centre for nineteenth-century studies

Institutions in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond

Wednesday, 7 May 2025, Durham University, United Kingdom
TLC101, Teaching and Learning Centre

Program

10:30 Arrival/Registration

11:00 Art and the Working Class (Chair: Jasmine Margalit)

James Inkster (Newcastle), "Trollope's Alms-house. Or, Dickens's Bioethics of Survival."

Alexander King (Leeds), "An Encyclopaedia for the Working Class? Politics, Cost and Audience in the 19th Century Publishing Industry."

Isabel Thomas (Newcastle), "Music in Working Men's Clubs and Institutes as Institutionalisation of Working-Class Life."

12:00 Lunch (Provided)

1:15 Northeast Institutions (Chair: Ben Thompson)

Joy Brindle (Durham), "Sunderland Art Gallery as an Embodiment of Nineteenth-century Association."

Neil Harrison (Northumbria), "A New Institution: the Importance of Networks in the Creation of the Tyne Improvement Commission (TIC) in 1850 to own and manage the River Tyne."

2:00 Break

2:30 Global Networks (Chair: Jamison Hankins)

Megan Liao (Durham), "Marginalized Voices in Imperial Tourism."

Yevhen Yashchuk (Oxford), "Globalised Telegraph in Imperial Provinces: Hierarchies of Information Flows and the Appearance of International Crisis in Kyiv and Lviv, 1875-1878."

3:15 Break

3:45 Keynote: Simona Valeriani (V&A) (Chair: Ardi Echevarria)

5 Close

Abstracts

Art and the Working Class

James Inkster (Newcastle), "Trollope's Alms-house. Or, Dickens's Bioethics of Survival."

In *The Victorians and Old Age* (2009), Karen Chase observes that "the workhouse, the hospital, the asylum, and the alms-house" held a "central place" in the gerontological landscape of the nineteenth century (6). When literary critics analyse the representation of these institutions, they often turn to *The Warden* (1855) by Anthony Trollope (1815-82), for that novel centres on an alms-house and the care it offers twelve old men. The main action of Trollope's plot, however, is shaped by a debate over the Last Will and Testament of John Hiram – the man who left instructions for the running of the alms-house – and the old men's care is determined by a document and its potential implications. There is a fault line running through such a system: if the interpretation of inherently ambiguous language is the deciding factor, then the old men's care cannot be guaranteed.

Alice Crossley, in a recent chapter on 'Ageing Masculinity in Victorian Fiction' (2024), brings together Trollope's *The Warden* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), comparing the alms-house to the relationship between Wemmick and 'Aged P'. With this paper, I will also read *The Warden* alongside *Great Expectations*, but I will focus instead on the relationship between Pip and Magwitch. In particular, I will study how Dickens describes their bond in symbiotic terms. For, during the years between *The Warden* and *Great Expectations*, Darwin published *On The Origin of Species* (1859) and he introduced a wider audience to the materially entangled ecosystem. Splicing age theory with ecocriticism, I will argue that this expanded awareness of symbiosis helps Dickens find a stronger reason to care for the elderly than just institutional obligation: Dickens demonstrates that the elderly are integral to the web of life.

Biography

After studying English literature at the University of Cambridge (BA) and Newcastle University (MA), James Inkster returned to Newcastle as a doctoral student. His thesis examines how nineteenth-century writers deploy the fictional autobiography to wrestle with the problem of survival, both for the ageing individual and the imperilled collective. James has presented papers in a variety of settings, including at the *Narrative* conference (Spring 2024) and at Newcastle's recent symposium on ecological crises (Autumn 2024). He has also published an article on Victorian Egyptology, the Gothic and the idea of progress in Durham University's *Postgraduate English* journal (Spring 2024).

Alexander King (Leeds), "An Encyclopaedia for the Working Class? Politics, Cost and Audience in the 19th Century Publishing Industry."

Founded in 1826, the *Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (SDUK) aimed to educate "the people" through a vast array of educational publications, including books, magazines, maps, and the 27 volume *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1833-1846). Its chairman was Lord Chancellor Henry Brougham, and its members included many of the most prominent contemporary figures in politics. Many of their publications were highly commercially successful, with the 1832 *Penny Magazine* launching to then unprecedented sales of 200,000 copies in its first year. The SDUK public perception was deeply bound to that of Brougham, and they were viewed as an arm of the political establishment, their products described by critics as a product of "the ministers". Despite this, the SDUK was seen as a challenge to several existing institutions. Their conception of useful knowledge was perceived by some as a secular threat to Christian values and the high Church.

Perhaps more dramatic was their impact on the publishing industry. Taking advantage of new technology, the success of SDUK publications such as the *Penny Magazine* was underpinned by their unprecedented cheapness, the magazine named for its cost of one penny per number. The SDUK differed from publishing rivals in that they were not a commercial entity, and they were perceived as undercutting competitors with a flood of cheap publications. The SDUK sat at the intersection between institutions including government, science, church and the print industry. This paper examines the impact of the SDUK on commercial publishing by exploring the intended audience and the ultimate reception of the *Penny Cyclopaedia*. It aims to address the reaction from commercial publishers to the *Cyclopaedia*, explore how its cost shaped its ultimate audience, and address the nature of the new "mass" market for popular science.

Biography

Alexander King is a third year PhD candidate and historian of science at the University of Leeds. He is a member of the Leverhulme funded project *Science for the People: Popular Print and the making of the Victorian World*. Alex is interested in how the modern scientific disciplines established themselves as institutions from the 19th century onwards, and the role communication, print and language played in this.

Isabel Thomas (Newcastle), "Music in Working Men's Clubs and Institutes as Institutionalisation of Working-Class Life."

Clubs of many kinds are a part of modern British life, bringing people together around shared hobbies, goals or interests. In *The Making of the English Working Class* E. P. Thompson shows how the self-managed working class societies and clubs across the country that grew out of the early nineteenth century became a distinguishing feature of British culture. Most of these were without a permanent building of their own, meeting in pubs and halls, and were often hostile to the authorities. It was not until the middle of the century that working men's clubs and institutes (WMCIs) were established: such forms of working class gathering were made into institutions with the financing and legislative support of industrialists, church leaders and philanthropists. While some WMCIs were set up from scratch, reading clubs, sick clubs, trade clubs or friendly societies have been considered as WMCIs when they take a building of their own, become integrated into the club networks of live entertainment, gambling machines or excursions, or join the Working Men's Club and Institute Union (or a similar organisation such as the Royal British Legion).

This institutionalisation of working class social and cultural life from the 1850s onwards paralleled the separation of work and leisure and the rise of an identifiable working class. I explore how the development of musical canons and performance practices specific to WMCIs contributed to this institutionalisation by functioning as symbols and expressions of a mainstream working-class identity characterised by paradoxes of aspiration, conservatism and rebellion. Within these institutions of Victorian origin, some repertoire and musical idioms of WMCIs have even been sustained until the present day, continuing to function in community-building and as expressions of class identity.

Biography

Isabel Thomas is a postgraduate researcher at Newcastle University, funded by the NUAcT project *The Invention of Pop Music: Mainstream Music, Class and Culture, 1520-2020*. Her research uses oral history, archival research, media analysis and ethnography to construct a critical music history of working men's clubs and institutes. It compares the differences and similarities between classical, folk and popular music as symbols and expressions of working-class identity. She is also interested in their role in local and national heritage, and in international parallels; institutions such as Eastern European factory clubs and Soviet palaces of culture.

Northeast Institutions

Joy Brindle (Durham), "Sunderland Art Gallery as an Embodiment of Nineteenth-century Association."

My interdisciplinary PhD research focuses on the letters of Thomas Dixon, a Sunderland cork-cutter and self-described 'Workman', who was also an autodidact, disseminator of books, religious free thinker, co-operator, and correspondent with individuals of different class backgrounds, including literary figures and public intellectuals with whom he perceived a sharing of ideas. The primary purpose of his writing was social action to develop educational and cultural institutions in Sunderland. These included the Sunderland Art Gallery which opened in 1880 in a newly created municipal space also housing a Museum and Free Library. Through his local and national associational activities, Dixon sourced many of the works in the gallery's first collection.

When the new building opened, Alderman Lindsay of Sunderland Council said that 'he would like to say a word or two, not about the building, but about the institutions for which the building was erected'. This says something interesting about institutions as they were conceived in nineteenth-century Sunderland. The imposing new civic building was not the institution: the institutions were virtual, pre-existing associations of people, many of them working-class descendants of Chartism and/or Utopian Socialism, who had been working for years to create educational spaces and opportunities in the town. These ideas about institutions flow into later debates around the nature of the public sphere.

My proposed paper will use some of the paintings sourced by Dixon to tell the stories of association which led to those works being in the Gallery's first collection. By conceiving these works as symbols of association and social networking as well as paintings, we can gain a different understanding of the Gallery as an institution embodying the agency of its founders; the aggregation of resources through belonging to a group (social capital); and the idea of local government as a representative/participative rather than a controlling body.

Biography

I'm a third year PhD student interested in nineteenth-century literature, in particular that relating to the working class. My academic interests reflect my career in local government and local partnerships, including inter-agency working, reciprocity and what can be done in the spaces between different agendas and institutions. My interdisciplinary PhD research examines literary networks using a large, scattered body of letters to and from the Sunderland cork-cutter, autodidact and co-operator Thomas Dixon, and explores the connections between letter-writing and the delivery of social action.

Neil Harrison (Northumbria), "A New Institution: the Importance of Networks in the Creation of the Tyne Improvement Commission (TIC) in 1850 to own and manage the River Tyne."

In this paper I discuss why the Tyne Improvement Commission (**TIC**) was created in 1850 and examine its development as a new institution from 1850, concentrating on the networks of the individuals who founded and ran the TIC. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Newcastle Corporation and coal merchants exercised a virtual monopoly over river trade. The towns on the River were in frequent and acrimonious dispute over the use of the Tyne. The TIC was founded in 1850 to own and manage the River and to harmonise relationships. After assuming ownership and management of the River, the TIC facilitated major structural improvements. By the end of the nineteenth century, the TIC viewed the Tyne as an asset for all Tyneside and had become an exemplar as a governing institution.

My research examines the networks of members of the TIC to contextualise their actions in its creation and development. Through the lens of the TIC, its members and their networks, I interrogate the evidence of the influence of English law (including commercial, business, organisation, regulatory, local law and byelaws) on Tyneside's economic development. My hypothesis is that the TIC and the actions of its members evidenced by their networks were the key facilitators of Tyneside's economic development in the second half of the nineteenth century. Without the creation and development of TIC, the actions of the individuals and the influence of their networks, Tyneside's economy and trade would have developed in a wholly different way.

Biography

Neil's doctoral research is on the management and ownership of the River Tyne by the Tyne Improvement Commission in the nineteenth century, focusing on the role of individuals and networks. His research interests are legal and local history, and history more broadly with a focus on the "long nineteenth century". They include Chartism, radicalism, trade and business, newspapers and the press, biographical history, networks, ports and rivers, culture, and crime and punishment. He teaches on a wide range of courses at Northumbria University. He is a member of the Royal Historical Society and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Global Networks

Megan Liao (Durham), "Marginalized Voices in Imperial Tourism."

Tourism, as a new institution expanded and engaged with the imperial agenda, experienced a boost at the end of the 19th century. Industrial and institutional developments expanded overseas tourism to a broader audience, particularly women and the working class. However, the increasing globalization leads to anxieties over unstable borders between the Empire and the rest of the world. Ethnocentric *fin-de-siècle* travelogues illustrate not an accurate image of the Destination but rather an auto-portrait of the Home. The hyper-exoticization of the travelee—through the denial of coevalness, coined by Johannes Fabian (1983), and characterizing the Destination as primitive and exploitable—reflects the Empire's underlying anxieties about the unstable distance between the Home and the Destination. How previously marginalized British voices engage with the imperial narratives that denigrate the travelee offers compelling insights into encounters within the contact zone.

This paper examines late 19th-century British tourism narratives abroad to compare how various marginalized voices express the Empire's sentiments toward the rest of the world. Each text analyzed in this research—*Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* by Isabella Bird (1880), *In the South Seas* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1889), and *From Sea to Sea* by Rudyard Kipling (1900)—features a distinctive narrative voice that grapples with both the allure of the exotic and the anxieties surrounding modernization abroad. By scrutinizing Home-Destination cultural comparisons and chronopolitics, this research aims to demonstrate how leisure travel narratives reinforce the idea of modernity as a Western possession, ultimately failing to disentangle modernity from imperial rhetoric. Furthermore, this dissertation explores how marginalized identities—often dismissed as the Other, such as female, Scottish, or Anglo-Indian perspectives—contribute to and engage with imperial propaganda and the construction of Otherness abroad.

Biography

Megan Liao is a postgraduate student in English Literary Studies at Durham University. Her research interests lie in fin-de-siècle travel narratives, postcolonialism, modernism, and comparative literature. The title of her working MA dissertation is "The Angst of the British Empire and its Clueless Tourists," in which she plans to survey British tourism narratives in relation to material culture exemplified by railway development and their implications of the imperial or colonial subtexts.

Yevhen Yashchuk (Oxford), "Globalised Telegraph in Imperial Provinces: Hierarchies of Information Flows and the Appearance of International Crisis in Kyiv and Lviv, 1875-1878."

The worldwide introduction of the electric telegraph in the mid-nineteenth century transformed information exchange across the globe, expediting information flows and shaping the global news market. While its presence allowed more people to access information from remote places, either through telegraph wires or through newspapers that relied on international telegrams in their coverage of news from abroad, telegraph networks were not equally distributed. To indicate the effects of that inequality, my paper will focus on two imperial provincial centres, Kyiv in the Romanov Empire and Lviv in the Habsburg Empire amidst the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878. Drawing on scholarship of media history and history of international relations, it will argue that the development of telegraph networks in both imperial settings resulted in (un)even hierarchies of information, which became an especially acute issue during the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878, the first military crisis the inhabitants of both cities could access through this new means of communication. The paper will trace how provincial newspapers faced the challenge of intensified information flows and highlight the role of international telegraph agencies in that process. These institutions tried to monopolize news circulation in Europe by attempting to preserve control on the internal market in the distribution of news about the crisis. Thus, I will point out that, together with the major daily newspapers, news agencies shaped the routes through which the information from the epicentre of the Great Eastern Crisis reached newspaper readers in the imperial provinces of East Central Europe. Finally, I will consider the role of imperial censorship in regulating access to international news, both in conditions of peace and war, changing the perception of information from abroad and leading to the domestication of the crisis, largely thanks to the availability of the telegraph.

Biography

Yevhen Yashchuk is a DPhil student in Global and Imperial History at the University of Oxford. His research interests include imperial history, media history, and intellectual history of East Central Europe in the nineteenth century and topics in contemporary memory politics. He is currently working on his dissertation on the transimperial history of Great Eastern Crisis, with the focus on everyday life in the cities of Kyiv and Lviv between 1875 and 1878. Yevhen is also a student coordinator and mentor at CEU Invisible University for Ukraine and a co-editor of the web journal *Visible Ukraine*.