OVERVIEW

The course is designed to give students a research-based grounding in the social history of eighteenth-century London. It will examine the forces behind the city’s growth and wealth. It will enquire into the relationship between cockneys, provincial Londoners and the host of newcomers from Scotland, Ireland and the European mainland, as well as Jews and black slaves from the West and East Indies and America. It will investigate how Londoners made a living and how they enjoyed themselves in coffee houses, theatres, pleasure gardens and parks. It will look at
how the poor lived and the problems of crime and disorder, and how a vicious system of penal justice responded with prison, transportation and public executions. It will introduce the fractious world of religion in London and its connections with politics, City radicalism, and the early campaigns for parliamentary democracy. And a host of celebrities will rub shoulders with linkboys, beggars, porters, weavers, maids-of-all-work and prostitutes – just as they did when walking the streets of eighteenth-century London.

**Introduction: London and Londoners in the Eighteenth Century**

An introductory seminar will outline the development of London during the eighteenth century. This was a growing city with new wealthy suburbs especially important in the north-west. The construction of two new bridges at Westminster in 1750 and Blackfriars in 1767 opened up development opportunities south of the Thames that were little more than nascent at the end of the century. On the other hand, the centre of London grew older and more worn out, with a ring of decaying slums around the City of London, including parts of Westminster.

Some examples of the content of further seminars are given below.

**Cockneys, migrants and minorities**

The growth in population – from around half a million at the beginning of the century to nearly a million at the end – was strongly reliant on new migrants. They came from the English provinces in great numbers, especially young men and women seeking work; labourers, skilled workers and professionals came from Scotland, Ireland, and the European mainland; and black slaves came from the West and East Indies and America, posing a problem for the British courts as slave masters sought to enforce slavery in London. Not all fitted in easily: the Scots were deeply resented among the middling sort of people in particular, and the Irish poor were often at odds with their cockney neighbours. Black people, in general, though seem to have been treated relatively well.

**Women and Men: Gender Relations and Celebrity**

Women and men interacted at many points. They did so, of course, in the home where the working worlds of men and women often combined in homes which were
also workshops. And in the homes of the middling sort almost all would employ one or more female domestic servants, and in richer households a variety of men servants, in livery and without. Beyond the domestic, men and women shared the enjoyment of many of London’s public pleasures, and in the street the most complex and sometimes difficult point of contact concerned prostitution, one of the great facts of life in eighteenth-century London. Prostitution, perhaps surprisingly, was one route to celebrity, as also were the stage for actresses and Grub Street for men; and noble men and women also became renowned characters on the streets of London.

**Other seminars** cover making a living in City and suburbs; the worlds of print and paint; London’s public pleasures from coffee-houses to theatres and taking along exhibitions of monstrosities and bear-baiting along the way; politics and religion, the two inextricably intertwined for much of the century; and poverty, crime and the ‘bloody code’ of the criminal ‘justice’ system.

Jerry White