



## Seminar in Early Modern Economic and Social History Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, Lent 2015

The seminar meets every alternate Thursday in term at 5pm in the Linnett Room in Robinson College. We normally have dinner with the speaker afterwards. All welcome.  
Convenors: Amy Erickson and Leigh Shaw-Taylor.



**22<sup>nd</sup> January: Wouter Ryckbosch (Antwerp)**

### *Singing the praises of tea. Social hierarchy, consumption and Asiatic luxury in the early modern Low Countries*

Across large parts of Europe exotic novelties such as tobacco, porcelain, cottons and tea turned from exclusive luxuries into everyday staples over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. More social groups and strata than before were now drawn into the realm of market consumption, as sumptuary legislation and traditional moral anxieties with regards to the vices of luxury were seemingly abandoned. This change is generally understood as a crucial aspect in the so-called 'consumer revolution', leading the way to growing commercialisation and eventual industrialisation (De Vries 2008; Berg 2004). This paper sets out to study whether the introduction and adoption of tea drinking in the Low Countries should be seen as a reflection of endogenous early modern social transformations, or if it perhaps served as an agent of change itself. How were social hierarchies reflected, transformed or perpetuated through the practices of (and discourses on) preparing and drinking tea in the early modern Low Countries? Clues will be sought for in probate inventories, trade statistics, scientific discourse, and popular ballads.

**5<sup>th</sup> February: Judy Stephenson (LSE)**

### *Skill, work and pay in London building trades, 1660 - 1790*

This paper uses the archival records of some of London's major seventeenth century building projects to show the scale and scope of building contracting and contractors in the long eighteenth century, and how skill was deployed and valued in the resulting hierarchies and networks. Although it is frequently assumed building craftsmen worked in small artisan teams in this period the evidence shows that with large market and project expansion, contractors and subcontractors used complex and flexible organizational hierarchies that responded to market forces and transaction costs. I examine human capital inputs to the building process at all levels, design, administration, supply, construction, and across a number of trades and show evidence of shifts in relative reward for different groups.

**19<sup>th</sup> February: Joseph Harley (Leicester)**

### *Pauper inventories and the material lives of the English poor, c.1680-1834*

This paper uses nearly 350 pauper inventories from Dorset, Kent and Norfolk to assess the material lives of the poor. It starts by analysing furniture and hearth-related items and then moves on to assess how 'new' goods, such as tea, came to affect the poor's everyday lives. Through this I will examine the extent to which the poor were able to engage with the market and will offer a unique perspective on what people ate, how they relaxed, how they kept warm, how they slept and so on.

**5<sup>th</sup> March: Keith Wrightson (Yale)**

### *"On or about/In and upon": 'dating statements' and the rise of 'almanac time' in early modern England*

This paper examines the 'time consciousness' of the common people in early modern England through the systematic study of the idioms used by them to date events. Samples of 'dating statements' in which witnesses attempted to date an event witnessed in the past reveal coexisting ways of locating events in time and shifts in their relative importance between the sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries. These variants and changes are explained in terms of the forms of time consciousness appropriate to different 'communities of practice' and the rise of what I call 'almanac time'.

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