**Reuter Masterclass**

**Wednesday 5 June 2013**

**Abstracts**

**Group 1**

**Hagiography and auto-Biography as sources for biography**

**Kirsty Day**

**Hagiography as Biography; Biography as ‘History’: Medieval and Modern Uses of the Thirteenth-Century Vitae of Clare of Assisi**

In the past two decades, significant scholarly effort has been devoted to the recreation of the chronological sequence of events that comprised the formation of the Franciscan women’s order. All of the studies resulting from this effort rely upon hagiographical representations of the life of Clare of Assisi — the saintly figure with whom the order of nuns is today most readily associated. The power that such representations of Clare’s life continue to wield over scholarship is most strongly felt in modern accounts of the history of the nuns prior to 1218, for which no documentary evidence is extant.

The texts used to recreate this history — Thomas of Celano’s vita of St. Francis

(c.1229), and a vita of Clare of Assisi (written at some point between 1253 and 1261) — were written well after the events that they describe. They present the nuns and their religious life as having gained legitimacy through Clare’s early contact with Francis of Assisi — the founder of the male Franciscan order. Interpreted within its immediate contexts, this formulation reads as part of a papal initiative to secure the male Franciscans’ care of the nuns. Instead, modern scholarship has projected this narrative structure back on to an earlier and less well-regulated period, consequently presenting the formation of the women’s order as a phenomenon that was secondary to the men’s. By analysing the effects of this misuse of hagiography as ‘reliable biography’, my paper will demonstrate the value of Clare’s vitae — when read in the contexts of their construction — to our understanding of the formation of

Franciscan identities.

**Biography**

After obtaining a BA in English and History from The University of Sheffield (2007–2010), Kirsty Day undertook a Master’s degree in Medieval and Renaissance Culture in the CMRC at the University of Southampton (2010–2011). She is currently in the second year of a PhD in the School of History at the University of Leeds. Her project examines the evidence for the Franciscan dynastic nunneries established in Bohemia and the Polish duchies in the thirteenth century, arguing for the importance of these institutions — previously neglected due to Franciscan scholarship’s androcentric and western-European focus — to the history of the construction of Franciscan identities.

**Erin Maglaque**

**Writing biography from autobiography.**

In this paper, I will focus on the manuscript autobiographical letter of Giovanni Bembo, a Venetian colonial administrator posted to the Aegean islands of Skiathos and Skopelos. By comparing this letter (1536) with his other surviving written material, including a collection of antique inscriptions, a commonplace book, an annotated copy of a geographical encyclopedia of islands, and his edited collection published by the Aldine Press (1502), I will investigate the ways in which textual collecting and annotation practices are essential to understanding the narrative strategy of early modern autobiography. Bembo’s intertextual reliance on classical writers, antique inscriptions, and ruined landscapes to structure his own life-writing will lead to a discussion of the implications of the studia humanitatis on conceiving subjectivity. I will argue that the texts and landscapes of antiquity, as well as the humanist techniques of oratorical epistolary writing, offered Bembo a literary strategy to create the absence from one’s self paradoxically needed to write autobiographically.

My chosen form of historical biography is literary criticism of autobiography: to use the discursive and narrative strategies of autobiographical texts to elaborate upon the intellectual and cultural formation of the autobiographer’s self-consciousness of his own identity. This allows her to write a biography that turns upon a nuanced understanding of the dialectic between subjectivity and historical context.

**Biography**

Erin Maglaque is a second-year doctoral candidate in the History Faculty at Oxford. She graduated from Bard College in New York with a BA in the History of Art (2010, distinction), and from Oxford (St. Hilda’s College) with an M.St in Medieval Studies (2011, distinction). She was awarded a Clarendon Scholarship for the length of her D.Phil. She has spoken at the International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, 2012) and will be speaking at the Renaissance Society of America annual meeting (San Diego, 2013). She has also presented at smaller workshops. She has a forthcoming chapter on contested devotional space in late-medieval Cairo appearing with Brill this year.

**Group 2: Finding the person in their writing**

**Revd. Isobel Rathbone**

**Scrutinising the Texts: the life and work of King Alfred, from his own writing.**

My present work concerns the translations which comprise the ‘Alfredian Corpus’, focussing in detail on two specific texts. The first of these, the *Cura Pastoralis,* is a close translation from its Latin original, the *Regula Pastoralis* of Pope Gregory the Great. The other, the *Soliloquies,* is a useful contrast because it takes a very free approach to its original, to the point where it can appropriately be described not as a translation but as a free rendering of St. Augustine’s *Soliloquia* which incorporates material from various other sources.

In the *Soliloquies* Alfred, like Augustine, sets out to understand God and his own soul. In this paper I shall explore how he adapts and combines his sources, using the dialogue form to pursue both his own interior exploration and the external quest of discovering how God can best be understood in the context of ninth-century Wessex society. In the process, he investigates and consolidates his own ideals of kingship, using native idiom, and especially metaphor, to paint an engaging picture in which wisdom and authority, and earthly and heavenly kingship, combine. The result is autobiographical in that it reflects Alfred’s own life and concerns, at the same time as establishing an authority for kingship in Wessex which reflects that of the kingdom of God.

**Biography**

Isobel Rathbone is currently in her fourth year of study for a part-time D Phil at the University of Oxford. Her tutor is Canon Professor Sarah Foot and her college is Lady Margaret Hall. The title of her thesis is ‘The Theological Agenda of King Alfred’s Educational Reforms and she is working on a comparison of the Latin and Old English versions of the *Cura Pastoralis* and the *Soliloquies.* She is also an ordained priest in the Church of England, working part-time in a parish.

Her previous academic experience is: MA in Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, 1999 – 2002; MA in Classics and Anglo-Saxon, University of Cambridge, 1966 – 2000.

**Robert Smith:**

**“There is no history: there is only biography” – what the life of John Trussell of Winchester can tell us**

John Trussell of Winchester was a poet in Elizabethan London at the height of its literary glory; a historian, at the time when the great seventeenth-century antiquarians were revolutionising the practice of history; a politician and leading citizen of Winchester, as England collapsed into civil war. His life, and his extensive manuscript writings, have been comparatively little studied; and this paper will show that those scholars who have taken notice of him have done so in limited and restricted ways. Arguing that history cannot be understood except as the agglomeration of intersecting individual lives, the paper insists on the value of chronological narrative biography as a primary means of understanding history, and seeks to show what can we can learn from a life of John Trussell. The detailed biography we are able to reconstruct, and the complexities which emerge from it, are a caution to historians to value the testimony and lived experiences of early modern individuals above scholarly interpretative paradigms, especially the opposed dichotomies which often feature in analysis of the period leading up to the civil war: royalist/parliamentarian, conservative/revolutionary, Catholic/Protestant, puritan/Anglican, and so on. While such concepts can be useful, the function of narrative biography, this paper argues, is to remind us that human lives are rarely so simple.

Robert Smith is a PhD candidate at the University of Southampton, aiming to complete in July 2013. He is researching a life of John Trussell, a historian, poet and civic official of Winchester in the early modern era.

**Group 3: Group biography**

**Kathryn Maude – King’s College London**

**Writing Community: the Opportunities and Challenges of Group Biography**

The biographical move in contemporary scholarship can isolate a prominent figure from their community. The concentration on Goscelin and Eve at Wilton is a good example of this. Group biography is a form that is common practice in twentieth century historiography, but has not yet been adopted fully by medieval historians. This paper will consider the opportunities and challenges of a group biography for the study of monastic culture. Focussing on the Wilton community at the time of Eve and Goscelin, I argue it is only by considering them as part of a community, and attempting not to privilege their stories, that we can gain an understanding of the culture at the time.

Biographies should derive from the form of their subjects’ lives; in the case of a monastery or nunnery, the form of the subjects’ lives is communal. Treating them as individuals in the modern sense of the word fails to capture why we are interested in their lives to begin with. One problem with group biography is that people are apply communal labels to groups that would not have thought of themselves as such, whereas this form of biography would seem to me to work best when the group has a sense of a group identity, as I argue that the nuns of Wilton did. Considering this nunnery as a group, then, enables us to bear witness to the social nature of their lives and the collective construction of their group narrative.

**Biography**

Kathryn Maude completed her undergraduate degree in English at the University of Cambridge and then went on to gain a distinction in her Masters in Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds. She is now in the second year of a PhD at King’s College London, with Professor Clare Lees. Her thesis investigates a group of texts in Old English, Latin and Anglo-Norman directly addressed to women in the period 960-1160. These texts reflect the multilingual textual culture of the time, and also the range of material – historical, religious, legal and epistolary – written to and commissioned by women in this period.

**Adrienne Miller**

**The children of Esmé Stuart, first duke of Lennox: a noble family biography**

While prosopographical studies of individuals are highly valuable, a biographical study of a small group is a unique way to compare contemporaneous experiences. The four children of Esmé Stuart, first duke of Lennox, were incomparably privileged nobles under James VI of Scotland. Esmé had been the first in a long line of James’s favourites, and upon his death in 1583 the king turning his attention and affection immediately to Esmé’s children. One by one the king called the children to his side in Scotland, leading to the establishment of one of the most powerful dynastic factions in the country.

Henrietta, Ludovick, Esmé, and Marie Stuart received unrivalled royal favour, made exceptionally powerful marriages, and were adored and cared for like the king’s own children. While each of their careers was fascinating individually it is through analysis of them as a group that we begin to see patterns of behaviour developing that were atypical to most contemporary magnates: a sense of entitlement to their position with James, the ability to stretch the boundaries of his tolerance while maintaining privileged positions, and petulance rather than deference.

A limitation to this type of study may be that, since it gives equal attention to multiple figures, some of the finer details of their individual personalities could be lost in the process. But the benefits outweigh the negatives, with biographies of composite piece adding to the bigger picture of an unusual noble family in early modern Scotland.

**Biography**

Adrienne Miller is a Ph.D. research student at the University of Edinburgh, investigating the career of the seventh earl of Menteith from 1625 to 1649. Research interests include sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scottish nobility and lordship, political patronage networking, local political and government administration, and noble indebtedness. Her forthcoming publications include a biographical article on the second duke of Lennox and a comparative study of the conciliar relationships between Charles I, the marquis of Hamilton, and the earl of Menteith.

**Group 4**

**Writing the biographies of people and their things**

**Maria Kirk**

**Books and their lives: Collection, biography and the Petworth House plays**

This paper will focus on biographies of people and objects, and the interplay between them as revealed by the study of a collection. It will explore the relationship between the biography of the collector and the biography of the collection. The paper will focus on a particular collection of 148 early modern printed quarto plays kept at Petworth House in Sussex. The publishing dates of the plays range from 1590 to 1638, and they were collected and bound into sammelband volumes in the mid-seventeenth century. They were probably acquired around the same time by Algernon Percy, the 10th Earl of Northumberland, and his involvement, or perhaps lack of, in the selection and purchase of the plays will be discussed. The paper will explore some of the issues raised when considering the specific relationship between a collector and his collection - can we always consider collection to be a highly personal activity? How relevant to the collection are the biographical details of the collector’s life? What can the collection really tell us about the collector?

The paper will also explore the “past lives” of some of the quartos, as well as setting out a theory of how the collection came to exist in the form it is currently in. Ultimately the paper will seek to show how the study of the Petworth collection can inform an understanding of the 10th Earl of Northumberland’s life, and vice versa, and will discuss both the usefulness of this approach and its potential pitfalls.

**Biography**

Maria Kirk is a second year doctoral student at the University of Susssex studying for a PhD in Early Modern Literature and Culture. Her PhD project is funded by an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award and is jointly supervised by the University of Sussex and the National Trust. Her research focusses on the relationship between performance, consumption and collection in the early- to mid-seventeenth century, with specific reference to a collection of late-16th and early-17th century play quartos which are owned by the National Trust and kept at Petworth House in Sussex.

**Tracey Wedge**

**Considering a biography of Maynard Buckwith (d.1593) foreign denizen and hosier**

Maynard Buckwith arrived in London from the Low Countries around 1553. This was a turbulent year in England’s religious and regnal history. By 1560 Buckwith was attached to the household of one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. His relationship with this patron continued after Buckwith established his own business in the Liberties of London. Evidence for Buckwith’s career can be found in the portraits and surviving papers of his patron, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588). Yet there was clearly more to this man than these documents and images suggest. This paper will examine the evidence for Buckwith’s life and career and consider, by comparison, the evidence available for Leicester’s English tailor. By locating Buckwith within his community and exploring his relationships, his biography can be expanded to demonstrate he was a figure not wholly defined by his thnicity and the products he produced for his patron.

**Biography**

Tracey Wedge is a New Zealander, and completing a PhD in History at the University of Southampton. She has a background in the heritage sector, as a conservator of cultural heritage, and finds the objects people have created, the circumstances of their use, and the history they represent fascinating. She is particularly interested in the networks of production that were creating the dress for Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588), and the wider court. These people created the visual spectacle of the court yet their role and lives remain little explored. She plans to continue to expand this research on completion of her doctorate.