth-century Russia. His wider research interests include musical nationalism, biography, music criticism, and music in Singapore.

Title: 'Unhinged' Women: Gender and Violence in Rachilde's *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) and Eliza Clark's *Boy Parts* (2020)

Marie Martine (University of Oxford)

Abstract: With its evil and violent heroine, Eliza Clark's 2020 bestseller *Boy Parts* shares a lot with Rachilde's novel *La Marquise de Sade* published in 1887. While Rachilde tried to find her voice within the French decadent movement by destabilizing gender norms with her ferocious heroines, Clark writes about a modern-day British character who has been given the title of female equivalent of *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman. In this paper, I will be comparing both novels because they deal with female violence in a subverting way and a comparison of the two is not as far-fetched as it might first seem. In bringing together both stories, this paper aims to show that our current literary



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production shares similar concerns with the end of nineteenth century society, particularly our ambivalent responses to violence. Both Rachilde and Clark, despite writing in different contexts, portray sadistic female protagonists who take pleasure in dominating and torturing men in a society that dismisses the possibility of women acting violently. However, the reader is soon led to question the protagonists' mental sanity and the cause of their brutality. Both novels explore the intricacies of trauma and sexual violence and thus probe the idealization of 'female rage' in media. This transnational comparison will bring to light how certain nineteenth-century ideas still influence our views on the gender dynamics of violence. This paper will also prove that because of the active erasure of women writers from our literary canon, we lack the awareness on those issues that make us, as feminists, repeatedly ask the same questions. Building on feminist readings, madness studies and comparative methods, this presentation will reflect on the legacies of nineteenth century tropes and demonstrate why analysing them is central to our understanding of a certain strand of current literary and cultural production.

Trigger warning: This paper will deal with topics such as physical and sexual violence and mental illness.

Biography: Marie Martine is a second year DPhil student at the University of Oxford (Hertford College). Her thesis looks at women writers' responses to naturalist writing in France, Germany, and Norway, and one of her chapters deals with the representations of madness in *fin-de-siècle* European literature.

Title: Towards a History of Feminist Counter-Language: Insights and Legacies from the Long Nineteenth Century

Martina Guzzetti (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Abstract: Nowadays, the Internet and social media are full of a whole new terminology created by the Third-wave feminist movement which includes neologisms like mansplain ("to explain something [...] in a manner thought to reveal a patronising or chauvinistic attitude"; cfr. Oxford English Dictionary), and multi-word expressions like yes means yes (a paradigm shift that looks at



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rape by highlighting the idea that consent should be explicit). However, this does not mean that feminist language did not exist before the advent of social networks and chatrooms; this paper proposes the (partial) results of a long-term project that aims at reconstructing the history of feminist discourse by looking at examples of British feminist writings from the long nineteenth century. The research has considered a corpus of 715 articles taken from four of the most important feminist periodicals of the period between 1894 and 1914, and results have shown that a key feature of their discourse was the semantic renegotiation of words like womanhood, suffragette, and sisterhood. Their specific extended meanings, which were not acknowledged in official reference works, demonstrate how the feminist movement has always adopted what might be labelled as “feminist counter-language”, which has mainly aimed at deconstructing and renegotiating terms defined by patriarchal ideology. The analysis underlines how studying nineteenth-century feminist language can be useful for different reasons: (a) reconstructing its history and creating a historical glossary; (b) filling a niche in linguistic studies of the feminist movement, which have tended not to consider this period; (c) helping in the revision and redefinition of key headwords related to gender in dictionaries, and thus eliminating any form of sexist bias from them; and (d) in an interdisciplinary perspective, contributing to scholarship concerning the history of the feminist movement and to media studies on Victorian and Edwardian periodicals.

Biography: Martina Guzetti is a PhD candidate at Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy). Their project concerns the study of feminist language in British suffrage newspapers from the long nineteenth century, with a focus on gender, militancy, and health discourses. Their research interests revolve around gender in historical news discourse and lexicography.

Panel 2: ‘Cleansing’ the Nineteenth Century

Title: To Conquer the Filth: Street Cleaners and the Public Space in Nineteenth Century French Art

Amit Kestenbaum (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)



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Abstract: Unprecedented developments in the science of public hygiene and awareness of sanitation characterized nineteenth-century Paris. The combined effort of political and medical authorities to maintain the population's health expanded the jurisdiction of hygiene and affected the individual, society, and social organization. In a century that experienced radical demographic changes and recurring epidemics, hygiene was considered the solution to various problems of modern society. Street cleaning and waste removal were among the most prevalent sanitary measures to preserve public health. This claim is particularly evident when examining artistic representations from nineteenth-century French art, which abound in depictions of people cleaning the roads. This paper will discuss the centrality of street cleaners in nineteenth century urban life by analyzing their representation in artistic and literary sources. Focusing on street cleaners will challenge our perceptions of their marginality in French society and their (un)visibility in urban landscapes. Furthermore, it will disclose the historical, medical, and social origins of the hygiene and sanitation discourse nowadays.

In this paper, I will interpret the visual representation of street cleaners as figures who embody two contradictory aspects of modernity. On the one hand, as the city's agents entrusted with public sanitation, they symbolized cleanliness and testified to the capital's general hygiene awareness. On the other hand, their daily work with dirty substances stereotyped them as filthy, contaminated, and dangerous in the eyes of the middle-and-upper classes. Visual representations of street cleaners, which appeared in paintings, journals, encyclopedias, guidebooks, photographs, and caricatures, uncover French society's perspective on cleanliness and dirt. At the same time, it illuminates the population who worked modestly to make Paris "The Capital of the Nineteenth-Century," while revealing the complexity of the urban experience on the streets, a heterogeneous space where different classes coexist.

Biography: Amit Kestenbaum is a Ph. D candidate in the Art History Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His dissertation, written under the supervision of Prof. Gal Ventura, focuses on the cultural and socio-medical history of cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitation in nineteenth century French art.



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Title: "The Strangest Creatures: Hybrid People and Weird Eco-Utopianism in W H Hudson's A Crystal Age"

Charlie Toogood (Newcastle University)

Abstract: In this paper I argue that weird eco-utopianism produced at the fin-de-siècle recognises and responds to the shifting qualities of both humankind and nature in the Anthropocene and dismantles the ontological hierarchy of capitalist modernity by dissolving the boundary between human and nonhuman kind. How can fiction produced in the fin-de-siècle be relevant to our very modern climate emergency? The same industrial and economical forces of capitalist modernity that governed society in the fin-de-siècle - extractivism, consumption and unsustainable growth - inspire climate activism today. As a result, the literature of the period offers a novel perspective on the origins and conditions of our contemporary ecological crisis.

The current epoch of human-driven geological change, the Anthropocene, has destabilised our understanding of human and nonhuman subjectivity and demands that we recognise their mutual interconnectedness, vulnerability and malleability in a shifting, volatile biosphere. Weird utopian fiction, that is untethered by the familiar, thrives in otherness and boldly pushes past nature and society boundaries, provides the perfect material for advancing our critical and conceptual understanding of these challenges.

I contend that William Henry Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887) is a thoroughly weird vision of environmental utopia that radically re-imagines human and nonhumankind, breaks free from the familiar ideology of capitalist modernity and dismantles the epistemological and ontological structures of the Anthropocene. My analysis uncovers an eco-positive reading of the Crystallite's hive-like social structure, hybrid bodily and ideological identity and charts the transformation of the narrator from modern man to Crystallite martyr. In doing so, I show how this often-overlooked text rises to the challenges of the Anthropocene and critically and creatively reimagines humankind in an environmentally positive biosphere.



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Biography: Charlie is a first-year PhD student at Newcastle University. His thesis, titled ‘Green Futures: Environmentalism in the Victorian Utopian Imaginary’, identifies an overlooked tradition of environmental utopianism in the fin-de-siècle and highlights its importance to contemporary Anthropocene debates.

Title: Health Care in the Armies of Nineteenth Century British India: Lessons for the Present Day

David J. Gawkrödger (University of Oxford)

Abstract: Mortality in the European army of British India and, to a lesser extent, in the native army, was high in the first half of the nineteenth century, but declined thereafter. European admissions exceeded those for sepoys, though the causes changed. For the European force, malaria and accidents are a constant over the century, fevers and hepatitis largely fade by 1900, and venereal disease increased after 1885 until 1908. For the sepoy, malaria remained the most prominent cause of admission from 1861, with a notable contribution from accidents throughout, with a decline in diarrhoea and dysentery. The major causes of death for European soldiers in the third quarter of the nineteenth century were cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea and, less so, remittent or enteric fevers. Other prominent causes were hepatitis, heat apoplexy (fatal overheating), pulmonary tuberculosis and heart or circulatory disease. The situation for the native soldiery was different. Diseases in the combined category of ‘fevers’, that would have included malaria, generally were the biggest cause of death. Although gastrointestinal disorders were prominent, pneumonia/ bronchitis and intermittent fever (mostly malaria) caused many deaths. Cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea, and hepatitis had declined as causes of death for European troops, by the end of the nineteenth century. In the last quarter of the century typhoid was prominent, along with hepatic abscess. Pneumonia and bronchitis, heart and circulatory disorders, and accidents and injuries, became more prominent towards the mid-twentieth century. Intermittent fever declined as a cause of death from the three-quarter point of the century but remained more fatal for the native soldier than for the European. Dogma based on theories of disease played a large part in controlling public health



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sanitation and approaches to individual therapies in nineteenth century India, something perhaps reflected in the approach to pandemics in the present day?

Biography: David Gawkröder is a fourth year part-time DPhil candidate at New College, Oxford working on 'Health of the armies in British India, 1850-1940'. In 2016, he completed an MSt in History at Wolfson College, Cambridge, with a dissertation 'The commemorative activities of bishops of Lincoln and of Bath and Wells, 1350-1700'.

Panel 3: Transnational Legacies of Empire

Title: A Re-examination of the Nineteenth-Century Roots of the 'Ulster Problem'

Patrick Duffy (Trinity College, Dublin)

Abstract: The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union and more specifically the Northern Ireland protocol and the later Windsor framework has highlighted the 'Ulster problem' in British and Irish politics for the first time since the Good Friday Agreement. In 1971 on the eve of the Troubles, Gilbert Cahill wrote an article entitled 'Some nineteenth-century roots of the Ulster problem'. Cahill argued that Catholic emancipation began the campaign for 'civil rights' that continued throughout the nineteenth century and which was achieved by Catholics in southern Ireland after independence. 'That struggle still continues in Ulster', he wrote. Ian Paisley was portrayed as the 'latest figure' in a 'long genesis of papaphobia'. This paper moves beyond Cahill's examination of Ulster politics as opposition to Catholicism as a concept and rather focuses on the role of nineteenth-century political developments in forging cultural and religious identities, particularly those built on geography and territory. Building on Robert Sack's work on territoriality, it will show how campaigns for Catholic emancipation and repeal of the union prompted a sense of territoriality among northern Protestants which has similar elements to current Ulster unionist political rhetoric. Recent loyalist threats against Irish government ministers visiting Northern Ireland, for example, had similar tones to Orange opposition to a Catholic Association delegation visiting Ulster in 1828. While it would be incorrect to deterministically suggest, like Cahill, that



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current political controversy is the consequence of the emancipation and repeal campaigns, a closer examination of Ulster politics throughout the nineteenth century can help identify longer term patterns of political controversy in the north of Ireland. It will therefore demonstrate that home rule crisis, as much of the historiography suggests, was not the first time that Ulster Protestants highlighted their separate geographical identity from the rest of Ireland.

Biography: Patrick Duffy is a Ph.D. candidate at Trinity College, Dublin, investigating the emergence of a cultural, religious, and ethnic frontier between Ulster and the rest of Ireland during the early nineteenth century. This is done by studying popular politics and sectarian relations in County Monaghan.

Title: The Female Scot Quebecer in Nineteenth-Century Lower Canada: The Lasting Influence of the Dalhousies and Campbells on Quebec Science/Society

Kimberly M. Glassman (Queen Mary University of London)

Abstract: From across the Atlantic, Scottish women living in early nineteenth-century Quebec botanized for both leisure and science. Today, the plants they collected can be found in the world's most famous botanic gardens. This presentation will look at how a predominantly Scottish network of women living in the small town of Sillery, Québec in the 1820s made botanical history by helping William Jackson Hooker, the first Director of Kew Gardens, to publish his *Flora Boreali-Americana*, or the botany of the northern parts of British America (1829-1840). In my presentation, I uncover the networks of sociability – the balls, dinners, and societies – that interconnected a complex network of English, Scottish, and French-Canadian members of Quebec's elite. To unpack the role Scots played both as wealthy merchants and colonial officers, I will compare the history and activities of two predominant Scottish families in Quebec's intellectual scene: the Campbells and the Dalhousies. The women of these families, most notably Mrs Harriet Sheppard (née Campbell) and Lady Dalhousie, situated themselves as indispensable assets to the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, managed noteworthy garden-estates, and corresponded with leading botanist of the time from John Torrey and Asa Gray in America to William Hooker in



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Glasgow. I will introduce you to Harriet, an avid mycologist and ornithologist, her daughter Charlotte, her sister-in-law Josette, and to Lady Dalhousie, an avid botanical collector, her political contacts in the Hudson's Bay Company, her friends, such as botaniser Anne Mary Perceval, amongst countless others who helped shape the intellectual and sociable life in Quebec. Through the lives of these women, we gain insight into how United Empire Loyalist Scots held a unique position as friends of the British Empire who settled roots, married into French-Canadian families, and established lasting legacies that continue to affect the decolonial global landscape of Quebec today.

Biography: Kim is a PhD student at QMUL x Kew's PhD Humanities Cohort. She is the PGR Rep for the Centre for the Study of the Nineteenth Century and its Legacies, and Conference organiser for the British Association for American Studies. Kim has recently published in *The Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* journal.

Title: Who was King Philip IV? — A Comparative Study of Transcultural Soundscapes in Shanghai Concession through Musical Iconography in the late 19th Century

Teng Chen (University of Southampton)

Abstract: *Dianshizhai Pictorial* was the earliest pictorial in China and was published in Shanghai for 14 years (1884-1898) in the Late Qing dynasty, becoming an influential publication at the time. This paper reconstructs a microcosm of the cross-cultural soundscape in the Shanghai Concession during the late 19th century through the in-depth analysis of a news pictorial about a pipa recital held in Moore Memorial Church in 1890, then delves into the musical ecology of Shanghai in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal periods.

A comparison is drawn with Michel Foucault's (1994) analysis of Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*, which represented the encapsulation of an episteme - an entire system of knowledge/power. Juxtaposing the pictorial from *Dianshizhai* against *Las Meninas*, it is clear that there are corresponding metaphorical relationships between the subjects of the two artworks. Foucault points out that in *Las Meninas*, the domination of the real sovereign (King Philip IV)



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results in the subject (the little Infanta) being suppressed. Similarly, in *Dianshizhai*, the symbol of colonial power weakens the voice of Chinese music, which is highlighted by the general dismissal of Chinese music's place in global music history by influential European music scholars such as Charles Burney, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, and Adolf Bernhard Marx in the 18th and 19th century (Irvine, 2020).

In this paper, I interrogate this still-relevant narrative, revealing how the colonists, under the rules of the concession, had passed laws prohibiting Chinese commoners from accessing Western music while disparaging Chinese music as primitive and historically irrelevant, and how this rhetoric limited the auditory experience and freedom of the European audience.

Biography: Teng Chen is a PhD music researcher at the University of Southampton. Her PhD thesis is *Hearing the Twilight of an Empire: A Soundscape Study of Dianshizhai Pictorial and Late 19th Century Sino-Western Cultural Exchanges, 1884-1898*. She was awarded a master's degree in music at King's College London in 2020.

Title: Sheffield and Atlantic Slavery in the Long Nineteenth Century: Charting the Economy, Society and Culture of a British Industrial City

Tobias Gardner (University of Sheffield)

Abstract: The long-nineteenth-century offers an excellent periodisation to examine the development of British industrial cities. Through an interdisciplinary case study of nineteenth-century Sheffield, this paper demonstrates how Britain's relationship to Atlantic slavery dramatically influenced metropolitan economy, society, and culture throughout this century. It reveals connections between Sheffield's industrial sectors and global systems of bondage, highlighting how Sheffield manufacturers produced tools and cutlery for plantation economies across the Americas and long after British abolition in 1838. From mass produced and uninspiring tools of enslavement, such as plantation hoes, to Bowie Knives collected by US enslavers engraved with the slogan 'death to abolition', Sheffield's material connection to slavery was visceral and varied. From this, Sheffield's links to Britain's burgeoning empire are then shown to have shaped



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social movements in the city. As moral debates over slavery clashed with demands for domestic reform and the ‘condition-of-England’ question, ideas of human difference in terms of race, gender, class and nation became increasingly important to socio-political utterances. Philanthropic middle-class reformers lamented how Britain’s oppressed classes such as chimney sweeps, or victims of the New Poor Law had become ‘home-slaves.’ Working-class radicals developed this slavery trope into a demand for sweeping political change as the century progressed. Alongside this, representations of slavery and empire became increasingly significant to local cultural forms such as literature, arts and theatre. For Sheffield poets, comparisons to Atlantic slavery became a central way to inject pathos in their work. Conversely, racist minstrel shows from the mid-century found a receptive audience in Sheffield. Therefore, by returning to Sheffield in the nineteenth-century we can better understand the local origins of contemporary issues such as global systems of oppression and discriminatory ideas of human difference. Studying this through multiple disciplines and raising public engagement with this past may aid in deconstructing such harmful legacies.

Biography: I am a historian from, and of, the city of Sheffield. My undergraduate and masters research examined the interactions between antislavery and other radical movements in nineteenth-century Sheffield. Since then, I have commenced a collaborative public-focused PhD with the city archives on Sheffield’s commercial and socio-political relationship to Atlantic slavery.

Keynote

Title: Reexamining Science, Religion, and, Race through African Collections: British Museums and Colonial Erasure in the Long 19th Century

Nathan Bossoh (Science Museum)

Abstract: In November 2022 the Wellcome Collection, London, took the executive decision to close its Medicine Man exhibition which had been open to the public since 2007. The closure was followed with a statement explaining that Wellcome’s decision had been based on the desire to



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move away from an exhibition that focused on a “single person, Henry Wellcome”. This move was met with highly polarised responses – praise from one end of the political and cultural spectrum whilst scathing criticism from the other. The closure of Medicine Man highlights an ongoing issue within British museums today - an issue which has its roots in the long nineteenth century. This period saw a dramatic growth in British museum establishments which paralleled the rise of global imperial power, the hardening of scientific racism, and the decline of traditional Christian beliefs. Yet only in recent years have British museums begun to seriously address their racial and colonial legacies. In particular African materials - often labelled as ‘African collections’ - have been the subject of significant discussion and debate within the museum sector. How many African materials do British museums hold? What is their provenance and cultural significance? What is the future of these materials? Over the past few months my own training in history has been applied towards working on the Science Museum’s ‘Wellcome’ African collections where I am engaging with these historical legacies as well as future development of the collections. This talk will therefore draw on my current experience as a museum-engaged historian in order to explore some key connecting threads between Britain in the long nineteenth century and museum collections today. Centrally I ask, *what can museum collections reveal about the entanglements between science, race, and religion in past and present?*

Biography: Nathan Bossoh is Research Curator of the African Collections at the Science Museum London where he is helping the Museum to better understand the provenance, significance, and future development of the over 5000 'Wellcome' African materials in their possession. He earned his PhD in History of Science from the Science and Technology Studies Department at UCL in 2022 and was recently accepted as an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department. Nathan has published on the history of British science, technology, and religion, and his current areas of research surround the intersections of science, medicine, museums, and African Studies.