



# BIRTHA news

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ISSUE 7 OCTOBER 2010

## A message from the Director



BIRTHA continued to organise its usual range of activities and to support a substantial number of successful

research-related events and initiatives in the Faculty in 2009-10.

The 2009 BIRTHA lecture was delivered by Marina Warner, on 'Present Enchantments: Magic after the Arabian Nights'. This year we look forward to receiving David Crystal, who will speak on 'Internet Linguistics' on Monday 18 October in the Pugsley Lecture Theatre in the Queen's Building in University Walk at 6.00 pm.

The annual BIRTHA debate was held on 28 April 2010. Simon Jones (Drama), James Ladyman (Philosophy), Neal Farwell (Music) and John Steeds (Physics) debated the question whether impact should be a factor in judging academic research.

We returned to the subject of impact at a workshop organised in collaboration with the Faculty Research Director and held on 21 June, with a view to identifying the forms that research impact might take and clarifying the relationship between impact and public engagement. The workshop brought together scholars from the Faculty, on the one hand, and colleagues from Research and Enterprise Development, the Centre for Public Engagement and the Public Relations Office, on the other.

BIRTHA supported international conferences organised by members of

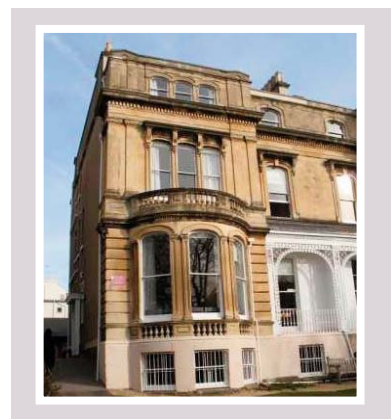
the Faculty during 2009-10 and was also able to provide grants to assist with the reception of distinguished speakers, organisation of seminars and workshops, establishment of networks and other preparatory work on research projects.

We have been encouraged by the volume and quality of research-related events being organised by the Faculty's postgraduate community. We have supported these events wherever possible and shall continue to do so. (Support for postgraduate attendance at conferences, on the other hand, will henceforth be provided by the Graduate School.)

We are most grateful to Quentin Skinner for the donation which again made it possible to award a postgraduate bursary in 2009-10.

The BIRTHA Research Programmes award for 2009-10 was used to fund a project entitled 'A New Orchestral Nexus', led by Neal Farwell (Music). The Research Programmes award for 2010-11 will support an interdisciplinary project on 'The Medieval West', led by Elizabeth Archibald (English) and James Clark (History).

BIRTHA intends from 2010-11 to oversee compilation of a comprehensive calendar of the research-related events that are taking place in the Faculty, with the aims of avoiding clashes and publicising events more effectively than in the past. Colleagues are accordingly asked to notify the BIRTHA administrator of their plans whenever



they are organising such events ([arts-events@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:arts-events@bristol.ac.uk)).

Finally, I thank the BIRTHA administrator, Sam Barlow, and my colleagues on the BIRTHA committee (Lesel Dawson, Susan Harrow, Nils Langer, Katie McKeogh, Samir Okasha, Angela Piccini, Bradley Stephens, Kerry Vernon, Ika Willis) for their contribution to BIRTHA's activity in 2009-10. I look forward to working with them and with new or returning members of the committee (Catherine Hindson, Emma Hornby, Dot Rowe) in 2010-11. I also thank the Dean and the Faculty Manager for ensuring that BIRTHA can expect to sustain its normal programme of activity over the coming year.

**Professor Derek Offord**  
Department of Russian

THE BRISTOL INSTITUTE FOR  
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BIRTHA is offering a range of different funding schemes for 2010/11 to help support research activity across the faculty, please get in touch if you would like any advice or guidance. I work Tuesdays/Wednesdays and Fridays, and look forward to hearing from you.

**Samantha Barlow**  
**BIRTHA Administrator**

### Report from Fiona Malkin, BIRTHA intern for 09/10

As an intern for BIRTHA and IGRCT I have gained a valuable insight into the inner workings of the vibrant research community at the University. I have had the privilege of working with the team in the Research Support Office planning various fascinating events with great people. The breadth of research and the variety of people has yielded a genuine sense of community and conception of the university beyond the usual "student experience". I have learnt a great deal about issues surrounding HE, dealing with external bodies as well as internal activities such as web skills, marketing events and general correspondence. All in all, an invaluable experience.



Supporting research  
activity across the  
Faculty of Arts

[www.bristol.ac.uk/birtha](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/birtha)

## Update on the 2009-10 BIRTHA Research Programme:

### A New Orchestral Nexus ~ NOX



It's been a busy year. At the core of the NOX programme were the six concerts of the 2009-10 *Elektrostatic* series. The concerts themselves were made possible by the generous support of Colston

Hall, in terms of core finance, facilities and support team. The BIRTHA/NOX grant enabled us to buy time in this music-making "laboratory", to pay the professional fees of the musicians in rehearsal and performance. The musicians in question are Bristol Ensemble, the city's professional chamber orchestra, and collaborators ranging from jazz quartet Get The Blessing to operatic soloist Charles Johnston. These vivid interactions, and a series of provocative themes for the concerts, set the frame for participation by Music Department composers. Our contributions included my *The Memory Toy (redux)* for ensemble and live electronics (a 2010 revision for professional ensemble of an earlier piece for amateurs); the première of part 1 of my *Bloodlines*, a challenging work for 19-piece chamber orchestra; and a string septet *Shakti* by PhD student David Greenhorne, all of these piece conducted by me; and the première of a *Chaconne* for solo viola by our professor of composition, John Pickard, reworked from a much older piece, and performed here by Bristol Ensemble's director Roger Huckle.

Other outputs included a paper at the SEMPRES conference "Empirical Musicology II: Performance" outlining our work on NOX and some of the methodological difficulties in studying performer interaction in live music-making. Music lives in performance, but we also recorded multiple elements in video and sound for later study, an ongoing process which should lead to web display in the coming months. Internal to the University, NOX provided me with a case study to address questions of "impact" as an invited speaker in this year's BIRTHA Debate, and we feel confident that the NOX events were impactful in several meaningful ways. Future plans will build on the strong relationship we have established with Bristol Ensemble, and already include a commission from one of the guest artists from the 2009-10 series.

**Dr Neal Farwell**  
[neal.farwell@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:neal.farwell@bristol.ac.uk)

# The Medieval West: The Formation and Reception of a Cultural Community

Project leaders: Elizabeth Archibald (English), James Clark (Historical Studies)

The aim of this project is to initiate a re-examination of the culture, and cultural dynamics, of the West Country in the Middle Ages and their role in shaping the identity of Medieval England as a whole. It was within West Country landscapes that were formed the legends on which much national history was founded. The churches and clerical communities of the region were a source of ecclesiastical leadership and spiritual inspiration; the region generated an early and energetic tradition of learning and literature, and between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries it was also renowned for its creativity and innovation in architecture and the production of books, indeed even for early experimentation in printing. The West Country was also a frontier between the English polity and its expanding dominion in Wales and Ireland and, at least in the later Middle Ages, what might be termed the emerging Atlantic world. As such it served as a point-of-exchange, where a wide variety of cultural commodities – language,

textual traditions, doctrines – were traded and transmitted. Here London English confronted rich variations in vocabulary and usage.

The rich, diverse cultural traditions of the Medieval West have attracted much attention from researchers, but for the most part they have been the subject of discrete studies. The aim of this project is to engender an integrated approach, examining these themes from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and within the context of the region as a whole. The project builds on a number of recent projects completed by members of the Centre for Medieval Studies; it also seeks to extend extra-mural partnerships which have been fostered over a number of years with the Library and Archives of Hereford Cathedral and Wells Cathedral. In the course of developing the project, it is hoped to add further partners, such as the Library and Archives of Gloucester and Exeter Cathedrals, Bristol Public Library and Bristol Record Office, and Berkeley Castle.

The objectives for 2010/11 are threefold: to convene three, thematic research workshops, in January, April and July, involving researchers within and beyond Bristol, to mount a day symposium for the autumn of 2011, and to prepare an application for a major research grant. The draft programme of events is as follows:

## 20 October

Preparatory meeting for Bristol researchers

## 10 November

Preparatory meeting for Bristol researchers

## 8 December

‘Launch’ event including external partners

## 26 January

Workshop 1: Myth and History

## 27 April

Workshop 2: Church and Cult

## 6 July

Workshop 3: Books and Readers

## BIRTHA CONFERENCE

# Great Mystics Address the Contemporary World

6 MARCH 2010

Organizers Anke Holdenried (Historical Studies) and Carolyn Muessig (Theology and Religious Studies)

The Departments of Historical Studies and Theology and Religious Studies, School of Humanities hosted a one-day international conference: *Great Mystics Address the Contemporary World*. The symposium featured one keynote presentation and five lectures by scholars who considered the meaning of mysticism in the Christian tradition in the past and its appropriation and reception in the modern world.

The keynote speaker was Professor Bernard McGinn (University Of Chicago), who was also Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professor during the 2010 Spring Term. He addressed the question of the role of women in the Catholic tradition by assessing the

writings of two mystics, Catherine of Siena and Madame Guyon. The five lectures were given by Dom Aidan Bellenger (Downside Abbey); Professor Oliver Davies (King's College London); Dr Joseph Milne (University of Kent, Canterbury); Professor Tina Beattie (Roehampton University); and Dr Eddie Howells (Heythrop College). They addressed the main currents in medieval mysticism, early modern mysticism, including mystical texts of the 16th and 17th centuries, primarily Spanish and French as well as mysticism in the 21st-century. Thinkers and topics addressed included Meister Eckhart, St John of the Cross, Luce Irigaray, love and suffering, negative theology and the argument that

the mystical apprehension of the cosmos transcends the usual terms of the modern science-religion debate.

There was a round table discussion at the end of the one-day symposium where the speakers and audience assessed how mysticism past and present is perceived and understood in contemporary society. The conference attracted more than 70 people both locally and from abroad, including Canada, France, Italy and the USA. Students and staff from across the Faculty of Arts were in also in attendance.

The organizers would like to thank BIRTHA, the School of Humanities and the Institute for Advanced Studies for their generous support.



# Writing the empire: scribblings from below

24-26 JUNE 2010



Phillipe de Vigors, 'Convicts letter writing at Cockatoo Island, New South Wales, 1849'  
Reproduced by kind permission of the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney

Between 60 and 70 delegates from all over the world gathered at Burwalls in late June for the successful and lively "Writing the empire: scribblings from below" conference. The conference was supported by BIRTHA, by the Royal Historical Society and by Bristol's Centre for the Study of Colonial and Postcolonial Societies. Participants came from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds including Anthropology, History and Literary Studies and also from a range of museums, libraries and archives including the ss Great Britain, the National Library of the Netherlands and the National Museum of Australia. The conference was jointly organised by Dr Kirsty Reid of Bristol's Department of History and Dr Fiona Paisley from Griffith University in Queensland.

The focus of the conference, as its title suggests, was on writing from below. In choosing this as a focus, the conference reflected the fact that, while numerous scholars of colonialism and post-colonialism have explored the written word as a key technology of power in empire, relatively limited attention has been paid to how less powerful and less privileged actors made use of the written word. The conference sought to redress that balance by focusing on ordinary and everyday writings about empire. As a result, it brought together scholars who work on lower-class Britons like transported convicts, soldiers and sailors, with those who work on the histories of the colonized. Reflecting the emphasis on 'scribblings', many of the papers focused on fragmentary texts and sources including letters, broadside ballads suicide notes and graffiti. Participants also explored the entangled and dynamic character of the relationship between oral and literate cultures. The reception and the performance of texts were also key themes. The conference proceedings were recorded and most of the papers are available as free podcasts at: <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/06/writing-the-empire-scribblings-from-below/> A conference book, to be edited by Fiona Paisley & Kirsty Reid, is forthcoming in 2011.

## POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE

# Language & Silence: Postgraduate Medieval Studies Conference

26 - 27 FEBRUARY, 2010



Bristol's 16th Annual Postgraduate Medieval Studies Conference, generously supported by BIRTHA, met in February to discuss issues of language and silence in medieval culture. More than 50 postgraduates and early career scholars travelled to Bristol from all over the UK, Canada, and Hungary to share their research in an interdisciplinary and international setting.

Over the course of six panel sessions delegates discussed questions of multilingualism and language barriers; language, silence and gender; language, performance and the body; and ineffability, inexpressibility and the limitations of language. One of the conference's highlights was Professor Bernard McGinn's master class on 'Communicating the Incommunicable: Mystical Ineffability from Origen to Catherine of Siena'. Professor McGinn visited the University of Bristol as a Benjamin Meaker Visiting Professor. His address struck many of the conference's key themes and the discussion which followed impressed on everyone the themes' centrality to all disciplines of medieval studies. The conference was brought to a close with a dynamic lecture by Dr. Oliver Crisp on 'Anselm on Speaking about God'.

The conference was well attended by students both from within the university and further afield, by Bristol alumni, and members of staff from across the Faculty, including Professor Elizabeth Archibald, Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies, who commented on the wide range of topics and the high standard of many of the papers. She said 'This excellent annual event is testimony to the lively interdisciplinary medieval community at Bristol, and the professionalism of our postgraduate students.'

On behalf of the conference committee I would like to thank BIRTHA for the financial support which enabled us to organise an event on such a large scale, and in particular Sam Barlow for her invaluable expertise and assistance

**Edwina Thorn**  
**Centre for Medieval Studies**  
**Department of Historical Studies**

Giusto de'Menabuoi,  
The Creation of  
the World, Late 1370s.  
Baptistry, Padua



## Imagining Astrology: Painted Schemes and Threads of the Soul

Co-convenors – Darrelyn Gunzburg  
(Dept History of Art)  
and Liz Greene (Dept Historical Studies)

The BIRTHA grant was used to support costs of hosting the 'Imagining Astrology' conference held at the University of Bristol, School of Chemistry. We initially planned for this conference to be held on 24-25 April 2010. However, we did not foresee the Icelandic volcano that disrupted flights in and out of the UK. All but two of our speakers were able to change dates and we used video-conferencing to beam in those who were unable to be present. We had 52 registered delegates, 9 speakers, 2 guests, 2 chairs from outside the University of Bristol, and 2 volunteers including one who helped us with the video -conferencing.

We were thrilled to have five highly-esteemed academics of global repute as part of our faculty of nine. These were: Ronald Hutton, Professor of History, The University of Bristol; Elliot Wolfson, Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, New York University; Roger Beck, Professor Emeritus, University of Toronto; Kocku von Stuckrad, Professor of Religious Studies and head of the Department of Religious Studies and the History of Christianity, University of Groningen; and Peter Forshaw, Assistant Professor in Western Esotericism, University of Amsterdam. This meant that the two of us, along with two other post-graduate research students, Bernadette Brady (The University of Wales, Trinity St Davids) and Geoffrey Shamos (The University of Pennsylvania) gained the opportunity to present our work within an international arena.

It also gave us the occasion to gain valuable knowledge about how to convene an academic conference. As well, it placed The University of Bristol centre stage in terms of subject matter in an area that is one of the academy's research frontiers.

Finally, even before the conference began, we were fortunate in securing four academic publishers who are interested in publishing the conference proceedings.

Thank you, BIRTHA. It was a wonderful and exciting conference and you have our sincere and heartfelt thanks for such generous support.



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# Events

## Upcoming events supported by BIRTHA:

**18 October 2010**

### **BIRTHA Annual Lecture**

6.00 pm - 7.00 pm, Pugsley Lecture Theatre, Queen's Building,  
University Walk

**Professor David Crystal O.B.E** (Bangor University)  
*Internet Linguistics*

**20 November 2010**

### **Postgraduate BIRTHA Conference 'Women and Religion'**

**Organiser: Pascale Englemajer** (Theology and Religious Studies)

**22 November 2010**

### **Annual Literature and Community Engagement lecture**

**Professor Rick Rylance**, Chief Executive of the Arts and Humanities  
Research Council (AHRC)

*'Literature and The Public Good'*

**January 2011**

### **BIRTHA Distinguished Lecturer Scheme**

**Diane Setterfield** author and Bristol alumni, will be giving a talk  
on the theme of translation

**March/April 2011 (date tbc)**

### **Postgraduate BIRTHA Conference**

### **'Cultural Exchange: Russia and the West'**

**Organiser: Theodora Clarke**

**27 April 2011, 2.00 pm**

### **Sixth BIRTHA Debate**

Title and venue tbc

**15 June 2011**

### **Postgraduate BIRTHA Conference**

### **'Annual Conference of the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI)**

**Organiser: Caroline Lynch** (Italian)

**25 - 30 July 2011**

### **BIRTHA Conference**

### **23rd International Arthurian Congress**

**Organisers: Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter** (English)

**For more details of these events and  
for a comprehensive listing of all faculty events please  
check the Faculty events page:  
[www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/events](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/research/events)**

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