

Watching, *reading,* listening...

The Early Modern Audience and
Their Entertainments, 1400-1800

CALL
FOR PAPERS

*Wednesday 13th January -
Thursday 14th January 2027*

at the
 **UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM**

Early modern audiences have received increased attention amongst scholars in recent years, invigorated by new interdisciplinary approaches. The period 1400-1800 marked major shifts: from manuscript to print culture, the rise of professional theatre, and the development of 'amateur' street and household performance. Whether gathered in rowdy playhouses, overhearing singers on the street, or engaged in devotional reading at home, audiences across this period could take many forms.

This conference aims to explore the opportunities and challenges that arise by centring the audience in discussions of early modern entertainment. In doing so, we hope to invite a unique opportunity to consider who was engaging with sources of entertainment, and why. Is a royal ordinance strictly a document that describes a law, or is it political theatre designed to stir a reaction in people? Is a printed ballad the final authority, or is its performance an opportunity for subversion?



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With Keynote Speakers

Professor Elaine Hobby
Professor Pete Smith
*and an
evening performance*



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**UNIVERSITY OF
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Our definition of both audience and entertainment is necessarily capacious. You might consider a discussion on, although are not limited to:

- Print audiences: readers, printers, buyers, and writers of marginalia
- Theatre audiences: playgoers, spectators, dramatists
- The street crowd & urban entertainment and spaces: ballad-singers, preachers, alehouses
- Elite audiences: court-masques, operas, tournaments
- Early modern soundscapes: over-hearing, sonic identities, multisensory experiences
- Emotional and corporeal responses from audiences
- Audience manipulation and propaganda: ephemera, rumour
- Early modern visual culture and its audiences
- Gender and audience
- Theoretical approaches to audience: reader-response theories and imagined audience
- Reception of classical and medieval text amongst early modern audiences
- Afterlives, responses and imaginings of early modern audiences beyond the eighteenth century

We welcome abstracts of up to 250 words for individual research papers of 20 minutes in length, or 700 words for a panel of three people presenting on a shared topic or sub-theme. Please submit abstracts via this link before Friday 13th November 2026. (23:59 GMT). Successful applicants will be notified by Monday 30th November 2026. Papers are welcomed by PGRs and ECRs. A full programme will follow shortly. For more information or questions, please email: earlymodaudconfm4c@gmail.com or [contact us on instagram](#).