

Editors' Introduction

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This issue begins with a pair of articles that address two very different senses of time and chronological change during the long eighteenth century in Britain. Ted McCormick explores the relationship between long-term, deep histories of the creation of the earth and the multiplication of its many peoples, and the emergence of a new science of “political arithmetic” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Amanda Vickery, in contrast, looks at time as lived experience, and at the gendered body in time.

In “Political Arithmetic and Sacred History: Population Thought in the English Enlightenment, 1660–1750,” McCormick argues for the importance of long-standing concerns about sacred history—the very *longue durée* history of the earth and humankind since its divine inception—to the shaping of the new and particularly English field of “political arithmetic.” While the development of a science of political arithmetic, based on the importance of quantification and the emerging science of probability, was key to innovative thinking and novel questions about the relationship between state and society, McCormick insists that it must equally be seen as a response to ongoing debates about the ancient past and the accuracy of sacred histories based upon scripture.¹

While political arithmeticians struggled with determining how to fit the age of the earth into their understanding of human populations, others struggled with how to fit their personal experience of aging within their own cultural expectations. In “Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England,” Vickery argues that the eighteenth-century concept of aging, particularly for women, had little room for a middle ground, or at least a middle age, between youth and “old age.” She pays particular attention to the relationships among femininity, age, and fashion, and notes that anxieties about the fashion choices of middle-aged and elderly women were intense. Debates provoked by such anxieties often revealed a vicious streak of cultural misogyny. This tendency to criticize women’s fashionability, however, was contradicted by “the equally insistent demands of rank, politeness, and respectability” (868). As Vickery also highlights, there was a consistent discrepancy between the general misogynist frames in which female appearance was discussed publicly in the eighteenth century and the rather more nuanced understandings of age and fashion that were expressed by women themselves in their own words. Both McCormick and Vickery, therefore, astutely attend to the ways in which

¹ Compare William Peter Deringer, “Finding the Money: Public Accounting, Political Arithmetic, and Probability in the 1690s,” *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 3 (July 2013): 638–68.

eighteenth-century understandings of the passing of time, both for populations and for individuals, were multifaceted and not easily reduced to any one simple formula.

The next two articles examine aspects of what one might call a wider history of violence. Jacob Middleton studies the cultural significance of personal violence among schoolboys in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On a very different level, John Regan is concerned with the role that fears and debates about political terrorism played in shaping the distinctive character of Irish liberalism and modern Irish historical writing.

With Jacob Middleton's "The Cock of the School: A Cultural History of Playground Violence in Britain, 1880–1940," we turn first to the history of violence at the level of lived experience. Middleton looks at playground violence and the culture of the schoolboy fight. He draws most extensively on memoirs, focusing on men's memories of their own childhoods. He argues that it is possible to trace common features of the playground fight over time and that the fight usually operated within a broadly accepted economy of violence: fights were ritualized ways to establish school hierarchies, for example, and had rules and expectations, including ideas about honorable and dishonorable fighting techniques. At the same time, the ubiquity of the schoolyard fight up until the interwar period suggests the prevalence of casual violence in daily life, even if it was ritualized and contained. The article thus raises the questions about why this type of violence seemingly declined in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Whereas Middleton looks at schoolyard violence as an often taken for granted part of ordinary life, John Regan examines spectacular violence in extraordinary times. He is particularly interested in the ways in which fear of violence shaped Irish political and cultural life. In a provocative article, "The 'O'Brien Ethic' as an Interpretative Problem," Regan claims that some Irish liberals responded to terrorist violence in the 1970s by compromising liberal principles, such as commitment to freedom of speech and protection of the rights of the accused, in the name of the greater good. He sees this as a classic dilemma characterizing liberalism confronted by terrorism. Regan's primary example is the political evolution and widespread influence of Conor Cruise O'Brien. Regan further argues that historians were affected by similar anxieties not to provoke violence by promoting a romantic view of nationalism and violence in the Irish past and claims that a combination of fear and self-censorship often lay behind revisionist caution. In a spirited argument, Regan criticizes what he sees as, in fact, illiberal responses to terrorism from which historians in turn need to liberate themselves.

FORUM: VICTORIAN FOOD HISTORY

The second half of this issue features a special forum on Victorian food history. While the history of food has always played a prominent role in social and economic history, in recent years it has tackled new questions and adopted new approaches often inspired by the new cultural history. Food as both commodity and article of consumption, both material object and subject of cultural practices, can be used to cut across disciplines, from economic history to anthropology to cultural studies. The articles in this forum all use the history of food to tackle some long-standing questions and problems in Victorian history and to demonstrate the value of using

food as an optic for understanding the past. Each article in some way looks at the cultural meanings with which food was imbued, even as food was also an article of economic exchange. Food history in these cases opens the door to a cultural history of economics.

The first two articles in this forum use attitudes toward food and diet to rethink the Victorian workhouse. In "Feeding in the Workhouse: The Institutional and Ideological Functions of Food in Britain, ca. 1834–70," Ian Miller criticizes reevaluations of feeding practices in early Victorian workhouses. A recent revisionist article in the *British Medical Journal* analyzes a workhouse dietary guide to argue that workhouse paupers were in fact adequately fed, *pace* *Oliver Twist*. Miller points out that this type of narrow analysis misses the disciplinary uses of food, cultural understandings of an appropriate diet, and the considerable gulf between theory and practice. The pauper diet was supposed to be adequate but unpalatable, and feeding routines were designed to discipline the pauper mind. Diets were adapted to local food practices but were not supposed to surpass a minimal threshold of requirement. Furthermore, the adequacy of diet was judged by the weight of the food rather than by its nutritional value. This was, however, in the general context of a lack of scientific knowledge of nutrition and an initially minimal role for doctors in the workhouse. The development of more precise knowledge about the nutritional needs of the human body coupled with changing views of the workhouse as a source of welfare for the most vulnerable, rather than as a means to discipline the able-bodied into working, did in fact lead to better workhouse diets, but only from the 1860s onward. It is crucial, Miller argues, to understand the cultural meanings of workhouse food.

Nadja Durbach's article, "Roast Beef, the New Poor Law, and the British Nation, 1834–63," covers similar ground from a very different perspective. Even after the passage of the New Poor Law and the supposed standardization of workhouse feeding regimes designed to make the workhouse unattractive, Poor Law guardians often wanted to give their inmates a traditional Christmas dinner, starring such forbidden foods as roast beef and plum pudding. Instead of revisiting the scholarly debate about the quantity and nutritional content of workhouse food, Durbach asks instead what types of food the poor were forbidden or allowed and what cultural meanings were attached to acts of permission and forbidding. What meanings were imputed to particular foodstuffs? Why did it matter who ate them and in what circumstances? Durbach examines the changing cultural connotations of the Christmas dinner and, in particular, what it meant to include the pauper in the "national" festival of Christmas at a time of the rethinking of citizenship. The article tracks the fate of a multitude of requests from local guardians to the Poor Law commissioners in the mid-nineteenth century for permission and funds to give Christmas dinners. Such requests were sometimes allowed, often refused (following workhouse regulations), and sometimes rendered unnecessary by recalcitrant local officials who refused to follow the letter of the law at Christmas. For Durbach, debates over roast beef were "not trivial negotiations," but rather "illuminate how the borders that surrounded the national community were being constructed and contested at a crucial moment in the making of modern Britain" (988).

Erika Rappaport's "Sacred and Useful Pleasures: The Temperance Tea Party and the Creation of a Sober Consumer Culture in Early Industrial Britain" similarly highlights the culture and politics of mass consumption. Her subjects, however, were far

more self-determining than the paupers studied by Miller and Durbach. The temperance tea party was a self-confident and carefully calibrated performance of virtue with a significant political sting. These public banquets, encompassing both persuasive speeches and persuasive rituals of appropriate consumption, celebrated tea as the epitome of national virtue. While the temperance tea party attacked alcohol use and assuaged the anxieties of those who worried about the importation of foreign luxuries, it also enacted a particular vision of the nation. Tea, as the antithesis to dangerous drink, was positioned as a virtuous drink that epitomized rationality, sobriety, and appropriate gender relations. In common with the other authors in this forum, Rappaport reminds us of the importance of uses of food in the public sphere, arguing that "food and drink came to define class, community, and nation in very intimate yet also public ways in Victorian Britain" (991).

In Keir Waddington's "We Don't Want Any German Sausages Here! Food, Fear, and the German Nation in Victorian and Edwardian Britain," we find a cultural history of the relationship between attitudes toward food and national identity that extends the themes explored in the other articles in this forum. In this case, however, a particular type of good, the German sausage, came to stand in for negative values ascribed to another nation rather than virtues that the British ascribed to themselves. His article shows how perceived understandings of national dietary preferences shaped the larger culture of national identities and rivalries in the decades leading up to the outbreak of the First World War. The German sausage became a focus for deep-seated anxieties regarding public health and the salubriousness of meat preparation in an age of industrialization, as well as fears of the growing power and influence of the newly united German Empire and its potential to challenge British hegemony in Europe and the rest of the world. For many prewar Britons, a German sausage was much more than just a cylinder of processed meat.

Our next issue will focus on transnational themes in British history. It will feature articles on Sir Thomas Roe's early seventeenth-century embassy to the Mughal court; Inuit encounters with late eighteenth-century London; the politics of subjecthood in the eighteenth-century British Empire; debates over the transportation of convicts from the British Isles to Australia in the nineteenth century; the entanglement of colonialism and imperial "humanitarianism" in mid-nineteenth-century New Zealand; the varied reception of a fictional character in the early twentieth-century British world; and theories of rights and citizenship emanating from the British Caribbean in the interwar period.