



THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

historylab



# History Lab Conference 2021

Material Culture as  
methodology: the  
objects that make  
history

#HLConf21

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1921-2021

INSTITUTE OF  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH

SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED STUDY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

**09.45 - 10.00**    **Welcome**

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**10.00 - 11.30**    **Panel 1: Gender, War and the Material**

*Made to Measure: Prosthetic Limbs in the First World War*

**Louise Bell** (University of Leeds)

Over 1 million British men were left disabled by disease or injury as a result of the First World War. Around 41,000 British servicemen returned missing one or more limbs: this equated to roughly 11,600 cases of lost arms and 29,400 cases of lost legs. With hospitals opening solely with the task of helping these limbless men, it was important that workshops for the production of artificial limbs were set up in Britain, in increasing numbers than there had been previously.

Work has been undertaken into disabled ex-servicemen in this conflict, but I would like to change the focus to the prosthesis itself. The materials and manufacturing of the prostheses are important to consider – limb fitting hospitals utilised both local skill bases, as well as bringing in limb makers from the USA. Towards the end of the war we begin to see more experimentation with new materials, and conversations around the standardization of parts begin to appear in the records. But what is equally important to explore is how the men themselves engaged with these prostheses and how they reflected the needs of the men reintegrating into civilian life. What did men think of their new limbs? Did they want to wear them?

Using archival sources and museum objects, this paper will focus on the production and supply of artificial limbs in Britain during the First World War and try to bring the voices of the men who had to wear them a little closer to the surface.

**Louise Bell** is a AHRC CDP-funded PhD student at the University of Leeds and The National Archives. Her research is focussing broadly on British State provision of prosthetic limbs to limbless ex-servicemen in the two world wars. Louise is also one of the editors of the Social History Society's Community Exchange blog.

*Dressing the Part at the Fourteenth Century English Court*

**Ella Muir** (University of Roehampton)

*I feel that marriage is a joining together of man and woman, maintaining the undivided habit of life, and that someone has come between my husband and myself trying to break this bond; I protest that I will not return until this intruder is removed, but discarding my marriage garment, shall assume the robes of widowhood and mourning until I am avenged of this Pharisee.*

In the winter of 1325 Queen Isabella of France, defiant and dressed in widow's weeds, made this declaration. She had arrived in France earlier that year, acting as a diplomatic ambassador on behalf of her husband, Edward II of England; now, dismayed by the rapid rise of the King's favourite, Hugh Despenser the Younger, and a series of increasingly humiliating acts against her, as 'a lady in grief who had lost her lord' Isabella publicly refused Edward's orders to return. Even more strikingly, she bolstered the impact of this flagrant disobedience through her attire:

adopting the garb synonymous with bereavement, Isabella used mourning robes to declare her husband dead to her; a material flourish to accompany her verbal and physical defiance.

Less than a year later, Isabella, acting alongside Edward's opponent, the exiled baron Roger Mortimer, would lead an invasion of England, executing her enemies and deposing her husband. In this paper, I will demonstrate how detailed analysis of material culture from this tumultuous historic period can corroborate, interrogate, and even contradict suppositions about these events, with a specific focus on attire. Using inventories, household records, the queen's trousseau, and the accounts of chroniclers, I will investigate how the clothing donned at the court of King Edward was in constant use as a material means of communication, consensus and challenge, and the new light this methodological approach can cast on the ostensibly well-trodden past.

**Ella Brook Muir** is a postdoctoral candidate at the University of Roehampton, researching queenly clothing in England and France during the 16th century. Her work explores the creation and construction of royal image through dress and other forms of material culture at a pivotal point in Anglo-French relations, with a particular focus on the individuals and networks that came together to clothe a queen, and the various ways that this sartorial symbolism was observed throughout society. This research is funded in its entirety by a scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Techne programme. Ella is Editorial Assistant at *History Today* magazine and incoming Chief Copy-Editor for *Royal Studies Journal*. Find her on Twitter @ellabrookmuir

### **Reading "Properly and Morally": Shakespeare, Literary Activism, and the Cultural Shift in Women's Reading, 1830-1865**

**Felicia Strouth** (Kingston University London)

This presentation on Women's Literary Groups in America 1830-1865 speaks to material exchange in a number of ways. The social exchange of knowledge in Antebellum and Postbellum periods was a catalyst for the exchange of cultural capital in the years surrounding the American Civil War. Likewise, the advent of libraries in the form of book exchanges allowed women from a lower social class to harness the power of literacy among their peers in reading groups through this material exchange.

This paper analyses the creation of American Women's Literary Groups which arose from Women's Volunteer Societies, recruited to aid the American Civil War effort through the distribution of garments for soldiers. Crucial to this transformation were those black societies in the Union states, which lobbied for equal rights and equal education through literary activism. The knowledge transfer between members of women's literary groups and the community led to the rise of public libraries, especially those in rural areas.

This paper derives from a larger research project dedicated to women's interactions with Shakespeare, 1830s-1890s, which aims to contextualize the rise of philanthropic Women's Shakespeare Groups within the trauma of the American Civil War.

**Felicia Strouth** is a 3rd year PhD candidate at Kingston University London. She holds a B.A. in English Literature from Concord University (Athens, WV) and an M.A. in Shakespeare from Royal Holloway, University of London. Her PhD project, "*The Lady's Shakespeare: American Women's Interactions with Shakespeare's Plays, 1830s-1890s*" looks at women's interactions with Shakespeare through the lens of trauma theory and the American Civil War, an interest which she has been cultivating since her time at Concord. When she's not researching or writing,

Felicia enjoys reading young adult literature, crafting, and swimming.

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## 11.30 - 11.45 Break

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## 11.45 - 13.00 Joint Keynote Session

- **Leonie Hannan** (Queen's University Belfast)
  - **Kate Smith** (University of Birmingham)
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## 13.00 - 14.00 Lunch

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## 14.00 - 15.30 Panel 2: The Materiality of Empire

### *Perceptions of Archaeology as Material Culture in British Mandate Palestine*

**Chloe Emmott** (University of Leeds)

The British Mandate in Palestine made the management of archaeology and antiquities a keystone of the new regime; this was seen as a “sacred trust” held in Britain by the world and was used as part of the imperial propaganda of the Mandate, in particular to show superiority over their Ottoman predecessors.

The new antiquities laws of the mandate governed what was considered an antiquity and gave the government new powers to purchase land and to take possession of antiquities, and to halt processes such as building or agricultural work. I explore how these policies affected the day to day lives of those who lived amongst the material remains of the past which was now designated as archaeology and antiquities.

Archive documents, whilst told solely from the British point of view, can allow us to read against the grain and gauge the impact of these laws on those who lived amongst a material culture which was now subject to strict legal requirements based on British conceptions of the past and the process and practice of preservation. Through archive documents we can assess how different perceptions and meanings of material culture were navigated. To do this I will examine negotiations relating to land purchase, the re-use of archaeological stones for building work, and artefacts found whilst doing agricultural work, and the material culture of archaeology itself such as the storage of site equipment and the construction of temporary buildings, and open air museum sites based around excavation sites, and how these relate to the lived experience of Palestinians under British rule.

**Chloe Emmott** is a PhD student at the University of Greenwich, researching the history of British archaeology in Palestine. She completed her BA in Archaeology of Ancient Civilisations at the University of Liverpool. After graduating she completed a social history project on Liverpool's Chinatown and docks and the Church of St Michaels. She returned to the University of Liverpool to study her MA in archaeology, focusing on the history of excavations in Jericho. She is interested in the history of archaeology in the Middle East, particularly Palestine, Biblical Archaeology and the political uses of heritage.

## *Colonial Control, Local Value and Resistance: guns and alcohol in Southern Nigeria (1890-1960)*

**Immaculata Abba** (University of Oxford)

The economic and social lives of guns and alcohol in colonial Southern Nigeria show how commodities were central in the reasons for, and means of, colonial control and anti-colonial resistance. After these two objects were spot-lit in the 1890 Brussels Conference Act signed to counteract persisting slave trade in the interior of Africa, they continued to be central to the paternalistic attitudes, economic needs, and security concerns of British imperial rule in Nigeria.

This paper's comparative history of guns and alcohol shows that the colonial government was more interested in preserving the British Empire, than it was in the welfare of colonial subjects. The similarities and differences between the ceremonial value, monetary roles, and consumption patterns of the two commodities across the colony reveal that the qualities of scarcity, sophistication (both social and technological), and proximity to power enabled the objects to accrue their local social values.

Building on these two mappings of value, this paper finally demonstrates how guns and alcohol were implicated in the conflicts between colonial control and local agency/resistance. Here, it looks at case studies of illegal ogogoro distillation and the 1949 Enugu colliery massacre.

This paper connects the existing scholarship on guns and alcohol in colonial Nigeria that have since run parallel to each other. It uses evidence from official records of colonial policies, Hansard (parliamentary debates), colonial police and district officers' reports, court petitions, newspapers, billboard advertisements, and Nigeria Blue Book statistics.

**Immaculata Abba** is currently writing a dissertation on the economic lives of Kumasi market women (1970 and 1995) as part of her masters in Global and Imperial History at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on the political economy of informality, and she holds a BA in History and Comparative Literature.

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**15.30 - 15.45 Break**

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**15.45 - 17.00 History Lab's inaugural Olivette Otele Prize Paper**

*'Queering Black Politics: The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre (Project) in London, 1980s-1990s*

**Sue Lemos** (University of Warwick)

History Lab is delighted to announce the creation of a new annual prize for Black PhD research students based in the UK. The aim of the prize is to address intersectional challenges in academia and to diversify the early career voices in historical research today. The prize is named in honour of Professor Olivette Otele in recognition of her scholarly achievements in the history of race and slavery, and her appointment as the first Black female History Professor at a UK Higher Education Institution.

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For further information:

## History Lab

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