WSG seminars winter 2018-19 announced

WSG is pleased to be able to share details of its forthcoming winter 2018/19 seminars. All seminars take place at the Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, WC1N 1AZ, starting promptly at 1pm and finishing at 4pm. Doors open at 12.30, and there is a break for tea, coffee and biscuits halfway through the session. The Foundling is a wheelchair accessible venue, and directions for getting to the Museum can be found here, including those who are partially sighted. All seminars are free and open to the public, though refreshments will cost £2 to those who aren’t WSG members. Those attending the seminars are welcome to look round the museum before or after.

Saturday September 29, 2018
Madeleine Pelling: Negotiating the Portland Vase: Mary Hamilton, Sir William Hamilton and the Duchess of Portland
On 5 February 1784, the little-known Bluestocking and diarist Mary Hamilton wrote in her journal, ”With ye Duchess [of Portland] till past 4 o’clock. My Uncle Wm [Sir William Hamilton] came some time after I had been there, we look’d over some Antique Medals. My Uncle & ye Dss settled about the Vase...entirely. The Dss made him give her an impression of his Arms, to have a Seal cut for me for ye Watch she had given me”. This extraordinary gift given Hamilton by the Duchess of Portland was in fact meant as a commemorative token of her services in negotiating the sale of the Barberini, subsequently Portland, vase from Sir William Hamilton to her patron. Despite its already well-established fame in Britain, the transference of the vase was executed in secret, and the watch gifted to Hamilton was no doubt a reward for her discretion and skill in manoeuvring negotiations between both parties. The role of Hamilton in the negotiations between her uncle and the duchess has been largely neglected by scholars. Instead an oft-rehearsed and factually incorrect narrative of its having been “named after the Dukes of Portland who owned it from 1786 to 1945” has taken hold. Even today, the display text that accompanies the vase exhibited in the Roman gallery at the British Museum, continues to perpetuate this myth. The historiography of the vase has certainly been concerned with its male patrons, specifically with its treatment at the hands of Sir William, the 3rd Duke of Portland (the duchess’s son) and, later, Josiah Wedgwood. This paper aims to redress this deficit, and instead to place Hamilton at the centre of the sale through close examination of her (previously unpublished) correspondence alongside her journals from 1783 – 84. Moving away from the economically focused and largely patriarchal readings of the vase’s biography, I map the exchanges between this small group, initiated and curated by Hamilton. In doing so, I reveal the role of the Bluestocking salons, and the conversation and art criticism that took place within them, as vital in understanding how this vindicated Roman treasure came to be the highlight of the duchess of Portland’s famous museum.

Laura Pérez Hernández: Analyzing female identity through the fashion press: differences and similarities between Spain and England (1750-1800)
During the eighteenth century, the press acted as a cultural instrument and it became a fundamental element of social critique because it was instrumental in the establishment of order, good taste, appearance and fashion. This paper will analyze the methods used by the Spanish and English press to spread female fashion between 1750
and 1800. Fashion magazines during this time have as objectives the definition of social categories and the diffusion of what were considered proper attitudes and manners for each social group, collective, or gender. At first, this paper will explain how the press spread female dress models and female ideals. Using publications such as The European Magazine, The Times, El duende especulativo and La pensadora gaditana, it will show how ideas on female identity and dress were imposed through articles on dresses of the month, essays on luxury, and descriptions of masquerades and other events. Secondly, it will analyze the commercialization of female styles by examining advertisements for dresses or textiles, using such journals as the Diary of Madrid, Diary of Valencia and The Times. Finally, both countries will be compared, showing how the methods of spreading female fashion in each of them indicate the position of women and their importance in the culture of appearance in the eighteenth century.

Taylin Nelson: ‘A Meager Cow’: The Duchess of Devonshire and Animality in 18th Century Poetry
William Combe’s lesser-known satirical poem, The Duchess of Devonshire’s Cow (1777) was publicly addressed to Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, among a series of letters which admonished her wild behavior. Often moralizing in tone, Combe constructs a link between the Duchess and animals in an attempt to paint her to the public as barbaric. Combe focuses on the bodies of animals, and consequently the female body, to create a binary between the animal type and the archetype of dangerous feminine sexuality. In doing so, Combe uses the figure of a dead cow to subvert the Duchess’s rank as a national symbol, with pointed suggestions concerning her inability to produce an heir. I will offer perspectives on Combe’s sickly cow, and show how he creates an inverse of British national pride directly linked to the Duchess’s political roles and maternal duties.

Miriam al Jamil: Eleanor Coade and the Back-room Venus
During the eighteenth century, workshops and small manufactories produced commercial reproductions of both antique and contemporary sculpture in a variety of materials on different scales for both domestic and public consumption. The cheapest were most commonly made in plaster but the medium itself does not always indicate the status of the object and in some cases defies expectation. My paper examines the entry for one example of sculpture included in Eleanor Coade’s Gallery catalogue in 1799 and what happens when the identity of the original subject is reinterpreted, the comparative value of original and copy is unclear, and the context of display in a commercial gallery complicates its meaning. This is not a case of high art reconfigured in a proposed workshop copy. Who were the anticipated customers and how were they expected to accommodate this full-length reclining nude, a stark commodified representation of his mistress which John Sackville, 3rd Duke of Dorset originally commissioned?

Saturday December 8, 2018
Louise Duckling: Exploring the Lives of Women, 1558-1837: a journey in images
The editors of WSG’s 30th anniversary book – Exploring the Lives of Women, 1558-1837 – were given the opportunity to fill a generous 16-page plates section by publishers Pen & Sword. This informal, illustrated talk will discuss the challenges we faced in finding relevant images for subjects as diverse as breastfeeding, aphrodisiacs
and athleticism, and our efforts to represent female occupations ranging from mine workers to opera singers. It will discuss how, with the help of our authors and WSG members, we eventually gathered a wonderful stock of royalty-free images from a variety of different sources. It is hoped that by sharing our experiences, we can help others seeking to illustrate their own projects. While embarking on a journey in images, this session will tell the story of the book, highlighting the volume’s key themes and discoveries. On the voyage we will see how Exploring the Lives of Women opens our eyes to the possibility of interesting new resources, interpretations and explorations.

Bernadette Andrea: ‘English Daughters’ in Eighteenth-Century Morocco: Abjection and Assimilation in the Narratives of Thomas Pellow and Elizabeth Marsh

In this presentation, I propose to examine English and other British women in the Maghreb during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through narratives and other documentary sources by men, in particular Thomas Pellow’s The History of the Long Captivity and Adventures of Thomas Pellow, in South-Barbary (1739), and the first full-length account of Maghrebian captivity written by an Englishwoman, Elizabeth’s Marsh’s The Female Captive: A Narrative of Facts, Which happened in Barbary (1769). In assessing the abjection of female captives, who are represented as constantly prone to sexual and spiritual degradation, I draw attention to the assimilated “English daughters” of male converts in the region, including the daughter Pellow sired in captivity. Marsh, while in the Moroccan ruler’s palace, encounters another daughter of an English “Renegado,” who speaks Arabic and attempts to convert her to Islam. Although Marsh casts this encounter in terms of the abjection Englishwomen faced in captivity, she suggests her own assimilation to Moroccan gender norms as she adopts their mode of sequestered transportation for her safety, rather than continue to ride side saddle, and other habits. I conclude by analyzing Marsh’s sartorial negotiations, which balance abjection and assimilation, as a counterpoint to Mary Wortley Montagu’s frequently cited “Turkish bath” scene.

Felicity Roberts: The academic precariat: what it means to write women’s history now

The continuing popularity of the Women’s Studies Group 1558-1837 comes at a time when staff and students in universities and other research institutions are facing increasingly unsustainable pressures. This is not a coincidence – as more and more academics become precariously employed it is more likely that groups such as WSG will form an alternative community and safety net for scholars wishing to make, share and exchange research and ideas. This situation is both a threat and an opportunity. This paper explores the ways in which WSG can transform the way women’s history is done now.

Saturday January 26, 2019

Angela Byrne: The Chetwood–Wilmot Circle: Literary Sociability and Epistolary Culture in the Nineteenth Century

This talk will introduce a heretofore unidentified coterie of Irish and Anglo-Irish writing and travelling women in the first half of the nineteenth century that included some well-known “bluestockings” and radicals, as well as some less well-known women
of the middling sort. Mostly, but not solely based in the environs of Cork city and, later, around the English spa towns of Cheltenham, Clifton and Bath, the circle demonstrated strong group cohesion despite the high level of geographical mobility demonstrated by its members. The group left a wealth of published and unpublished travel writing, correspondence, poetry, prose, fiction and non-fiction, mostly produced in c. 1800–1840, and held in archives across Ireland and the UK. This talk briefly outlines the composition of the group, identifying key members and their relationships, before going on to discuss the importance of epistolary sociability and the circulation of manuscript compositions within the group.

Samantha Belcher: ‘A Great Intuitive Genius’: Catherine Gore and the Evolution of a Literary Career
Catherine Gore is considered one of the most prominent authors of the silver fork subgenre. During the 1820s to 1850s, she wrote about 60 novels as well as an award winning play, manuals, and sketches. Her most recognized novel, Cecil, or the Adventures of a Coxcomb (1841), created controversy when it was revealed that the anonymously published ‘Dandy novel’ was written by a woman. This paper will examine Gore’s relationship with literary critics, such as William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, in the context of the silver fork subgenre’s literary reception. While critics were praising Gore for her work, they were also suggesting she write in a more male dominated literary sphere. Gore’s contemporary literary critics reveal the complex gender assumptions female authors faced in the early nineteenth century. The paper will also argue that Gore responded to these critiques in various forms. Gore’s novel, Cecil, allowed her to address the stereotypical literary genres women authors were expected to conform to. In addition, her letters to editor William Tait reveal her urge to abandon novel writing and diversify her canon in order to adapt to the emerging Victorian literary audience.

Nathalie Saudo-Welby: Becoming Lady De Lancey at Waterloo
Magdalene Hall of Dunglass (1793-1822) was a member of a Scottish aristocratic family. In April 1815, she married William De Lancey, a British officer who had made a name during the Peninsular war and was appreciated by the Duke of Wellington. She followed him to Brussels a month later. When she learnt that he had been badly injured, she joined him in Mont Saint Jean, a village near Waterloo, and remained with him till his death a week later. The following year, Magdalene De Lancey wrote a diary which she could circulate among her relatives and friends instead of constantly retelling her painful experiences. The family objected to the publication of this diary, even though Walter Scott and Charles Dickens expressed their admiration for the text. It was finally published in a military magazine in 1886. This piece of self-writing is a rare document about a woman’s experiences in a zone of conflict. It is also interesting for the way the author negotiates her heroism in a male universe: becoming Lady De Lancey did not only mean taking on her husband’s name, but proving her valour at his side and building her own “heroism” (Ellen Moers). While the text played an important role in establishing the reputation of William De Lancey as a war hero, it also had the transformative power of turning Magdalene de Lancey into a heroine and an author.

Saturday March 30, 2019
Mary Chadwick: “Thy work appears unnotic’d or unknown”: Elizabeth
Harcourt (1746-1826)
In 2008 the Bodleian Library acquired the archive of the Harcourt family of Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire. Amongst the estate papers are over 100 manuscript poems written by Elizabeth Harcourt, nee Vernon, (1746-1826), wife of the 2nd Earl and Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Charlotte. Carly Watson has produced a valuable overview of the hundreds of commonplaced and original poems in the archive (2010) and has researched Elizabeth Harcourt’s authorship of private theatricals (2011) but these remain the only scholarly works produced since the Harcourt papers entered the public domain. An anonymous poet of Harcourt’s acquaintance described her charitable work as “unnotice’d or unknown”, a description which is, today, intensely applicable to her poetry, thanks to her gender, her preference for scribal rather than print publication, and the relative inaccessibility of the Harcourt archive. In this paper I draw on Harcourt’s poems as I argue that she deserves to be both noticed and better known amongst scholars of literature and history in general, and women’s literary history in particular. She experimented with a range of genres and topics, including verse epistles, autobiography, advice texts addressed to friends and her future self, antiquarian-inflected “Cambria” poetry and, demonstrating the continuation of this genre beyond the early eighteenth century, country house or estate poetry. I demonstrate that close readings of her poems extend our understanding of issues which shaped and were shaped by the literary, cultural and geo-political events of the eighteenth century, including the nature of manuscript authorship, especially for women, in an era of print; experiences of aging; and relations between England, Wales, Ireland and France.

Caitlin Kitchener: ‘The Mania of Amending the Constitution’: Female Reformers in 1819
During 1819, numerous female reform societies were founded across the north of England and in Glasgow. These were lively and active groups of women who aimed to contribute to the political reform movement, with the Peterloo Massacre spurring them on further again. They did not escape conservative criticism, being deemed “women well known to be the most abandoned of their sex” and questioned, “Might not women be better employed?” Using an historical archaeological perspective, this paper will discuss how female reformers performed their gender, crafted material culture, and utilised ritual within radical meetings and landscapes. Through using a queer reading, female reformers’ gender is analysed as being a form of female masculinity. Particular attention will be paid to the first society founded, the Blackburn Female Reform Society. The analysis also demonstrates the capabilities of using multiple strands of evidence (material, documentary, visual) to understand lived experiences and landscapes.

Valeria Viola: ‘...they would overcome men by far’: Maria Anna Alliata and her agonal Spaces in eighteenth-century Palermo
What happened to the early-modern mechanisms of teamwork (Ago, 1992) if members of a same aristocratic family did not agree on their roles and spaces? What if women openly opposed the gendered organisation that placed them in the domestic realm? What if they competed for distinction in the agonal space of politics as equals to men (Benhabib, 1992; Honig, 1992)?
In eighteenth-century Palermo a long dispute between Domenico Alliata and his mother Maria Anna arose whilst the palace underwent its greatest renovation. While guiding de facto the renovation works of her palace (1751–1758) apparently on behalf of her son, Maria Anna patronized an apology (1737) arguing the superiority of women
over men and influenced the writing of a history of the Alliata family (1760). The cross-
examination of documents and works permitted investigation of the meaning that
Maria Anna gave to her participation in the renovation, how she used culture to
challenge the constraints of the environment in which she lived, and how culture acted
on her for a continuous negotiation of spaces.

Peter Radford: Women as Team Players in the Long Eighteenth Century
Women and girls have played team running and ball games for centuries, for diversion
and entertainment: fun and frolic for the enjoyment of the moment. In the first half of
the 18th century they began playing representative matches too, often at cricket; one
town, village or hamlet against another, or one part of a community against another
(single v. married), or a combination of the two. In these representative matches the
result matters to more people than those playing; scores were kept, crowds went to
watch, and reports of them were read in newspapers all over the country. For inter-
community matches teams could travel considerable distances, but the intra-
community matches were local and were usually followed by the whole community
getting together afterwards with the losers paying for the party. In these matches we
glimpse winning players urging each other on as a jockey would his horse, and of others
holding on to their “hearts of oak” strength in defeat. Team members ranged from 14 to
60 years of age, and being selected for a representative team conferred considerable
social status on the players. We see the bowlers on a victorious cricket team being
“placed in a sort of triumphal car, preceded by music and flying streamers”, and
winning teams becoming so confident that they challenged any in the whole county, or
even the whole country. In 1756, two players, Sarah Chase and Mary Coote, were
described as “the two most famous Women in the Kingdom.” Noble ladies encouraged
women’s teams, as their husbands encouraged men’s, and in 1777 Ladies of Quality,
joined in the play. Before attempting to draw conclusions, all the known women’s
matches (1740-1840) are considered. The language used in the mid-18th century to
report their matches is indistinguishable from that used to report the men’s; later
comments continue to be positive but with some surprise expressed at how good they
were, or even that they played at all; but by the 1830s the mood of the reports has
changed and is often negative, patronising, or even insulting.