

The Inaugural Lectures 2008

Inspirational thinking from some of the world's greatest minds
Autumn / Winter 2008





““ A Word of Welcome

Join us for a stimulating season of public talks by internationally renowned academic leaders who are now working at the University of Aberdeen.

Today we continue to attract great minds. Over recent years eminent professors who are international leaders in their fields have joined the University from many of the world's most prestigious institutions of learning.

In our 2008 autumn season, a selection of our leading academic scholars will share their thinking, and showcase their pioneering research on issues from Norse mythology to brain neurons, mathematics and music, stem cell therapies, philosophy, physics and fantasy in the nineteenth century in Scotland and Ireland and reflections on the history of Irish soldiers in France in the eighteenth century.

With a programme that has something for everyone, we hope that you will join us for these lectures. We look forward to welcoming you to the University for what promises to be a truly inspiring series.

To reserve your free space at these lectures, please visit:

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Alternatively, contact the University of Aberdeen Events Office on 01224 273874.



Professor Cairns Craig

Lecture title

Philosophy, Physics and Fantasy
in Nineteenth-Century Scotland
and Ireland

Date and time

Monday 20 October, 6.00pm

Location

Kings College
Conference Centre,
University of Aberdeen

Philosophy, Physics and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century Scotland and Ireland

In his lecture, Professor Craig will discuss the influence of science on intellectual thought in nineteenth-century Scotland and Ireland. Between 1850 and 1890, these two countries – in the persons of Lord Kelvin, Peter Guthrie Tait, and James Clerk Maxwell – were responsible for the development of the new science of energy.

Yet this period is generally regarded as one of intellectual decline in Scotland (the 'blackout' of the Enlightenment), as well as intellectual escapism in Ireland, characterised W.B. Yeats' interest in magic. Tracing the influence of the new physics on philosophy, and on the development of fantasy literature (George MacDonald, Robert Louis Stevenson, J.M. Barrie, W.B. Yeats), the lecture will reconsider the achievements of late nineteenth century Scottish and Irish culture.

Professor Cairns Craig was formerly Professor of Scottish and Modern Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Cairns Craig took up Directorship of the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen in 2005. He is author of *'Out of History'* (1996), *'The Modern Scottish Novel'* (1999), *'Associationism and the Literary Imagination'* (2007), and general editor of the *'History of Scottish Literature'* (1987-9). A Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy, he was awarded an OBE in 2007 for services to literature and education.



Professor Neil Price

Lecture title

Viking Funerals and the Origins
of Norse Mythology

Date and time

Monday 27 October, 6.00pm

Location

Kings College
Conference Centre,
University of Aberdeen

Viking Funerals and the Origins of Norse Mythology

Professor Price will talk about the viking diaspora of the eighth to eleventh centuries AD which created the modern nation states of Scandinavia and transformed the northern world. But what animated this extraordinary cultural expansion? How did the early medieval Norse see themselves?

Some of the answers may be found in the Viking way of observing death, which produced some of the most spectacular burial monuments known to archaeology. Using new research, Professor Price will take us deep into the Viking mind to explore their attitudes to mortality, with implications for their unique outlook on life. From excavations, it seems that pagan funerals may have involved complex elements of mortuary theatre – ritual plays literally enacted at the graveside. The evidence suggests an almost infinite variety of funerary dramas, each providing a poetic passage for the deceased into a world of ancestral stories. Could these tales be the

beginnings of what we know today as Norse mythology?

Professor Neil Price took up the Chair of Archaeology in 2007, having spent the previous 15 years in Scandinavian academia. Educated at the universities of London, York and Uppsala, he is a leading specialist in Viking archaeology and the study of ancient religion. The recipient of many awards, his books include *The Vikings in Brittany*, *The Archaeology of Shamanism* and *The Viking Way*. Neil is also a Consultant Professor at Harvard and a Senior Research Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.



Professor Tibor Harkany

Lecture title

**Wiring and Firing Neuronal
Networks: Endocannabinoids
Take Centre Stage**

Date and time

Monday 3 November, 6.00pm

Location

**Auditorium,
Polwarth Building,
Foresterhill.**

Wiring and Firing Neuronal Networks: Endocannabinoids Take Centre Stage

In the developing brain, an amazing variety of neurons are produced and organised into complex neuronal networks to control higher brain functions that make us distinctly human. Neuronal development is strictly regulated by signalling molecules that control the identification of neuronal subtypes

This lecture will highlight newly discovered principles of neuronal specification and wiring into networks by discussing fundamental roles of endocannabinoids in controlling the acquisition of neuronal identity during nervous system development. Endocannabinoids are endogenous compounds similar in function to delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol found in cannabis. Recent findings about the roles of endocannabinoids as developmental signalling cues has advanced our understanding of the detrimental affects of maternal cannabis smoking on the developing brain of the unborn baby.

Professor Tibor Harkany is a developmental neurophysiologist who has gained international reputation with his work on identifying unique factors affecting the organisation and functions of the cerebral cortex. He has also identified novel means to feedback control synaptic efficacy and plasticity in cortical neuronal network. His present work is focused on understanding cell biology principles of how maternal cannabis use affects the identity of neurons, and alters neural pathways such that there are permanent effects on the cognitive functions and emotional control of offspring.



Professor Thomas Bartlett

Lecture title

'The Wild Geese'. Reflections on the History of the Irish soldiers in the Service of France in the Eighteenth-Century

Date and time

Monday 10 November, 6.00pm

Location

Kings College
Conference Centre,
University of Aberdeen

'The Wild Geese'. Reflections on the History of the Irish soldiers in the Service of France in the Eighteenth-Century

Professor Bartlett will be examining previous work on the Irish soldiers in French service, drawing some comparisons with Scottish soldiers abroad in the same period, and looking at what still needs to be done in this field of research.

During the early modern period of European history, many tens of thousands of Irish soldiers enlisted in continental armies, principally those of France and the Habsburgs. While these 'Wild Geese' as they were described have not lacked an historian, much about them remains relatively unclear. The numbers who left Ireland, their motives for leaving, their impact on the host societies, and the memory of their exploits in Ireland are still debated. Professor Bartlett will talk about his study of the military origins of the Irish state in the early modern period, and will examine Irish attitudes towards the British Empire in the nineteenth-century. This lecture will seek to outline some fruits of recent work on these soldiers,

and address some of the other issues surrounding their role and legacy in modern Irish history.

Professor Thomas Bartlett is Professor of Irish History at the University of Aberdeen. He was formerly Professor of Modern Irish History at University College Dublin. Professor Bartlett has held visiting professorships at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1982-3), at the University of Washington, Seattle (1997), and at the University of Notre Dame, (1999). He was also Parnell Fellow in Irish Studies at Magdalene College, Cambridge (2001-2) and he was awarded a Government of Ireland Senior Fellowship in 2002. He was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1995.



Professor David J. Benson

Lecture title

Mathematics and Music

Date and time

Monday 17 November, 6.00pm

Location

Kings College

Conference Centre,

University of Aberdeen

Mathematics and Music

Professor Dave Benson will talk about why there has been an explosion of interest in exploring the many connections between mathematics and music.

Professor Benson will talk about his new book *Music: A Mathematical Offering* and will discuss questions such as: Why are intervals such as the octave and the fifth consonant, while others are dissonant? Why are there twelve semitones in an octave? What are meantone and well tempered scales? What would Bach have thought, and why?

Professor Benson will be discussing what causes consonance and dissonance, and in particular, illustrating dissonant perfect octaves and fifths. This will lead into a discussion of the origins of scales and temperaments, and an illustration of how scales form lattices which can lie in real space or on a torus. This lecture will provide an insight into the topic of mathematical sophistication.

Professor David Benson obtained his PhD in mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1982, and went on to work in mathematics departments at Yale, Northwestern University, Oxford, the University of Georgia, and now Aberdeen. As an amateur musician he has sung in the choruses of many operas. He is the author of six books, including *“Music: A Mathematical Offering”* (CUP 2006) and *“Classifying Spaces of Sporadic Groups”* (AMS 2008).



Professor Cosimo De Bari

Lecture title

**Stem Cell Therapies for
Musculoskeletal Applications:
From Bench to Bedside**

Date and time

Monday 24 November, 6.00pm

Location

**Auditorium,
Polwarth Building,
Foresterhill.**

Stem Cell Therapies for Musculoskeletal Applications: From Bench to Bedside

Regenerative medicine is a new exciting field that aims to develop stem cell treatments for conditions that result in loss of tissues such as osteoarthritis. There is vibrant interest in stem cell research, but how far are we from a routine use of stem cells in the clinic?

Depending on the clinical indication, two main stem cell-based therapeutic strategies are being pursued: transplantation of exogenous stem cells and pharmacological activation of endogenous resident stem cells.

Professor De Bari will review current stem cell research for musculoskeletal applications and discuss the hurdles that need to be overcome before therapies based on human stem cells can enter the clinic.

Professor Cosimo De Bari graduated in Medicine (maxima cum laude) from the University of Bari (Italy), where he also underwent specialist training in Rheumatology. He then moved to Belgium, where he obtained his PhD from the University of Leuven.

In 2003 Cosimo moved to the UK in the Department of Rheumatology at King's College London. In May 2005 he was awarded an MRC Clinician Scientist Fellowship and in December 2005 was appointed Clinical Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Rheumatology.

Since September 2007 Cosimo has been Professor of Translational Medicine and Honorary Consultant Rheumatologist at the University of Aberdeen, heading a unit of stem cell research for skeletal tissue repair in the Bone & Musculoskeletal Research Programme.

Cosimo has expertise in the field of stem cell research for musculoskeletal repair, regenerative medicine and tissue engineering.

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The Inaugural lectures provide you with the opportunity to hear first hand about their ground-breaking work.



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