

CALL FOR PAPERS

2 day conference, 24 and 25 January 2019

From “Old Corruption” to the New Corruption? Public Life and Public Service in Britain, c. 1780–1940



Keynote speakers: Professor Graham Brooks (University of West London); Professor Angus Hawkins (University of Oxford); Dr Kathryn Rix (History of Parliament)

Context and aims: The problem of “corruption” has proved decidedly more tenacious than post-war theorists of modernization had once predicted. This much is evident globally, where corruption constitutes one of the most pressing problems facing emerging democratic states; but it is also evident in established, Western-style democracies, which remain gripped by recurrent scandals regarding the abuse of public office and widespread concerns about the decay of public life. Scholarship on corruption has flourished; and although much of this has focused on the present, historians have begun to grapple afresh with its multiple manifestations and meanings in the past, reaching back to the early modern period and beyond.

This conference seeks to revisit the wide-ranging struggles against corruption in Britain during the period c. 1780 to 1940, ranging from the conduct of ministerial office and central administration to parliamentary, electoral and local government reform. The period is still considered crucial in terms of the demise of forms of corruption inherited from previous centuries “Old Corruption” and more broadly Britain still holds a pre-eminent place among those nations that first embraced modern values of public service and accountability. Yet, beyond the struggles to enact particular reforms and their peculiarly British realization, it is also clear that the very meaning of “corruption” was transformed in the process, as new problems, anxieties and scandals arose regarding the boundaries between the public and private interests of ministers, officials, councillors and MPs—and all in the context of an emerging market-driven, “mass society” that was at once more bureaucratic, democratic and industrialized. Arguably, the problem of corruption was less conquered than refashioned and revitalised, opening up a culture of public vigilance, suspicion and even cynicism that still prevails today.

In sum, the aim of the conference is to:

- encourage a more integrated approach to the study and conceptualisation of political and administrative corruption during the period when Britain became a mass democracy
- open up new historical perspectives through which we might better grasp the present

Format and themes: This will be a two day conference: 24–25 January 2019, held at Oxford Brookes University and is supported by Newman University, Birmingham, and the History and Policy Unit, King’s College, London.

Papers (of 20 mins in length) might include discussion of, but are not limited to, the following subjects:

- Conceptualising and historicising “corruption” over the long-term
- Britain and the British Empire in comparative perspective: cultures of corruption and trajectories of reform
- Conceptions of public service and corruption: office as private property and office as public trust
- Patronage, privilege and salaried service in Whitehall and Westminster: from the Northcote -Trevelyan Report (1854) to the payment of MPs (1911)
- Public and private interests: ministerial and official corruption and scandal
- The business of politics: party financing, party managers and the practice of mass elections
- Class and corruption: aristocracy, plutocracy and democracy
- Corrupt practices and the reform of local government: “Civic Gospels” and “Tammany Halls”
- The role of the national and provincial press in exposing corruption
- Representing and imagining corruption: images, narratives, conspiracies

Contacts: Expressions of interest to: I.Cawood@newman.ac.uk and tcrook@brookes.ac.uk

These should include:

- a brief ‘bio’ (detailing institution, publications, research interests, etc.)
- a proposal/abstract (of roughly 300 words)

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 27 July 2018. Alternatively, if you are interested in attending as a delegate please email to reserve a place.

The conference fee will be confirmed in September 2018, when registration will open.

Conference organisation enquiries: tcrook@brookes.ac.uk

Organisers: Dr Ian Cawood (Newman University, Birmingham) and Dr Tom Crook (Oxford Brookes University)

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