

British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS)

Report on activities

The 53rd BSECS **Annual Conference** took place on 3-5 January 2024 at St Hugh's College, Oxford. 152 papers were presented in 25 panels, 7 Roundtables, and 7 alternative-format sessions. A plenary lecture was given by the actor and writer Paterson Joseph, who also gave a live performance of 'Sancho & Me', a story connecting a Black life in the 18th-century transatlantic world with another in today's UK, and based on his novel *The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho*. The conference concert featured Ensemble Hesperis, whose programme was inspired by research conducted by Mary-Jannet Leith who won the BSECS-Georgian Papers Fellowship in 2021. The Conference's 'Listening Event' foregrounded members' concerns were around conference accessibility, and the advantages of hybrid conferencing. Next year, the conference will move to Pembroke College, Oxford on 8-10 2025, a venue that will permit more online involvement.

The main developments this year in support of BSECS' **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)** commitments were (i) establishment of an enhanced and revised mentoring scheme; (ii) new strategies to enhance the voice of our PGR/ECR members; (iii) new and enhanced inclusive guidance for conference participation and attendance; (iv) the establishment of an EDI policy working group; and (v) consultation with members on EDI through an in-person listening event at the annual conference and an online survey. The notes from the listening event and survey outcome are informing EDI strategy and planning for the coming year.

In July 2023 the Society's **Postgraduate (PG) and Early Career Researcher (ECR)** representatives organised a conference at the University of Edinburgh on the theme of 'Errantry, Exile and Elsewhere'. The conference attracted 47 delegates and was held over two days with parallel sessions, workshops, and tours. This year, in August 2024, the PG/ECR conference will be held in Uppsala, Sweden, returning to the tradition of hosting an international PG/ECR conference every other year. The theme is 'Communication and Exchange' and we have speakers from both the UK and Sweden presenting their research.

The ***Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies***, published by Wiley, continues to publish four issues each year. At least one each year is a Special Issue on a particular theme, including 'Writing Doctors and Writing Health in the Long Eighteenth Century' (March 2023) and 'Restoration Epistolarity' (March 2024). The Journal has featured 26 reviews of scholarly publications in the past 12 months, covering books about Handel and Scarlatti, works on military and scientific history, a landmark exhibition and publication on the artist Giacomo Ceruti, and a study of the reception of Jonathan Swift's works in China, among much else. The journal's reviewers range from PhD students to emeritus professors and we especially pride ourselves on the editorial support we offer to contributors at an early career stage.

Criticks is the online Reviews Hub for BSECS, providing entertaining, informative and provocative reviews of events, exhibitions and media that are of interest to scholars of the eighteenth century. Over 20 reviews have been published over the past 12 months, covering engagements with the eighteenth century in Media, Music, Theatre and Fine and Decorative Arts. The eighteenth century has enjoyed plenty of exposure on the silver and small screens this year, as reflected in our reviews of *Napoleon*, *Renegade Nell*, *Tom Jones*, *Our Flag Means Death* and further installments in the Netflix *Bridgerton Universe*. On stage, we've seen and reviewed new adaptations of *Northanger Abbey*, *The School for Scandal*, *The Welkin* and *The*

Divine Mrs S, whilst in the concert hall we've enjoyed the Handel Festival in Halle and a new production of 1772's *At the Venice Fair* (La Fiera di Venezia). Finally, it has been a bumper year for eighteenth-century exhibitions. We've reviewed new exhibitions celebrating the work of Joshua Reynolds (The Box, Plymouth), Vandyke (V&A South Kensington), Frances Williams (V&A South Kensington), Jean Etienne Liotard (National Gallery, London), Angelica Kauffman (Royal Academy of Arts, London) and William Blake (Fitzwilliam, Cambridge), alongside major exhibitions designed to provoke courageous conversations about art and its role in narratives of empire, enslavement and resistance, such as 'Entangled Pasts' (Royal Academy) and 'Black Atlantic' (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).

BSECS made **awards** of over £10,000 to scholars at all career stages, with a focus on postgraduate and early-career researchers. The Society contributed funds to joint prizes with the Bodleian Library, the Georgian Group, the Georgian Papers Project, the Birmingham Eighteenth-Century Centre, the Queen Mary Centre for Eighteenth-Century Studies, and the Society for Theatre Research. BSECS also provided financial support to events around the UK.

More information on these and other aspects of the Society's work can be found on our website: <https://www.bsecs.org.uk/>