

Transatlantic Showcase: New Directions in Scottish Women's and Gender History

Detailed programme

Session 1: Friday 12 Nov 17.00-19.00 GMT / 12.00 – 14.00 EST

Rachel Delman (University of York, UK)

Women and the Built Environment in Late Medieval Scotland

My talk will provide a taster of my research on women's architectural patronage in late medieval Scotland. Using the examples of Mary of Guelders, Queen of Scots (d. 1463) and the Edinburgh merchant Jonet Rynd (d. 1553), I will draw attention to surviving buildings commissioned by these women and will briefly explore how they deployed the built environment to communicate messages regarding their gender, power, and status within the Scottish landscape. I will also use my talk as an opportunity to reflect upon the previous lack of scholarship on women's architectural patronage in Scotland and will suggest how attention to this area can provide a new perspective on the study of women's and gender history, both in Scotland and further afield.

Charlotte Holmes (University of Edinburgh, UK)

Domestic Medicine in Early Modern Scotland: the Medical Recipe Collection of Anna Balfour and Jean Wemyss

This presentation will focus on the medical recipe collection of a mother and her daughter: Anna Balfour, Countess of Wemyss and Jean Wemyss, Countess of Sutherland. Like a modern household medicine cabinet, these recipes were often written just in case, allowing the women to care for their husbands, children, and servants. Using this collection, coupled with an account book and letters, the paper explores medical provision in upper class households over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Alice Glaze (Know History, Canada)

Clashing with the Kirk: Women's Work, Words and Friendships in Seventeenth-Century Scotland

This presentation will examine some of the ways in which women's lives and work in seventeenth-century Canongate could lead to clashes with local church authorities. Through a series of brief case studies, I will explore how details of women's work can be found in instances of Sabbath breach, and their friendships revealed in harbouring cases. I will also highlight women's sometimes salty interactions with kirk session elders and others.

Theresa Mackay (University of Victoria, Canada)

Gàidhealtachd Women and their Coastal Kitchens: Nineteenth-century Foodways in the West Highlands and Islands

This project explores the roles of indigenous Gaelic-speaking people of the west Highlands and Islands in reproducing, adapting, protecting, and innovating food culture in the nineteenth

century. It will examine foodways and daily lives in regional, national, and transnational contexts to uncover coastal food system challenges and understand how feeding a family and community required significant flexibility, resilience, innovation, and agency. Exploring how multi-generational households sustained themselves during times of bounty and hardship, this project considers the coastal kitchen—gendered workspaces of women and a gathering space for families—as a networked centre of Scottish culture, highlighting moments of persistence, resistance, flexibility, and resourcefulness in response to environmental changes and the reach of nation and empire into coastal homes.

Session 2: Friday 19 November 14.00-16.00 GMT / 09.00 – 11.00 EST

Chelsea Larsson (University of Guelph, Canada)

Wicked Women or Ladies in Charge? Noblewomen and Violence in the Scottish Borders

In both academic and popular representations, the Anglo-Scottish border region of the late medieval and early modern periods has been cast as a violent, lawless and masculine arena. Several scholars have asserted that women were excluded from the raiding and feuding that characterised border society; however, historians have perhaps been too quick to dismiss the involvement of women in violent forms of administration and conflict resolution. The records of Scotland's highest criminal court are not the juiciest or most detailed documents, but reading between the lines offers a glimpse into the ways that noblewomen related to prominent border families engaged in legitimate uses of violence typically reserved for men. The judicial responses, or lack thereof, to these women suggest that society perceived them as acting well within their social and political roles.

Lisa Baer-Tsarfaty (University of Guelph, Canada)

The Problem of Authority in Early Modern Scotland: Ambition, Feminality, and Control, 1560-1625

In the wake of the Scottish Reformation and the deposition of Mary Stuart as Queen of Scots, Scottish discourse increasingly reflected a growing concern about the exercise of personal ambition. Ambition was rhetorically vilified, and individuals perceived as ambitious were punished through attacks on their reputations, or with accusations of treason, witchcraft, or consorting with witches. My research explores the reasoning behind this vilification of ambition, arguing that ambition was not only explicitly coded female, but was also perceived by early modern Scots as a serious threat to the exercise of the legitimate authority.

Alice Krzanich (University of Edinburgh, UK)

Female Domestic Servants in Early Industrial Scotland: Legal Principles of the Master-Servant Relationship as They Applied to Women in the Period c 1790 – c 1850

My PhD research looks at the law regarding female domestic servants in the period c 1790 – c 1850 in Scotland. Scots law at this time included rules for masters and servants entering a service contract; the respective rights and responsibilities of the parties under the contract; and the rules for dissolving a service contract. My research seeks to understand the influence of class and gender upon these legal principles as they applied to female domestic servants. It is consequently an example of women's legal history that draws upon a number of sources to understand the historical relationship between women and the law.

Marianna Golinucci (University of Glasgow, UK)

'Gaping Silences Where Those Other Voices Should Be': Race, Gender, and Activism in Scotland, 1980s-1990. A Historical and Literary Analysis

My research examines race, gender, and activism in 1980s-1990s Scotland from two perspectives. Firstly, it focuses on Black and Asian women's grassroots organisations that began operating in the early '80s, including Scotland's first Black women's aid, the Edinburgh Chinese Women's Group, the Scottish Black Women's Group and the Lothian Black Forum. Such networks provided a safe space for racialised women, offering support and a wide range of activities – from the provision of shelter for those escaping from abusive relationships, to classes to help confront issues of racial discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, healthcare and political participation. Secondly, my research looks at poetry, a genre that had become an ideal medium for feminists affiliated with the Women's Liberation Movement and Black British feminism to express themselves and their experience of the world. The early poetry collections by Black Scottish poets Maud Sulter, Jackie Kay and Maya Chowdhry significantly challenged established models within Scottish and Black British literary spheres by introducing a poetic subject theretofore unacknowledged by accepted narratives. Merging different histories and ideas into a poetics that was evidently Black, Scottish, feminist, lesbian, and highly aware of interlocking power dynamics, their poetry can be seen as representing the start of a politically conscious Black Scottish aesthetic. My talk will provide a project overview and discuss the question driving my analysis: 'Did Scotland have a Black women's movement?' I will suggest reasons why existing research on Black British feminism has tended to overlook the Scottish context, outline the methodologies that will be employed and introduce the protagonists of this yet under-examined chapter of Scottish social and cultural history.

Session 3: Friday 19 November 17.00-19.00 GMT / 12.00 – 14.00 EST

Sierra Dye (University of Guelph, Canada)

Oaken Posts and Charms for an Ill Eye: Witchcraft, Healing, and Women's Networks in Mid-Seventeenth Century Scotland

Women, witchcraft, and words have long been tangled up in social consciousness and folk belief in Scotland. The curses, imprecations, and quarrels of ordinary Scottish women could lead to accusations of witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but so too could allegations of charming, healing, and other efficacious speech. In this talk, I will discuss a case from Paisley in 1650 which contains many fascinating elements and descriptions of both healing and harm attributed to two accused witches: Jeane Scott and Jonet Galbraith. In particular, I will look at some common themes and formats in their charms and other accusations against them, as well as examine some possible evidence for networks of female charmers and the transmission of healing knowledge in early modern Scotland.

Taylor Breckles (Simon Fraser University, Canada)

The Anti-Colonial Sounds of Music: Scots Gaelic and Musqueam Resistance as Expressed in the Song Poetry of Màiri Mhòr nan Oran and Christie Lee Charles

Song poetry has been recognized on a sociocultural level as significant, but it has not yet been explored within the Scottish/Indigenous cultural relationship nor in the context of decolonization. This project seeks to examine the relationship between song and colonial resistance in both Scottish and Indigenous contexts via popular songstresses who used their traditional, non-English languages to communicate colonial resistance through music. Specifically, this project intends to look at songs by famous Gaelic poet, Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (Mary MacPherson), as well as Vancouver's first Indigenous Poet Laureate, Christie Lee Charles. The languages of Scots Gaelic and Musqueam (hənqəminəm), respectively, play a significant role in the works of these poets and, arguably, in the decolonial message present within the songs.

Karen Mailley-Watt (University of Glasgow and Glasgow School of Art, UK)

'Ladies have the Knack of Making the Most of Wall Space': The Glasgow Society of Lady Artists since 1882

The Glasgow Society of Lady Artists (GSLA), established in 1882, by eight female students of the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) was crucial in helping navigate the social, political and in some cases economic barriers placed before its Artist members. Established as an artists' club, GSLA quickly developed into Scotland's first residential club for women, opening its doors to lay members in the 1890s and thus servicing the needs for both the professional artist and women from other professional fields. Artist members included Ann Macbeth, Jessie M. King, Helen Paxton Brown, Grace Wilson Melvin and De Courcy Lewthwaite Dewar. From 1893 the club settled at a townhouse in 5 Blythswood Square. Over the years the building's rooms were utilised as studios, for organising exhibitions, meetings, lectures and hosting a sketch club. Via fundraising in 1895, GSLA commissioned the architects Fred Rowntree and George Walton to design a custom exhibition gallery to showcase members' works and visiting exhibitions. This short talk will discuss the three spaces occupied by GSLA in the 1880s and 1890s and how each of the spaces (135 Wellington Street, 22 Charing Cross and 5 Blythswood Square) were used as platforms to create visibility and opportunity for women.

Sarah Leith (University of St Andrews, UK)

'Poor little Susannas'? Repression and Scottish sensuality in the writings of Naomi Mitchison, Willa Muir and Nan Shepherd

The intellectuals of the Scottish Literary Renaissance were united by their challenges to the Scottish Reformation, criticising not only its alleged suffocation of Scotland's culture but also its repression of sensuality. For the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, the Renaissance's figurehead, Scottish sensuality was exclusively masculine and heterosexual, but for Naomi Mitchison, Willa Muir and Nan Shepherd, Scottish sensuality was also inclusive of both the feminine and homosexuality. This talk seeks to explore these writers' ideas about repression and what they believed to be the free expression of female sensuality, which they viewed as bound up with Scottish national identity.