

How Well Do Facts Travel Project

Public seminars, Michaelmas Term 2007

10 October - Joe Cain, University College London

"You must be joking!" Pranks, Jokes, and Silliness in Science

Every scientific discipline has inside jokes. Why? Joe Cain will tell the story behind one of biology's most favourite practical jokes, the Rhinogradentia or Snouters. He then considers some of the social and intellectual work these pranks perform.

24 October - Abigail Woods, Imperial College London

'Ruined by disease': Farmers, vets, and the brucellosis problem in Britain, 1906-45

One of the main impediments to dairy farming in the early 20th century was the endemic cattle disease, brucellosis. Around 40% of herds were thought to be infected, suffering frequent abortions which impacted on milk output. In 1906, the Board of Agriculture began to sponsor research into the disease. Initially seen as an aid to the framing of administrative controls, its outcomes caused the Board to abandon its legislative ambitions. Instead it promoted the private use of two newly developed technologies: vaccination, which prevented cows from aborting, and diagnostic blood testing, which allowed infected animals to be identified and removed from the herd.

Based on very different scientific principles, and carrying diverse social and environmental implications, these methods represented the first significant incursion of the laboratory into veterinary and farming practice. Their inter-war uptake and reception provides important insights into perceptions of good farming and herd health, and the roles and priorities of veterinary science, practice and policy. Blood testing came to symbolize a selfless, progressive, productivity-oriented, science-based approach to agriculture, whereas vaccination became associated with the retrograde practices of ignorant, individualistic, money-obsessed 'cattle-keepers.' I explore how this situation came about before asking why, in WWII, under a newly modernizing, productionist-oriented, state-directed agricultural regime, blood testing was abandoned and vaccination became state policy.

7 November - Lambert Schneider, University of Hamburg

A journey through times and cultures? Ancient Greek forms in American architecture

Archaeology constantly deals with so-called "facts". Popular opinion clearly associates the field with demonstrable fact. Since the object of archaeology is investigating the past by analyzing material phenomena, the discipline is expected to have something substantial to say about the "travel" – meaning the historic continuity – of "facts".

The existence of ancient civilizations with their apparent immutability has generated confidence in the existence of cultural and artistic continuity, or at least of a gradual development that transmits facts through time. The numerous modern revivals of ancient forms and ideas – in scholarship as well as in the broader context – have, even more, seemed to prove the existence of a "cultural memory" within which facts might comfortably travel through time.

My talk on the reuse of classical Greek forms in 19th century American architecture examines this widely-held popular assumption. I suggest that the answer to the question of what "travels" and how depends largely on the interest and focus of the beholder, rather than on the phenomena beheld. Seen in this light, both Classical Revivals in art and architecture and the academic investigation of

ancient Greek culture turn out to be a creative undertaking that molds and even invents the shape and meaning of the past.

21 November - Marcus Popplow, independent scholar

Ways of transmitting knowledge in Renaissance architecture and engineering: the case of Heinrich Schickhardt (1558-1634)

Heinrich Schickhardt for decades served the Dukes of Württemberg, in Southern Germany, as master architect and engineer (Landesbaumeister). He is not particularly famous for certain buildings or spectacular technical inventions. However, in realizing countless buildings and devices all over Württemberg, he introduced elements of Renaissance architecture and, for his technical projects, always had an eye on efficient machine designs to introduce or improve machine technology at a given place.

Having not received a formal education, as was common among master builders of his time, Schickhardt took up knowledge on architecture and engineering wherever it was available. He visited Italy, France, and the Netherlands and was continuously travelling around southern Germany. Schickhardt usually produced sketches of buildings he found noteworthy and collected them in a personal archive. His large personal library comprised numerous books on architecture, technology, and geometry from all over Europe.

My contribution attempts to survey how Schickhardt made facts travel by, firstly, collecting various kinds of information on building projects and storing them with the help of the media available to him and, secondly, by spreading his knowledge by realizing building projects all over Württemberg.

The archive of Heinrich Schickhardt represents an extraordinary case of preservation and is now available online (State Archive Stuttgart: <https://www2.landesarchiv-bw.de/ofs21/olf/startbild.php?bestand=6668>), his machine drawings have additionally been analyzed according to standardized categories and are accessible in the "database machine drawings" at the Max-Planck-Institute for the History of Science (<http://dmd.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de>).