



‘Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain, 1550-1640’



A Joint Conference organised by the Centre for Humanities, Music and Performing Arts at the University of Plymouth and the Centre for Early Modern Studies at the University of Aberdeen

To be held at the University of Plymouth, 14-16 April 2011

CALL FOR PAPERS



This conference investigates the cultural uses of the letter, and the related practises of correspondence in early modern culture. Concentrating on the years 1550-1640, it examines a crucial period in the development of the English vernacular letter that saw a significant extension of letter-writing skills throughout society and an expansion in the uses to which letters were put. The conference aims to enhance our understanding of epistolary culture and to challenge accepted models of epistolarity through the study of letter-writing practices in all their nuanced complexity, ranging from the textual production of letters, their subsequent delivery and circulation, to the various ways in which letters were read and preserved for posterity. The transmission and reception of correspondence is a major theme for exploration, from the various processes by which letters were delivered in an age before the post office, to their copying and dissemination in manuscript form, and publication in print, as well as the oral divulcation of letters through group and public reading. Study of the early modern letter in its material and cultural forms can reveal the complex interplay of material practices of letter-writing with rhetorical strategies of the letter text. Contemporary literary appropriations of the letter on page and stage demonstrate the cultural significance of the letter and its potential resonances.

Proposals are invited for papers that treat the following key areas:

- The materiality of the letter: the physicality of correspondence (paper, ink, seals, folding) as well as the social context of epistolarity (composition, delivery, reading, archiving)
- Correspondence networks; the circulation of letters; postal systems and modes of delivery
- Letters, news and intelligence
- Authenticity, deception and surveillance: forgeries, secrecy, ciphers and codes
- Women's letters and the gendered nature of letter-writing
- Epistolary literacies, social hierarchies and the acquisition and diffusion of letter-writing skills
- Manuscript letters and letters in print
- The letter as a cultural genre and the rhetorics of letter-writing
- Humanistic letter-writing practices and the familiar letter; letter-writing manuals and models; education, pedagogy and learning to write letters
- Categories or types of letters: suitors' letters, letters of petition, love letters, letters of condolence
- Genres of printed letters: prefatory letters, dedicatory letters, address to the readers
- Staging the letter: letters and letter-writing in drama
- Editing and the digitization of correspondence

Proposals for papers, including titles and abstracts (of no more than 300 words) should be sent to James Daybell (james.daybell@plymouth.ac.uk) and Andrew Gordon (a.gordon@abdn.ac.uk) before 1st July 2010.

Confirmed Speakers Include

Alan Stewart (Columbia University)

Lynne Magnusson (University of Toronto)

Gary Schneider (University of Texas, Pan American)

The Organisers

James Daybell is Reader in Early Modern British History at the University of Plymouth. His publications include *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford, 2006), three collections of essays, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700* (Ashgate, 2004), *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* (Palgrave, 2001) and *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices, 1580-1730* (Palgrave, 2010) and more than twenty articles and essays in journals and edited collections. Dr Daybell is currently completing a monograph entitled, *The Material Letter: The Practices and Culture of Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England* (Palgrave 2011)

Andrew Gordon is Co-Director of the Centre for Early Modern Studies at the University of Aberdeen, and Programme Co-ordinator of the Department of English. He has published articles on various aspects of urban culture in the renaissance from city mapping to the urban signboard, and co-edited (with Bernhard Klein) *Literature, Mapping and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 2001) and (with Trevor Stack) a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* (2007) devoted to early modern concepts of citizenship. A monograph entitled *Writing the City* is forthcoming. His work on manuscript culture has focused principally on letter-writing and included articles on Francis Bacon, the earl of Essex, John Donne, and early modern libels.

For further details please email: james.daybell@plymouth.ac.uk, or a.gordon@abdn.ac.uk.