

Photo Studios in Focus

18th – 19th April 2024

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Convened by Emily Stevenson, Christopher Morton, and Clare Harris
Supported by The Leverhulme Trust, The Pitt Rivers Museum, and Linacre College



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Photo: E. Stevenson, 2023

Since the 19th century photo studios have served as crucial sites of everyday photographic practice, arenas for the imagination and performance of self and other, and spaces of complex transcultural encounters. This inter-disciplinary workshop will examine the photo studio as a physical space of social, commercial, and spatial relations, and diverse forms of practice.

The presentations will range widely in both time and social settings, asking questions such as: what role do the intimate physicalities of the photo studio play in the experience, value, and understanding of photography across different locations and historical settings? What forms of practice take place and change in the studio, and how are these remembered and narrated? What social relations have been formed, projected, maintained, and challenged in the studio? In what ways are studio encounters, practices, and relations connected to and reframed by the shifting biographies of studio photographs?

Expanding beyond the content and materiality of photographs themselves, this workshop will be the first of its kind to place the studio itself at the centre of enquiry. Papers will critically explore the mechanical, chemical, and artistic processes that take place within the studio, their position within wider socio-spatial networks, the economies of the studio, and/or the people who moved through them.

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Schedule

Day One, Thursday 18th April

13.30 – 14.00 Welcome with coffee

14.00 – 15.30 Panel One {Discussant – Stephen Hughes}

Christopher Morton, University of Oxford

Performing Vaishnavism: from the Parsi studio to the ethnographic archive

Sarica Robyn Balsari-Palsule, University College London

'Photo-Memes': Tradition and Modernity in Parsi Studio Photography

15.30 – 15.45 Coffee break

15.45 – 17.15 Panel Two {Discussant – Elizabeth Edwards}

Emily Stevenson, University of Oxford

Entangled Studios from 'Bangalore to Bengaluru'

Lucie Ryzova, University of Birmingham

Sites of Enchantment: Photographic Encounters in Late Colonial Egypt and Beyond

17.15 – 18.00 Pitt Rivers Museum Photograph Collections Visit

18.45 Dinner at Jamal's Indian Restaurant on Walton Street

Day Two, Friday 19th April

09.30 – 10.00 Coffee and a selection of breakfast pastries

10.00 – 11.30 Panel Three {Discussant – Clare Harris}

Christopher Pinney, University College London
Studios in an Age of Self-Photography

Vindhya Buthpitiya, University of St Andrews
“Government Authorized Studio”: Photographies of Disillusion and Disobedience in Northern Sri Lanka

11.30 – 11.45 Coffee break

11.30 – 13.00 Panel Four {Discussant – Elizabeth Edwards}

Rose Teanby, De Montfort University
Pioneering Women Professional Photographers: The early English photographic studio as a locus for social change.

Luke Gartlan, University of St Andrews
The Domestic Studio: Lord and Lady Kinnaird at Rossie Priory

13.00 – 13.45 Lunch

13.45 – 15.15 Panel Five {Discussant – Stephen Hughes}

Valentine Nyamndon, De Montfort University
One Photographer Four Studios: Circulations of photographic backdrops in Africa, a case study from Cameroon.

Brigitte Lardinois, University of the Arts London
Unveiling the Edward Reeves Archive in Lewes

15.15 – 16.15 Wrap-up/Next-steps Discussion

Abstracts

Performing Vaishnavism: from the Parsi studio to the ethnographic archive

Christopher Morton

On 14 July 1924, an Indian research student at Oxford called Noshirwan Ardeshir Thoothi, sat down to write a note to accompany a set of photographs he was sending one of his lecturers, the physical anthropologist L. H. Dudley Buxton. 'Most of these are Vanias of Gujarat', he wrote, 'and follow the Vaishnavite faith'. The photographs he included were large expensive platinum prints with a generous border, the work of Jehangir S. Tarapore, a successful Parsi studio owner on the Kalbadevi Road in Mumbai. This paper explores the multiple and complex layering of contexts in which this set of studio photographs became entangled soon after their creation, as a record of familial ties and Vania caste identity. The paper argues that the choice of Tarapore's studio as well as the conspicuous cost of the large platinum prints were important aspects of how the family sought to perform and consolidate their Vania identity. The studio becomes a space of dynamic interaction between the pictorialist Parsi style of photography that had influenced Tarapore, and the socioeconomic and cultural identifications of this Vaishnavite Vania family. Thus entwined, these performative studio encounters are ultimately put into sociological service by Thoothi as part of his research on the Vaishnavas, and then into the racial schema of an anthropological archive. Ultimately the paper asks questions about the ontology of these studio artefacts whose status as museum objects has shifted in context and perceived value so dramatically over the last one hundred years.

'Photo-Memes': Tradition and Modernity in Parsi Studio Photography

Sarica Balsari-Paluse

Following photography's introduction to India in 1840, the Parsis, a Zoroastrian minority community in India, became proprietors of many of the earliest commercial photographic studios in Bombay and regularly patronised studios for their own portraiture. Parsi enthusiasm for photography following the introduction of the carte-de-visite in 1854, signalled their affluence, transnationalism and elite status within a colonial context, particularly evident in the abundance of studio portraits displayed within Parsi homes.

In contemporary times, against a backdrop of Parsi population decline and fears of cultural erasure, these studio portraits evoke nostalgia for older Parsis as tokens of an irretrievable past. Even the Parsi-run photo studios in Bombay, once numerous, have now closed. Yet, such pastness is actively contested by a younger generation seeking to reimagine its identity through subversive images on social media. By

recycling studio portraits into ‘photo-memes’, Parsi content creators playfully refashion traditional markers of identity via creative placement of captions and anachronistic props, engendering new expressions of identity and reviving studio practices. This paper examines the unique digital phenomenon through an analysis of selected photo-memes and ethnographic data, highlighting the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, the renegotiation of social dynamics originally fostered in the studio and the afterlives of studio images in a digital era.

The Studio Beyond its Walls from ‘Bangalore to Bengaluru’

Emily Stevenson

From the late 19th century, photo studios in the British cantonment of Bangalore continuously opened, closed, changed hands, and moved location in response to personal and familial circumstances, business opportunities, local colonial geographies, and global events. As they did so, complex social, spatial, and professional relations were formed that extended beyond the walls of the studio and behind the lens of the camera. Few early studios continue to exist in Bengaluru (the city’s official name since 2014), yet these complex inter-studio entanglements that began in the context of colonialism continue to resonate into the present through urban material traces, oral histories, and the circulation of photographs.

In this paper I trace these studio entanglements over time from ‘Bangalore to Bengaluru.’ Whilst the numerous photographic encounters and relations that play out *within* studios provide important insights, by examining studios in relation to one another over time it becomes clear how they are themselves part of a wider and dynamic socio-spatial landscape. It is therefore necessary, I suggest, to expand our understanding of the studio beyond its walls to encompass the wider social, spatial, temporal, and professional entanglements between them.

Sites of Enchantment: Photographic Encounters in Late Colonial Egypt and Beyond

Lucie Ryzova

In the early decades of the 20th century, affordable commercial studios begun to spread across Egypt; ambulant photographers toured the Egyptian provinces; and consumer cameras became widely available to the emerging local middle class. Countless young, middling men and women used their cameras to produce portraits that replicated the space of the studio, turning little alleys, parks and gardens, rooftops or living rooms into makeshift photographic studios. This paper will examine these photographic encounters from several perspectives, foregrounding their spatial and temporal dimension, as well as their role in the production of modern selves in Egypt and beyond.

Firstly, I will argue that we need to enlarge our understanding of the “studio” to include such makeshift spaces. Secondly, at the centre of my analysis is the encounter between a person and a camera at the era of high modernity. These encounters are best understood as dense social performances that were self-reflexive and liminal, characterised by heightened awareness of the very act of representation. The concept of liminality is crucial here, as it not only describes the spatial location of these photographic encounters, but more importantly, the action that went on in front of the camera. Finally, I will argue that such encounters represented a form of modern magic, allowing the sitters to momentarily transform themselves into the person of their dreams and aspirations. They cultivated and realised some of the key desires unleashed by the processes of urban modernity; enabling young men and women to articulate the shape and content of modern selfhood, and to experiment with its boundaries.

Studios in an Age of Self-Photography

Christopher Pinney

This paper asks why studios still survive in India. The answer is two fold: a) they provide a performative space in which clients can “come out better” and the space of the studio still (just about) has the edge over mobile phone filters. b) the presence of a professional photographer is still *de rigueur* at weddings, and wedding photography and videography still underpins the economics of most studios. This reflects the continuing prestige attached to arranged marriage which is in turn an expression of the continuing vitality of caste.

“Government Authorized Studio”: Photographies of Disillusion and Disobedience in Northern Sri Lanka

Vindhya Buthpitiya

This paper examines studio practices associated with the production of identity photography in northern Sri Lanka. While the continued relevance and necessity of studios are bound to meeting the biometric demands of states, such photography also points to prevalent desires for and imaginings of mobility against a backdrop of ethno-nationalist struggle, and postwar uncertainty and disenchantment. Framed through the lens of the Sri Lankan state’s photography-focused citizen registration project and its entanglements with civil war, securitization, and militarization, as well as the embedding of photography studios within immigration regimes, I consider the state and border work of studios. Photographers seek to validate their expertise and authority in giving photographic shape to regulation and the requirements of state actors. However, individual skills of compliance are also recast as ‘auspicious,’ enabling studio practitioners to exert agency in assisting patrons in realizing aspirations for migration as a means to remedy the status quo of impaired Tamil

citizenship. I explore how these photographic inter/mediations simultaneously serve as acts of collective conformity, hope, and subversion pinned to the outcomes of photographs made possible by the sleight of photographers' 'lucky hands.'

Pioneering Women Professional Photographers: The early English photographic studio as a locus for social change.

Rose Teanby

The first photographic studio owned and operated by a woman opened within five years of the announcement of photography. In 1844 Mrs Ann Cooke introduced the revolutionary visual medium to her customers but, more significantly, introduced the concept of women as equal professional actors in a new commercial marketplace. In this paper I highlight English women's photographic studios between 1844 and 1861 within a reframed context as a locus for social change. Women photographers adopted new photographic technology during a period of restrictive photographic patent regulation and endemic societal female subjugation. But photography introduced a new commercial photographic narrative liberated from historic gender discriminatory practices, required no apprenticeship or trade guild affiliation, and was open to all on purchase of a patent licence. Photographic studios, within the home, high street or itinerant travelling van, became a practical demonstration of women's capability to productively contribute to mid nineteenth-century society.

This paper argues that women's early photographic studios acted as a catalyst for social change due to the prominent visibility of unmarried women, wives and widows presenting a viable alternative to social inequality, within their own autonomous environment. The paper will explore the first generation of English photographic studios operated by women, concluding that they contributed to the early establishment of photography in England and simultaneously created a precedent for wider society to contest the validity of gender determined 'separate spheres'.

The Domestic Studio: Lord and Lady Kinnaird at Rossie Priory

Luke Gartlan

This paper examines the studio in the Victorian-era home and its potential to disrupt the everyday domestic operations of the household. Taking as its case study the photographic studio work of Lord and Lady Kinnaird at Rossie Priory, I intend to highlight their broader contributions as patrons and practitioners of early photography in Scotland. By 'work', I refer not just to their photographic output but the domestic organisation of their home and the practicalities of their extensive equipment, such as its storage, care, maintenance, and organisation. Centred mainly on a group of glass stereographs, this paper will consider the rural and small-town social networks suggested by their sitters and the connections of these aristocrats to

the broader operations of Victorian photography. How might we think about the studio space and, through an examination of their correspondence, Lord and Lady Kinnaird's associations with commercial photographers, suppliers, manufacturers, and professional organizations both locally and nationally. What role did such aristocratic home enterprises play in the emergence of and support for commercial studios, such as that of Thomas Rodger in St Andrews? Given that photography was in operation at Rossie Priory from the early 1840s for at least thirty years, how might scholars reconsider the distinction between 'domestic' and 'commercial' in the concept of the Victorian studio, and, in doing so, rethink the significance and appeal of such home enterprises?

One Photographer Four Studios: Circulations of photographic backdrops in Africa, a case study from Cameroon.

Valentine Nyamndon

This paper interrogates how one photographer Djeuti Boniface (Young Abraham) who owns four photographic studios between several Regions (Provinces) in Cameroon forms other narratives of the history of studio photography. It presents a contribution of Djeuti's intra-interregional circulations trajectory with studio materials different from those presented in the archives of studio photographers in Mbouda the Western Region of Cameroon visual scene. This paper charts his history of apprenticeship until graduation, to when he opened his first studio at Small Mankon, the second at Ntamulung quarter - Bamenda in Anglophone Cameroon, and two others in Francophone parts of Cameroon. It interrogates why his studios are/were different from those other photographers who also own two or more studios in Cameroon. How and why did photographic backdrop materials circulate intra-interregional between several Regions (Provinces) among his studios in Cameroon? The basis of an investigation in this paper comes from fieldwork, extant scholarly contributions, and data generated from the studio photographers' archives.

Unveiling the Edward Reeves Archive in Lewes

Brigitte Lardinois

Edward Reeves Photography, established in 1855, is a family run photographic business, with a working studio and shop. It is believed to be the oldest still functioning studio, in the hands of the same family, in the world. When I started this work the Reeves business had no organised archive, rather a set of different collections dispersed in various places in the building at 159 High Street Lewes, where the family also live. Concentrating on the period 1855-1974 approximately 250.000 numbered glass plates have been linked to corresponding ledgers and account books, correspondence, and ephemera. With the help of a group of local volunteers this paperwork is currently being transcribed so it can become an archive that will be accessible online.

Under the name 'Stories Seen Through a Glass Plate' in 2014 eighty historical pictures of Lewes High Street were displayed as lightboxes, situated on locations depicted on the glass plates. With a turn of the head the viewer could experience the then-and -now effect of historical change. These exhibitions are now regular occurrences. The related programs of talks and events help deepen the understanding of the history of this English market town. There are currently forty volunteers working on different aspects of the project- notably the digitisation of the documentation. Outreach projects are devised that engage large segments of the local community

This project can shine new light on the history of commercial photography in Britain as Professor Elisabeth Edwards has referred to this collection as one of this century's most important findings in the history of British photography.

Practical Information

Pitt Rivers Museum

Pitt Rivers Museum
South Parks Road
Oxford OX1 3PP

The museum is approximately a 25-minute walk from Oxford train station. A Map is included at the end of this document.

Bus numbers S7 and 14 go from outside the station to Kebel Road, which is about an 8 minute-walk from the museum. If you have any concerns regarding accessibility please contact Emily.

It is best to use the museum's South Entrance, which is in Robinson Close, off South Parks Road.

The workshop is being held in the Pitt Rivers Museum Lecture Room which is the second door on your right after you enter the museum from the South Entrance.

Should you have any difficulty finding the museum, please contact the museum reception on 01865 613000.

Hotel

EasyHotel
280 Banbury Rd
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7DY

Phone: 01865 634602

The hotel is approximately a 35-minute walk from the Pitt Rivers Museum. A Map is included at the end of this document.

Bus numbers 2, 2A, S5 Gold, and S7 run from Kebel Road (about 8 minutes from the museum) to South Parade East (just opposite the hotel). If you have any concerns regarding accessibility please contact Emily.

Participants staying overnight should have received booking confirmations from Emily. Please contact Emily at emily.stevenson@prm.ox.ac.uk if you have not received this or if there are any issues.

Catering and Dinner

Day One:

We will begin the workshop after lunch on the first day, so please ensure you have eaten before the workshop starts. There will, however, be some refreshments upon arrival.

In the evening, we will go for dinner at Jamal's Indian Restaurant, which is located on Walton Street approximately a 15-minute walk from the museum. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian options will be available. Wine will be included with the meal but we ask that you please pay for any additional drinks yourself.

Day Two:

Breakfast pastries as well as lunch consisting of a selection of vegetarian and non-vegetarian sandwiches will be provided by Taylor's of Oxford. There will also be tea and coffee, and snacks available during breaks.

**Water will of course also be readily available on both days, but in the interest of the environment please also feel welcome to bring a reusable bottle with you which can be refilled in the museum kitchen at any point during the two days if you wish.*

Luggage

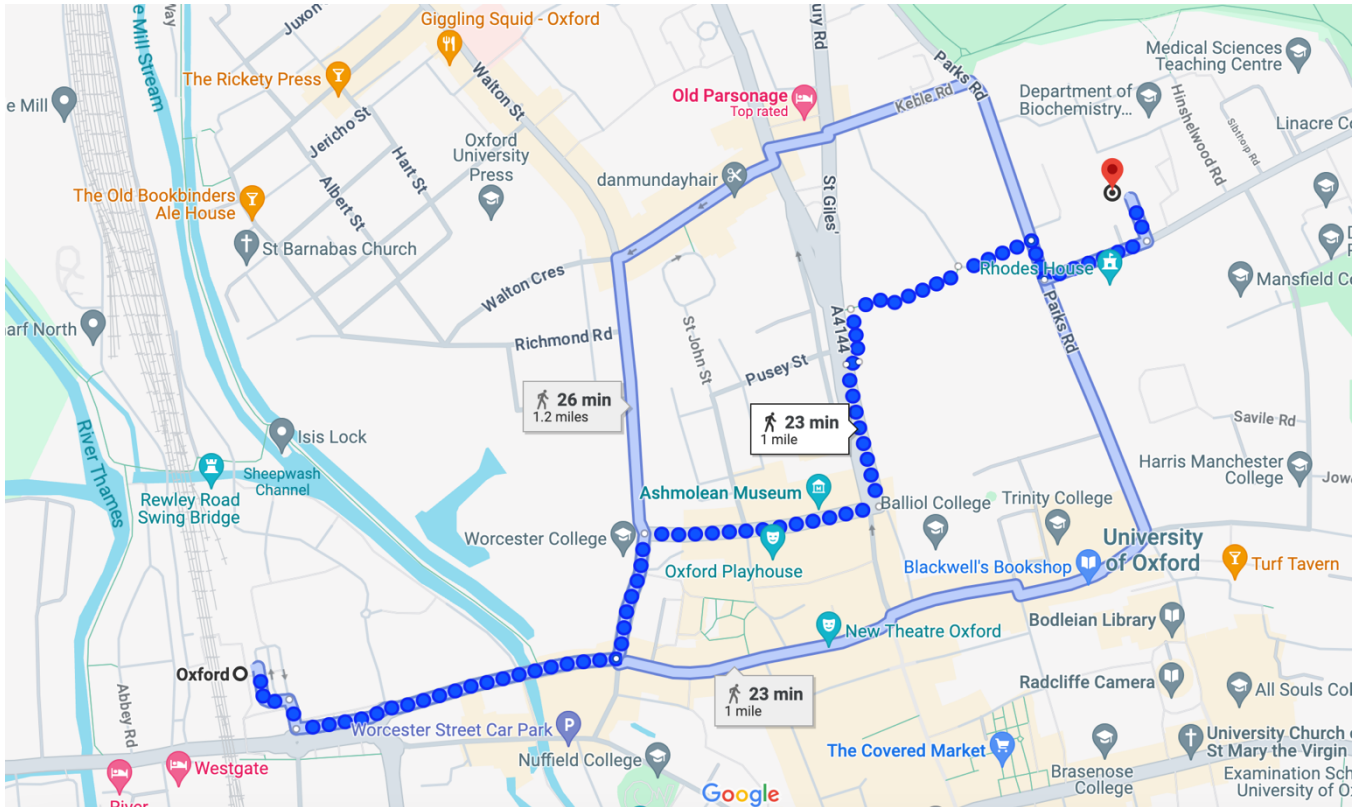
You will be able to leave any bags in the Lecture Room where the workshop is being held during the workshop hours if you wish. The hotel also offers a left luggage service if you wish to leave any bags there before/after check-in/check-out.

Expenses

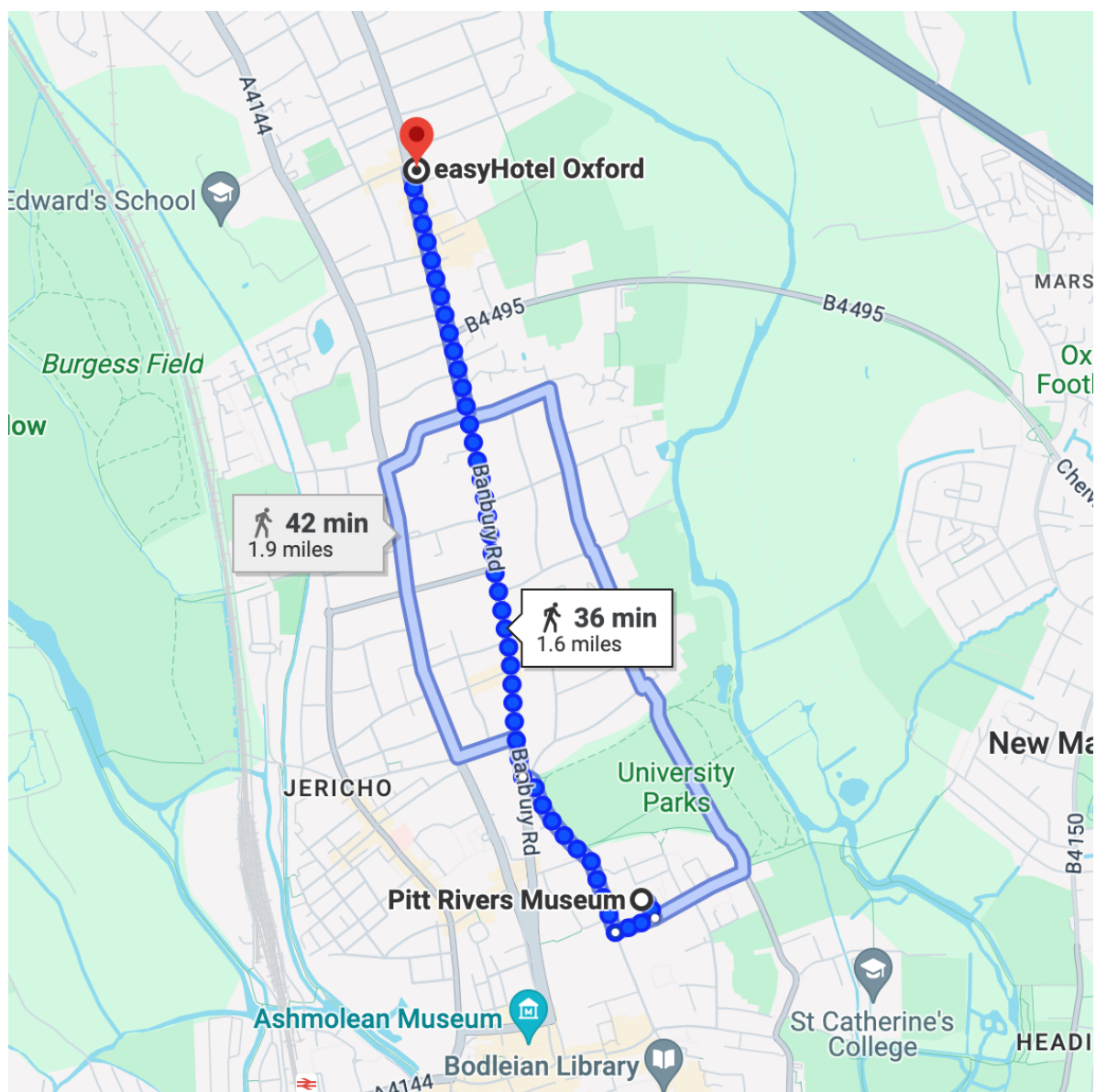
You should have received the expenses claim form for train fares via email. Please submit this along with receipts to Antigone.thompson@prm.ox.ac.uk

Maps

1. Oxford Station to the Pitt Rivers Museum



2. Pitt Rivers Museum to EasyHotel



We look forward to welcoming you to the Pitt Rivers Museum! If you have any questions in advance, please do not hesitate to contact Emily at emily.stevenson@prm.ox.ac.uk