



**SCIENCE**  
*at the*  
**PUB**

History of Science, Medicine, and Technology

Postgraduate Conference

11&12 June 2026

Maison Française d'Oxford

FACULTY OF  
**HISTORY**



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**Front cover:**

Designed by Kelly Pu

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## **Science at the pub: Whose Science? Whose History?**

From the dissecting rooms of antebellum Virginia to the mathematical institutes of Weimar Germany, from the missionary hospitals of colonial Kashmir to the feminist print networks of 1970s Britain, this conference asks how knowledge is made, who it serves, and whose bodies, voices, and labours it renders invisible. Across six panels, presenters examine the sciences, technologies, and medical practices that have shaped, and been shaped by power. For example, the anatomical theatre as a site of racial and class exploitation; the atomic bomb as a collective moral crisis obscured by the myth of individual genius; the archive as a place where disability, queerness, and enslaved labour are simultaneously documented and erased. Spanning four centuries and five continents, the papers gathered here refuse to treat science, technology, and medicine as neutral or universal. Instead, they recover the negotiations, resistances, and exclusions through which knowledge has always been produced, from the mānuka tree asserting its own agency in colonial New Zealand, to the nurses whose care sustained the 1918 influenza response yet vanished from the historical record, to the images that did not merely illustrate scientific racism but constituted it. This is a conference about authority: who holds it, how it is legitimized, and what is lost when we mistake the stories power tells about itself for history.

# Science at the pub: Whose science? Whose history?

HSMT Postgraduate Conference 2026  
11 & 12 June  
Lecture Theatre, Maison Française d'Oxford

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## Thursday, 11 June

09:00-09:30      **Registration**

09:30-09:40      **Opening Remarks: Professor Rob Iliffe, Professor of the History of Science**

09:40-10:40      **Panel 1: “The façade” – Race, representation, and the epistemic work of science**

**Toussaint J Miller**, The evidence of the eye: visual representation and the production of scientific racism

**Isobel Oliver**, Dr James Hunt and the law of race: reassessing the “Anthropological Controversy” (1863-1870)

**Thomas Glasman**, Antisemitism, mathematics and a discourse of intuition in German mathematics, 1890-1936

*Chair: Kelly Pu*

10:40-11:10      **Morning Break**

11:10-12:30      **Panel 2: “Behind the bar” – Surveilling bodies: law, institutions, and care**

**Rose Flanigan**, Seizure, surveillance, and care in early Americas: domestic medical practice in the case of Patsy Custis

**Chloe Kinderman**, Encountering the dissecting room: the social dimensions of anatomical education in nineteenth-century Virginia

**Murphy King**, Surveilling the veil: marital bans, disability, and crippling the archive in 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States

**Gina Maria Heggstad Vie**, “Good nursing”: care and treatments by nurses during the Influenza Pandemic 1918

*Chair: Asma Shakeel*

12:30-13:30      **Lunch**

13:30-14:50      **Panel 3: “The wine cellar” – Seeing the unseen: science, spirits, and circulation**

**Luke Wilkes**, Newton “for ladies”: female audiences for popular science in the early eighteenth century

**Ella Castanier**, Queer knowledge in transit: lesbian self-insemination & feminist print media as a technology of assisted reproduction

**Kelly Pu**, Medium or multiple personality? Spiritualism, psychical research, and medical authority in interwar Britain

**Mei Ling McDougall**, Victorian interactions with medieval madness

*Chair: Chloe Kinderman*

14:50-15:20      **Afternoon Break**

15:20-16:40 **Panel 4: “The pint” – A matter of expertise: material practice and scientific authority**  
**Matthew Bentley**, Safer milk: disease and dairy products in the UK, 1900-1950  
**Jeremy Gray**, Minting and assaying as mathematical practice: the history of the Mint, the material culture of assaying, and the Financial Revolution  
**Mikayla Apicella**, Myths, morals and the Manhattan Project: responsibility, ethical choice and innovation in the Atomic Age  
**Sam Johnson**, Looking back on *Foresight*: Elizabethan naval architecture, organization, and operations viewed through the construction and career of a notable sailing warship

*Chair: Luke Wilkes*

16:40-16:50 **Closing Remarks: Dr Alex Aylward, Departmental Lecturer in the History of Science**

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## Friday, 12 June

09:30-09:40 **Opening Remarks: Professor Erica Charters, Professor of the Global History of Medicine**

09:40-11:00 **Panel 5: “The beer garden” – Root causes: medicine, environment, and authority in colonial worlds**

**Asma Shakeel**, Medicine, the Maharaja, and the missionaries: public health and state formation in Kashmir, 1876-1920

**Marielle Masolo**, A Nguza on the hill: the making of Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo, 1921-1951

**Ruka Hussain**, George Catlin’s natural history: environmental knowledge and romantic science in the Atlantic world

**Brittany Dick**, Kua Tako Te Mānuka (the mānuka has been laid down): challenges to agency and the identity of a tree

*Chair: Ella Castanier*

11:00-11:30 **Morning Break**

11:30-12:30 **Panel 6: “Pub talk” – Constructed science: expertise, knowledge production, and shaping reality**

**Aoife Kearins**, “Radiation is an abstract term”: exploring the creation of a language of expertise in 19<sup>th</sup>-century mathematical physics

**Victoria Chung**, The reception of Mendeleev’s periodic system and atomism in Oxford chemistry

**Marcel Alain Shelton**, Time, space, and the construction of scientific genius, 1727-1800

*Chair: Murphy King*

12:30-12:40 **Closing Remarks: Dr Sloan Mahone, Associate Professor of the History of Medicine**

**Toussaint J Miller**

MSc Candidate

*Reuben College*

**Panel 1**

**The evidence of the eye: visual representation and the production of scientific racism**

Historians have long documented the pseudoscientific claims of racial hierarchy that saturated modern medicine from the 18th century onward. We know the names—Morton, Agassiz, Cuvier, Galton. We're familiar with the institutions. We recognize the damage. But the tendency in existing scholarship has been to treat the images produced by these men as secondary illustrations—as visual accompaniments to ideas that originated and circulated elsewhere, namely in text and institutional ideology. This dissertation argues the opposite. It seeks to suggest that images were not secondary to the argument, but rather the foundation of the argument. That visual representation was the primary epistemic instrument through which racial hierarchy was converted from cultural prejudice into verifiable, institutionally credible scientific fact. That the image did not reflect race science, but produced it. This dissertation is not a catalogue of racist images nor is it simply an account of the history of pseudoscience. It is, however, an argument about how images produce knowledge and the specific epistemic work that visual representation performs that text alone cannot do.

**Isobel Oliver**  
DPhil Candidate  
*Magdalen College*

**Panel 1**

**Dr James Hunt and the law of race: reassessing the “Anthropological Controversy” (1863-1870)**

In 1863, Dr James Hunt resigned from the Ethnological Society of London to found the rival Anthropological Society of London, precipitating a near decade-long institutional and intellectual divide between the two bodies over the scope and character of the mid-Victorian ‘Science of Man’. In contradiction to both contemporary and historiographical characterisations, the periodical record reveals that the ‘anthropologicals’ neither advocated for a particular theory of human origins, nor opposed Darwin’s theory as it was set out in *Origin*, rejecting only the universalist premises they saw as underlying its early application to man. The true disagreement was over the present nature and extent of racial difference. While within both the Prichardian and Darwinian ethnological traditions races were understood as differing in degree along a common developmental scale, the anthropology derived from Robert Knox’s transcendental anatomy saw races as differing in kind. In organising human varieties within a civilisational hierarchy that supposed all peoples capable of ‘improvement’ towards a European standard, the ethnological position served to justify the imperial project. By contrast, and surprisingly, the anthropologicals’ racial essentialism at times proceeded through a form of cultural relativism from which missionary enterprise and imperial rule could be, and were, denounced.

**Thomas Glasman**

DPhil Candidate

*University College*

**Panel 1**

**Antisemitism, mathematics and a discourse of intuition in German mathematics, 1890-1936**

The German Academic community, between the years 1921-28, was split by the 'Foundational Crisis of Mathematics', which pitted Intuitionistic mathematicians, who opposed the new formal and abstract methods of logic and set theory, against the 'Formalists', who did. This paper explores the role that the concept of Anschauung played within this debate, and its relationship with contemporary Romantic discussions of Germanic national decline. Exploring on the one hand how this relates to pre-Weimar discourses—mathematical and general—of a 'Sylvanic' and Germanic, versus a Jewish and 'Saharic' mode of thinking, this paper on the one hand will situate the Formal/Intuitive split as a product of late-Imperial German intellectual culture, while on the other hand contextualising the formalisation of a mathematical-racial typology in 1936, with the founding of the state-published journal, *Deutsche Mathematik*.

**Rose Flanigan**  
MSc Candidate  
*St Cross College*

**Panel 2**

**Seizure, surveillance, and care in early Americas: domestic medical practice in the case of Patsy Custis**

Martha “Patsy” Parke Custis (1756–1773) was a young girl with epilepsy who grew up in an emerging empire at the threshold of institutionalization. Documentation of her life survives as a rare case of domestic care. Her stepfather George Washington’s marginal diary entries and a small body of correspondence record her seizures not simply as clinical evidence but as part of a system of domestic observation in which events were tracked, repeated, and rendered meaningful over time. While Patsy’s seizures are recorded, her experience remains obscured, appearing only through mediated and authoritative accounts. Such absences emerge not as gaps in the historical record but as products of structural power. The labor that sustained her care, likely performed by people who were enslaved, remains largely unrecorded, further shaping what can be known. Situated alongside the emergence of institutional responses to mental difference in colonial Virginia, these early understandings of epilepsy, both domestically and institutionally, appear as products of surveillance and care. The archive thus becomes a site where disability and labor are simultaneously made visible and erased.

**Chloe Kinderman**

MPhil Candidate

*Hertford College*

**Panel 2**

**Encountering the dissecting room: the social dimensions of anatomical education in nineteenth-century Virginia**

This dissertation will explore nineteenth century anatomical education in Virginia at the University of Virginia as well as the Medical Department of Hampden Sydney College in Richmond as viewed through encounters between medical students, the custodians and caretakers of dissecting spaces, and the broader Charlottesville and Richmond communities. Before legislative changes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, grave robbing was a common practice in Virginia to furnish cadavers for dissection by medical students. At a time when the American medical field was undergoing a professionalizing process, dissection served as a defining experience that granted authority and expertise to the physician and consolidated power in the university, but because of the illegal and taboo nature of this practice, efforts to secure cadavers exploited vulnerable populations, led to conflict between universities and communities, and contributed to local and regional mythologies. Building on trends within the historiography of institutions as well as work on the body as a social force within American history, I argue that the anatomical theater served as a liminal space where larger social processes were both subverted and entrenched and that these dynamics were transmitted through community narratives over time, and I plan to explore these themes within Virginia's early medical schools through the accounts of medical students, faculty and staff, and others within the Charlottesville and Richmond communities.

**Murphy King**  
MSc Candidate  
*Linacre College*

**Panel 2**

**Surveilling the veil: marital bans, disability, and crippling the archive in 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States**

Scholars have consistently understood the 1895-96 statutes of Connecticut to be the first promulgation of marital bans targeting disabled people. Consequently, disabled bodies have been excluded from mainstream literature on marriage, movements, and the body politic of the 19th Century. This is misleading and false—erasing a century of statutory ableism and disabled resistance. As marriage transitioned from an economic and social institution of English common law and community tradition to one of love and individualism, anti-miscegenation, anti-sodomy, and anti-disability marriage laws increasingly proliferated. Scholarship has engaged with the coaxial development of anti-sodomy and anti-miscegenation laws, but has not applied this to anti-disability statutes. Eugenics scholarship has not centered disabled bodies prior to the emergence of sterilization laws. Marital bans function differently from pre-marital blood tests, sterilization, and other state surveillance technologies targeting the female body in temporality, geography, pace, enforcement, and method. I will demonstrate the danger of this historical assumption and oversight, the resulting sidelining of disabled people, queer people, and women in scholarship, and the impact on contemporary Disability Justice proponents and their goals. I will call for disabled visions and revisions to ablenationalism in the archive.

**Gina Maria Heggstad Vie**

MSc Candidate

*Green Templeton College*

**Panel 2**

**“Good nursing”: care and treatments by nurses during the Influenza pandemic 1918**

The dominant focus of The Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 by most historians has been on the economic, political and intellectual processes. This resulted in the role of the nurse being neglected in the British historical literature on the pandemic. By using autobiographies, oral histories and nursing records does this project aim to investigate the role nurses played to make it possible to reconstruct a comprehensive history of the 1918 ‘Spanish’ flu beyond the ‘Good Nursing’ narrative.

**Luke Wilkes**

MSc Candidate

*Linacre College*

**Panel 3**

**Newton “for Ladies”: female audiences for popular science in the early eighteenth century (Working Title)**

Many early works of popular science were based on explaining Newtonian philosophy to a non-specialist audience, often explicitly “for Women” or “for young Gentlemen and Ladies.” This essay will ask how genre and literary tropes were used to specifically target female audiences, focussing on Francesco Algarotti’s 1737 *Il Newtonianismo per la dame* (“Newtonianism for Ladies”). Algarotti’s text, dedicated to Fontenelle, is framed as a dialogue where an unnamed chevalier walks the Marchesa di E. through the history of optics, appealing to her imaginative or romantic sensibilities in order to convert her to a true Newtonian. Despite Algarotti’s clear references to female Newtonians like Laura Bassi and Émilie du Châtelet, he viewed imagination as a trait of ‘silly women and enthusiasts’ who oppose Newton, leading some to speculate that his motive was to promote Newtonianism “from below”. The effect of translation will also be considered by looking at the Bluestocking Elizabeth Carter’s celebrated 1739 translation “Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy Explain’d for the Use of the Ladies”.

**Ella Castanier**  
MSc Candidate  
*St Cross College*

**Panel 3**

**Queer knowledge in transit: lesbian self-insemination & feminist print media as a technology of assisted reproduction**

This paper looks at lesbian self-insemination during the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, the Women's Liberation Movement created print media that allowed information on assisted reproduction to travel among lesbian feminist communities in the United States and Britain. The advent of the women's health movement had primed women to take an interest in their own health and to be sceptical of medical clinics, creating the perfect landscape for at-home self-insemination. This paper specifically looks at the feminist media networks by which knowledge traveled and the various considerations for lesbians hoping to get pregnant.

**Kelly Pu**

MSc Candidate  
*St Anne's College*

**Panel 3**

**Medium or multiple personality? Spiritualism, psychical research, and medical authority in interwar Britain**

While historiography has often focused on the Victorian period as the height of spiritualism in Britain, the end of the First World War also saw a rise in the belief that the spirits of the dead could communicate with the living across both elite and popular society. Through an analysis of scientific, spiritualist and popular publications, this study examines how medical practitioners in interwar Britain engaged with spiritualism. In some cases, they sought to explain spiritualist phenomena in pathologizing medical terms such as hallucinations or dissociation and challenge claims of faith healing to assert medical authority. Other times, rather than dismissing spiritualism outright, medical practitioners argued that it warranted rigorous scientific investigation. They invoked their scientific rationality and professional authority to selectively legitimize certain phenomena while rejecting others as fraud, extending their influence beyond medicine. In doing so, medical practitioners intervened in popular understanding of spiritualism in interwar Britain.

**Mei Ling McDougall**

MSc Candidate

*Kellogg College*

**Panel 3**

**Victorian interactions with medieval madness**

This dissertation examines how Victorian psychiatry constructed a “medieval” past of superstition and irrationality in order to define itself as a modern scientific discipline, while continuing to grapple with the same underlying problem: how to explain mental illness without observable cause. Focusing on the concept of “unseen agency,” it explores medieval and Victorian approaches to mental disorder, particularly in relation to hallucination, trance, and possession. While medieval frameworks attributed such phenomena to supernatural divine or demonic influence, Victorian psychiatry reinterpreted them through “modern”, “natural”, and “scientific” explanations such as nervous disorder, degeneration, and unconscious processes. These explanations, however, remained fundamentally inferential, relying on causes that could not be empirically verified in the same way as a physical disease. Other branches of the mental sciences, such as Victorian spiritualism and psychical research, also act as sites where questions of invisible supernatural causation re-emerged explicitly, challenging the authority of professionalized psychiatry by reasserting medieval epistemologies.

**Matthew Bentley**

MSc Candidate

*St Hugh's College*

**Panel 4**

**Safer milk: disease and dairy Products in the UK, 1900-1950**

Though a central part of the western diet, cow's milk, and the products derived from it, posed a significant public health risk in early 20th century Britain. Diseases such as Bovine TB, Scarlet fever, Diphtheria, and Brucellosis posed a constant yet unavoidable risk to consumers, with infants being affected disproportionately. Methods such as the pasteurisation of milk and tuberculin testing of cattle offered a route towards disease-free milk, yet doubts cast by individuals and groups within the medical and scientific community, along with several other factors, meant that changes occurred slowly and inconsistently. As a result, disease rates remained high into the 1930s and beyond, before plummeting in the years around the second world war. This study aims to examine the factors that caused the British dairy industry to adopt measures that resulted in safer milk. To achieve this, it will examine the importance of campaign groups, new technology, consumer demand, and piecemeal government intervention, looking at how these drivers of change led to a reduction in illnesses related to dairy products by the time of the second world war. Assessing these influences will give an insight into the changing nature of British society in the early 20th century, with the dairy industry acting as a window through which the development of modern agriculture, consumerism, and government intervention can be viewed.

**Jeremy Gray**  
DPhil Candidate  
*Jesus College*

**Panel 4**

**Minting and assaying as mathematical practice: the history of the mint, the material culture of assaying, and the Financial Revolution**

One of the most important aims in the assaying of bullion and the minting of coins was establishing public trust in the accuracy and precision of the resulting coinage. Quantification was of crucial importance to this trust, and the careful administration of the minting and assaying processes attempted to construct money as a universal, quantitative measure of economic value. Though these had long been essential qualities of the Mint's output, they achieved renewed importance as the country's currency issues, caused by decades of coin clipping and counterfeiting, reached a crisis in the 1690s. Debates about how to address the coin shortage took place within broader discussions about the nature of money and the origin of value that were reinvigorated by the Financial Revolution, when a variety of new credit institutions and instruments developed. When viewed as mathematical practice, minting and assaying are revealed to be more clearly connected to the numerical reasoning behind abstract monetary policy. Through mathematical computations, the abilities of skilled, embodied, and institutionally-located practitioners appear to become universal, and with the precision and accuracy of coins so imparted, could affect the course of the nation's economy.

**Mikayla Apicella**

MSc Candidate

*Reuben College*

**Panel 4**

**Myths, morals and the Manhattan Project: responsibility, ethical choice and innovation in the atomic age**

This research proposes a reassessment of the Manhattan Project by challenging the dominant “Great Man” narrative that centers J. Robert Oppenheimer as the primary moral and intellectual authority of the atomic bomb development. Popular culture, particularly recent film portrayals, has reinforced this individualized perspective, obscuring the diverse experiences and ethical positions of the wider scientific community. By shifting focus away from Oppenheimer, this project seeks to reconstruct a broader and more representative account of scientific responsibility during the Manhattan Project. It examines a cohort of 20–25 lesser-known scientists across multiple project sites, including Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and Hanford, to investigate their roles, institutional positions, levels of knowledge, and moral attitudes toward the bomb’s development and use. Methodologically, the study draws on archival sources such as recorded interviews, personal diaries, and meeting minutes to access first-hand accounts of scientific decision-making.

These materials allow for a comparative analysis of how individuals understood their work, the extent to which secrecy and military oversight shaped their awareness, and whether ethical resistance emerged within the scientific community. The project ultimately aims to address key questions: To what extent did scientists grasp the implications of their work? Were there meaningful attempts to oppose the bomb’s use, and if so, why did they fail? By foregrounding collective experience over individual narrative, this research contributes to historiographical debates about responsibility in science. Understanding how ethical frameworks operated within the Manhattan Project offers critical insight into contemporary technological development, where rapid innovation can outpace systems of moral accountability.

**Sam Johnson**  
DPhil Candidate  
Wadham College

**Panel 4**

**Looking back on *Foresight*: Elizabethan naval architecture, organization, and operations viewed through the construction and career of a notable sailing warship**

In September 1570, the sleek, 130-foot hull of the new warship *Foresight* floated for the first time in the Thames. With an eventful career of thirty-four years still ahead of the relatively small vessel, the methods employed by Master Shipwright Matthew Baker for her design and construction had already rendered apt the choice of name.

In my ongoing research into sixteenth and seventeenth century English ship design, I was pleasantly surprised to find how well the construction of *Foresight* illustrated key developments in a transitional period of shipbuilding, with details appearing in builder's manuscripts providing the opportunity to recreate a functional set of plans. In *Foresight*'s design emerges a distinct first "phase" in the development of a sophisticated school of shipbuilding which would evolve and persist in England for over a century afterwards, with fundamental concepts pertaining to planning the complex shape of a vessel's hull on a paper medium being visibly trialed and iterated upon. These problems captured the attention of both working shipwrights, and prominent contemporary mathematical practitioners who interacted with them, such as John Wells and Thomas Harriott.

*Foresight* is equally illustrative through noteworthy participation in many episodes throughout the Anglo-Spanish Wars. These events came to define Elizabethan maritime endeavours via their - often equally dramatic - success and failures. Therefore, I will be experimenting with a "biographical" approach to *Foresight*, showing how the myriad of details in her design, construction, career, and those of the people who lived, worked, and fought on board bridge across numerous and interrelated facets of the sixteenth-century Navy, and can be used as a valuable lens through which to enliven them.

**Asma Shakeel**

MSc Candidate

*Exeter College*

**Panel 5**

**Medicine, the Maharaja, and the missionaries: public health and state formation in Kashmir, 1876-1920**

The famine of 1876–79 devastated Kashmir’s population and exposed the administrative weaknesses of the Dogra state, particularly its inability to provide effective relief, public health measures, and welfare. The crisis intensified British criticism of the 1846 transfer of Kashmir to the Dogra rulers of Jammu and increased colonial scrutiny over princely governance. In response, Maharaja Pratap Singh initiated reforms aimed at administrative modernisation and restoring British confidence in the state. This thesis argues that medical modernisation became a crucial site through which Dogra state formation was renegotiated in late nineteenth-century Kashmir. The growing presence of medical missionaries—particularly the Church Missionary Society (CMS)—both challenged the legitimacy of Dogra authority and facilitated the expansion of modern medical infrastructure, hospitals, and hygienic practices. By examining the works of CMS missionary-surgeons like Arthur Neve, the thesis demonstrates how Western medicine functioned not only as a humanitarian enterprise but also as a political and cultural instrument that reshaped relations between the Dogra state, colonial officials, and Kashmiri society. In doing so, the thesis shows that the emergence of public health institutions in Kashmir, as elsewhere, was deeply connected to broader processes of state formation and colonial influence. Medical modernity in this setting was therefore not simply imported from outside; it emerged through contestation among missionaries, colonial officials, and the Dogra state itself.

**Marielle Masolo**

DPhil Candidate

*St Antony's College*

**Panel 5**

**A Nguza on the hill: the making of Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo, 1921-1951**

In April 1921, the town of Nkamba, nestled west of Leopoldville, was alive. A fellow Mukongo healing like that of Jesus Christ, as taught in mission schools, spread like bushfire throughout the Congo regions and beyond, beckoning visitors to flood to the city and witness firsthand a ngunza (prophet) at work. Simon Kimbangu declared and demonstrated an ability to heal all maladies affecting his people, attributing this newfound capability to an authority bestowed upon him by God. He simultaneously healed the sick by modelling the works of Jesus and raised the dead using spirit possession coupled with trembling, drawing from Bakongo traditional beliefs. However, his newfound success was short-lived. Awakening the attention of the Belgian administration, Kimbangu was accused of insurrection and arrested in September, leading to a final sentencing of life imprisonment in October 1921. Confined to solitary imprisonment until his death in October 1951, and with thousands of his followers either jailed or exiled, the six-month healing ministry appeared to be extinguished.

By expanding on the rise and reception of the ngunza, this paper seeks to showcase how sickness and Kimbangu operated in tandem—exposing the vulnerabilities of the colony, its agents, and missionaries who read threats into his healing acts.

**Ruka Hussain**

DPhil Candidate

*Merton College*

**Panel 5**

**George Catlin's natural history: environmental knowledge and romantic science in the Atlantic world**

This paper reframes George Catlin (1796–1872) as a practitioner of Romantic and Victorian natural history whose paintings, writings, lectures, and travelling exhibitions functioned as sites of environmental knowledge-making in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. Rather than treating Catlin as marginal to scientific culture or merely illustrative of it, the paper argues that his work operated within shared (though contested) epistemological frameworks associated with Romantic natural philosophy, Humboldtian science, and transatlantic cultures of popular natural history, while also inflected with European and American politics.

Focusing on Catlin's travelling "Indian Gallery," an assemblage of more than 600 paintings, artefacts, performances, and narrative texts exhibited across the United States and Europe, the paper examines how environmental knowledge was produced through the interaction of visual, textual, and exhibitionary forms. Catlin represented North America not as a static wilderness but as a dynamic socio-ecological system shaped by interconnections between Indigenous societies, animal life, geology, climate, and colonial expansion. His work drew upon scientific sensibilities that positioned imagination, affect, sympathy, and immersive experience as legitimate epistemic tools for apprehending nature and historical change. Moreover, as illustrated through press responses, the paper argues that knowledge emerged dialogically through acts of spectatorship and interpretation, revealing unstable boundaries between science, art, entertainment, and commerce in nineteenth-century natural history.

**Brittany Dick**

MSc Candidate

*Magdalen College*

**Panel 5**

**Kua Takoto Te Mānuka (the mānuka has been laid down): challenges to agency and the identity of a tree**

The mānuka tree, native to New Zealand, is known for the medical benefits of its famous honey. This recent history obscures the longer historical relationship between humans and the tree, including the more-than-human beings asserting themselves in this ecological context. As the mānuka shifted in status between medicinal plant and weed, Indigenous Māori, farmers, conservationists and the state all projected concerns and desires onto this singular tree, shaping their actions in transforming the landscape. This paper argues that while mānuka has functioned as a surfacing site for tensions on the use and appearance of New Zealand's landscape, the agency of non-human actors such as mānuka, blight, and fungus ultimately determined the form and texture of the present environment.

**Aoife Kearins**

DPhil Candidate

*Wadham College*

**Panel 6**

**“Radiation is an abstract term”: exploring the creation of a language of expertise in 19<sup>th</sup>-century mathematical physics**

In the latter half of the 19th century, scientific writing became increasingly specialised and consolidated. This language was shaped by, and perpetuated through, key institutions of authority in the Victorian scientific community such as university departments and laboratories, as well as organisations of scientific legitimacy such as the Royal Society. I argue that during this time period, scientific language became one of the ways science garnered increased authority. In this talk, I will make this argument using a case study of the use of the word ‘radiation’ in mathematical physics publications of the latter half of the 19th century, looking at how referee reports, correspondence networks, and the individual outlook of Victorian scientific gatekeepers influenced how this term was used and what it came to mean.

**Victoria Chung**

MSc Candidate

*Exeter College*

**Panel 6**

**The reception of Mendeleev's periodic system and atomism in Oxford chemistry**

(WIP) This project examines the reception and consolidation of Mendeleev's periodic system and atomism within Oxford chemistry between 1880 and 1915. Mendeleev's arrangement of the elements by atomic weight and recurring chemical properties was not the first scheme of its kind, but it was distinctive for its flexibility and predictive power, including the correction of atomic weights and the anticipation of undiscovered elements. Yet its authority was not immediately secure. In the late nineteenth century, atomism remained philosophically contested: atoms functioned as useful explanatory tools, but their status as real physical entities was still debated, and even Mendeleev expressed caution about their ontological certainty. By the 1880s, the periodic system was influential but not fully consolidated. Its authority depended not only on predictive successes, such as the discovery of gallium, but on its integration into chemical practice. Oxford provides a revealing microhistorical setting for this process, given its relatively late development compared to German centres of chemistry. I argue that the authority of the periodic system in Britain was secured not simply by prediction, but through its gradual incorporation into institutional teaching and practice. Reception, in this sense, was a process of disciplinary consolidation, through which periodic classification and atomism became constitutive principles of chemical knowledge.

**Marcel Alain Shelton**

DPhil Candidate

*Wolfson College*

**Panel 6**

**Time, space, and the construction of scientific genius, 1727-1800**

Over the course of the eighteenth century the idea of genius underwent a radical change from something one had to something one was; from something that referred to a collective of people to something referring to a singular individual with outstanding intellectual power; from the inspiration of the poet to the ratiocination of the natural philosopher. Adding to this host of paradoxes, it was both situated in space—the “genius loci,” the “genius of Britain”—while simultaneously suggesting that “the mind is its own place”, unanchored from historical and culturally contingent forces. This paper will explore how temporalities and geographies—both real and imaginary—were foundational in the conceptualisation of, and the fabrication of monuments to, scientific genius. Using these lenses to “read” material cultural representations of natural philosophers in the cultivated “wilderness” of English landscape gardens, imaginary architecture, veduta, busts, portraits, and engravings alongside popular poems, histories, sermons, and treatises on aesthetics, reveals the political, religious, and economic strategies that underlay the transformation of the term. Furthermore, I suggest that these strategies constructed genius through juxtaposition with, and classifications of, “ancients” and “Oriental” others and thus was foundational in how eighteenth-century Europeans conceptualised themselves and their place in the world.

### PARTICIPANTS

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