

# Seminars

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## Departmental Seminars

Seminars are held on **Thursdays from 4.30 to 6.00pm in Seminar Room 2**, Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Free School Lane, Cambridge. There is tea beforehand from 4pm in Seminar Room 1.

Organised by Karin Ekholm.

- 26 April **Marie-Françoise Besnier (GKAB Project, HPS, Cambridge)**  
Textual transmission and hypertextuality in ancient Mesopotamia: the example of the divinatory series *šumma ālu* and *šumma izbu* (second to first millennia BC)
- 3 May **Catherine Wilson (University of Aberdeen)**  
'Lucretian pessimism' or, what was Kant's critical philosophy critical of?
- 10 May **Khadija Carroll La (Newton Fellow, HPS, Cambridge)**  
Colonial classification
- 17 May **Miriam R. Levin (Case Western Reserve University)**  
Urban modernity: reconsidering Paris from 1852 to 1914
- 24 May ***Seventeenth Annual Hans Rausing Lecture (Mill Lane Lecture Room 1)***  
**Thomas Schlich (McGill University)**  
The modern rise of surgery: gloves as a technology of control
- Wed 30 May ***Special Seminar***  
**Steven Shapin (Harvard University)**  
The sciences of subjectivity

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Seminar Programmes are sent out at the start of every term to the names on our mailing list. Please contact the Department if you would like to be added to or removed from the mailing list, or if you change your address.

Seminar information is also available at [www.hps.cam.ac.uk/seminars](http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/seminars)

**Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge**  
**Free School Lane, Cambridge CB2 3RH**

# Abstracts

26 April **Marie-Françoise Besnier (GKAB Project, HPS, Cambridge)**

Textual transmission and hypertextuality in ancient Mesopotamia: the example of the divinatory series *šumma ālu* and *šumma izbu* (second to first millennia BC)

In the middle of the second millennium, an Akkadian literature began to develop around the observation of omens. Omens were grouped into collections according to their topics. Each omen was structured as a conditional sentence: the first clause, the protasis, describes an ominous occurrence; the second clause, the apodosis, its significance. The omen series known by its first line, *šumma ālu ina mēlē šakin* (if a city is located on a height), is a compendium of terrestrial omens ('black cat' type omens), which covered all aspects of urban and domestic life. For instance: 'If a pig is carrying a reed bundle and roams around in the street: there will be trade.' The series *šumma izbu* (if an anomaly) is the Mesopotamian teratomancy, and is concerned with live-births, still-births, and miscarriages, both for human beings and animals. Both series were often intermingled and, like most Mesopotamian literature, have been copied down by generations of scribes, throughout second and first millennia BC.

In Ancient Near Eastern studies, it has long been assumed that textual transmission was limited to a simple process of 'canonisation' or 'standardisation'. Yet, a thorough study of the so-called 'canonised' Mesopotamian manuscripts indicates that such a view is too reductive. Many sources, especially the ones dealing with knowledge and meaning, such as the divinatory series, proved to be intractable to such a process. They thus form a corpus of 'literature in the second degree', closely related to each other through a relationship of hypertextuality (according to G. Genette's definition of the term). In this way, the textual traditions are indeed the cultural memory of the society, but also conform to the new cultural realities. I shall concentrate here on the history of the series *šumma ālu* and *šumma izbu*, and determine their transtextual relationships and their transformation through, amongst other methods, the study of linguistic *repertoires*.

3 May **Catherine Wilson (University of Aberdeen)**

'Lucretian pessimism' or, what was Kant's critical philosophy critical of?

Kant's 'critical turn' is often said to reflect his discovery of a third way between Lockean empiricism and Leibniz-Wolffian rationalism. Yet settling the debate over the role of experience vs. the a priori in the style of 1703 does not seem to have been at the top of Kant's philosophical agenda. The talk presents an interpretation of the critical turn as Kant's secular solution to 'Lucretian pessimism' – the existential angst of an 18th-century student of physical geography and anthropology disturbed by conjectures regarding the kinship of human and ape, the absence of a proper foundation for morals, and the apparent futility of the individual human life from the perspective of the student of nature.

10 May **Khadija Carroll La (Newton Fellow, HPS, Cambridge)**

Colonial classification

Indigenous environmental knowledge and language was recorded in the field records of natural historians and the artists they employed. These indigenous classifications remain in those expedition notes as they were excluded from dominant scientific systems when the information returned to European metropolitan centres. This paper retrieves and interprets ideas of this kind, from natural historical collections gathered in southeastern Australia in the 19th century.

Presenting the photographic encyclopedia *Australien in 142 Photographischen Abbildungen*, I argue that its author's career (Wilhelm von Blandowski, 1822–1878) failed precisely because he tried to foreground Aboriginal classification in comparative and metropolitan, as well as particularly Australian, contexts. For instance, Blandowski illustrated new types of fish in 1857

based on indigenous taxonomies guided by maturation stages rather than species. The Philosophical Society subsequently censored Blandowski; he was sacked from his positions as the first director of Museum Victoria and the first Government Zoologist of Victoria, and died aged 56 in a psychiatric asylum in Bunzlau. I contextualize his findings as efforts to document and mobilize indigenous models within the politics of colonial classification and theorize his particular brand of troubled humanism, antiquarian imagery, and Romantic *Naturphilosophie* in the wake of the Humboldts.

17 May **Miriam R. Levin (Case Western Reserve University)**

Urban modernity: reconsidering Paris from 1852 to 1914

At the close of the 19th century, industrialization and urbanization marked the end of the traditional understanding of society as rooted in agriculture. Paris was both the cultural capital of the 19th century and an international symbol of modernity. This lecture will discuss the efforts of Paris-based urban elites under two different political regimes to construct an urban-centred, industrial-based culture – an entirely new social reality based on science and technology. The synergy they created among expositions, urban rebuilding and museums provides the foundation for a new understanding of modernity's history in which science and technology were constitutive. These and similar efforts in London, Chicago, Berlin and Tokyo are the subject of a new book by Professor Levin and four colleagues.

24 May ***Seventeenth Annual Hans Rausing Lecture (Mill Lane Lecture Room 1)***

**Thomas Schlich (McGill University)**

The modern rise of surgery: gloves as a technology of control

The history of surgical gloves embodies the main strategies at work in the modern rise of surgery. In the course of the 19th century, surgeons learned to treat numerous injuries and disorders by interventions in all areas of the living body. Rather than being determined simply by the power of great ideas or the logic of technical progress, this transformation of surgery was made possible by a network of control technologies that enhanced manipulability and visibility. Two principles of control – manual control and aseptic control – clashed in a major debate over surgical gloves. Surgeons assessed the pros and cons of the different strategies as they tried to resolve the conflict by adjusting gloves' materials, design and use. We should not dismiss these debates as if they concerned mere technical details, for they reveal the dynamics of the control network. They show that the rise of surgery was an open-ended process, shaped by a multiplicity of practical, local concerns, and full of contradictions and compromises. This analysis places surgical innovation alongside other areas, such as science and industry, in which control played a major role as part of the emergence of modern societies in the same time period.

# Cabinet of Natural History

This research seminar is concerned with all aspects of the history of natural history and the field and environmental sciences. The regular programme of papers and discussions takes place over lunch on Mondays. In addition, the Cabinet organises a beginning-of-year fungus hunt and occasional expeditions to sites of historical and natural historical interest, and holds an end-of-year garden party.

Seminars are held on **Mondays at 1pm in Seminar Room 1**. You are welcome to bring your lunch with you.

Organised by Sophie Waring.

30 April **Flavio Häner (Pharmacy Museum, University of Basel)**

Raiders of the lost ark: an introduction into the practical archaeology of knowledge at the collections of the University of Basel

Tue 15 May Cabinet trip to Kew

21 May **Charlotte Sleigh (University of Kent)**

‘It is indeed a thing ominous for a Toad to be born of Woman’: taking experimental frogs and toads seriously

28 May **Jenny Bangham (HPS, Cambridge)**

Skulls from the dead, blood from the living: human heredity and race in interwar Britain

# Twentieth Century Think Tank

The Twentieth Century Think Tank (TCTT) is a discussion group organised by graduate students and postdoctoral fellows at HPS. It offers broad coverage of 20th- and 21st-century topics in the history, philosophy and sociology of science, technology and medicine.

Meetings are held **every other Tuesday during term from 1pm–2pm in Seminar Room 1** unless otherwise indicated. All welcome!

For more information, please visit our website <https://sites.google.com/site/hpsthinktank>. To join the mailing list, please contact the organisers, Leon Rocha and Kathryn Schoefert.

1 May **Lydia Wilson (HPS, Cambridge)**

Preserving scientific heritage: collaborating with scientists

8 May **Michael Guggenheim (Goldsmiths, University of London)**

Bunkers and other risk assessments: (im-)material calculations of military and natural disasters

Please note that this seminar takes place **from 5pm to 7pm at CRASSH Seminar Room SG2**. Co-organised with the ‘Between Civilisation and Militarisation’ Group.

# Things: Material Cultures of the Long Eighteenth Century

We meet **alternate Tuesdays 12.30–2.30pm** in the **CRASSH Seminar Room at 7 West Road on the Sidgwick Site**.

For further information, including a link to the *Things C18th* blog, or to subscribe to the mailing list, go to [www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/page/1036/thingsmaterial-cultures-18thc.htm](http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/page/1036/thingsmaterial-cultures-18thc.htm)

The 18th century was the century of ‘stuff’. Public production, collection, display and consumption of objects grew in influence, popularity and scale. The form, function and use of objects, ranging from scientific and musical instruments to weaponry and furnishings, were influenced by distinct features of the time. Eighteenth-century knowledge was not divided into strict disciplines, in fact practice across what we now see as academic boundaries was essential to material creation. This seminar series will use an approach based on objects to encourage us to consider the unity of ideas of the long-18th century, to emphasise the lived human experience of technology and art, and the global dimension of material culture. We will re-discover the interdisciplinary thinking through which 18th-century material culture was conceived, gaining new perspectives on the period through its artefacts.

Each seminar features two talks considering the same type of object from different perspectives.

- 1 May **Melissa Calaresu and Emma Spary (University of Cambridge)**  
Food
- 15 May **Mary Brooks (York Museums Trust) and Tara Hamling (University of Birmingham)**  
Decorative textiles
- 29 May **James Davey, John McAleer and Quentin Colville (National Maritime Museum)**  
The ship
- 12 June **Faramerz Dabhoiwala (University of Oxford) and Simon Chaplin (Wellcome Library)**  
The body

We will be rounding off the year with a one-day colloquium on Friday 28 September 2012: ‘We Need to Talk about “Things”: Concluding Colloquium’. See the website for details.

# Graduate workshops

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## HPS History Workshop

Are you wishing for advice on how to write the tricky bit of your argument? Not sure how to write a good introduction? Trying to convert an essay or a chapter into an article? Sign up to share a draft of your next PhD chapter, book chapter, conference paper, journal article or MPhil essay with an audience of friendly HPS postgraduates and postdocs!

The History Workshop is an informal setting to discuss your written works-in-progress on any area of the history of science, medicine and technology, and get feedback from your early-career colleagues. Your paper will be circulated by email before the workshop. We'll then discuss it together over tea and biscuits at **5pm on alternate Wednesdays in Seminar Room 1**.

Sign up now to share your work with this new format of the History Workshop! Please contact Rohan Deb Roy or Caitlin Wylie.

- 9 May **Jesse Olszynko-Gryn (HPS, Cambridge)**  
The global biopolitics of female sterilization
- 23 May **Jacob Habinek (University of California, Berkeley)**  
Conflict of the faculties? The philosophical and medical contexts of comparative anatomy, c.1800
- 6 June **Irene Goudarouli (University of Athens)**  
Conceptual change in history of science
- 20 June **Ruth Horry (HPS, Cambridge)**  
Studying Babylonia in Philadelphia: Assyriological practice and the University of Pennsylvania's museum, c.1900

## HPS Philosophy Workshop

The HPS Philosophy Workshop is a fortnightly seminar devoted to the discussion of on-going work by researchers in philosophy. Papers are invited from all graduate students and post-docs: it is a great format for getting some constructive and informal feedback. The workshop consists of a 25 minute presentation, followed by 35 minutes of Q&A.

Meetings take place **every other Wednesday** (2 May, 16 May and 30 May) **from 1–2pm in Seminar Room 1**. If you would like to present, or have any questions, please contact Vashka dos Remedios.

## Graduate Training

Training workshops for the Department's graduate students and postdoctoral researchers are held throughout the academic year. Most, but not all, are on **Fridays at 1pm in Seminar Room 1**. The full programme is available at [www.hps.cam.ac.uk/students/training](http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/students/training).

# Reading and discussion groups

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## Philosophy of Science Reading Group

We will be reading *Science in a Democratic Society* by Philip Kitcher (Prometheus, 2011). Meetings involve a short presentation by a member of the group followed by a general discussion.

Meetings will take place on **Thursdays at 2–3.30pm in Seminar Room 1** and are open to all. Organised by Jonathan Birch and Hasok Chang.

26 April Chapter 1, ‘The Erosion of Scientific Authority’

3 May Chapter 2, ‘Discussing Values’

10 May Chapter 3, ‘Democratic Values’

17 May Chapter 4, ‘The Evolution of Public Knowledge’

24 May Chapter 5, ‘Well-Ordered Science’

We may continue the reading group beyond Week 5 if there is sufficient interest in doing so.

## Philosophy of Biology Reading Group

We will be reading *Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards?* by Elliott Sober (Prometheus, 2011). Meetings involve a short presentation by a member of the group followed by a general discussion.

Meetings will take place on **Fridays at 2–3pm in the Lodge Seminar Room** and are open to all. Organised by Jonathan Birch.

27 April Chapter 1, ‘Did Darwin Write the Origin Backwards?’

4 May Chapter 2, ‘Darwin and Group Selection’

11 May Chapter 3, ‘Sex Ratio Theory – Darwin, Before, and After’

18 May Chapter 4, ‘Darwin and Naturalism’

25 May Talk by **Elliott Sober**

## Generation to Reproduction Reading Group

This group discusses pre-circulated papers, classics as well as our own work, in the area of our Wellcome Trust strategic award in the history of medicine ([www.reproduction.group.cam.ac.uk](http://www.reproduction.group.cam.ac.uk)). We also hold work-in-progress sessions.

This term’s meeting will be at 5–7pm (tea from 4.50) on **Tuesday 22 May in Seminar Room 1**. To join the group, please email [generate@hermes.cam.ac.uk](mailto:generate@hermes.cam.ac.uk).

# Kant Reading Group

In Easter Term, we will read papers from a selection of secondary literature on the topics we have covered during Michaelmas and Lent Term, i.e., the Analytic of Principles of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787) and the Analytic of the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). In particular, we will focus on the conception of ‘spontaneity of reason’, which seems to be all-important in both *Critiques*. We want to explore the role of spontaneity in theoretical as well as in practical judgments and its connection to the ideas of ‘normativity’ and of ‘transcendental freedom’. We will also look at its specific role within the context of the schematism.

Most papers will be taken from the following selection of readings, among others:

Henry E. Allison (1996). Autonomy and Spontaneity in Kant’s Conception of Self. In: *Idealism and Freedom*. Cambridge: CUP.

Stephen Engstrom (2006). Understanding and Sensibility. *Inquiry* 49 (1): 2–25.

Susan L. Hurley (1994). Kant on Spontaneity and the Myth of the Giving. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94: 137–164.

Thomas Land (2006). Kant’s Spontaneity Thesis. *Philosophical Topics* 34 (1/2): 189–220.

Douglas Lavin (2004). Practical Reason and the Possibility of Error. *Ethics* 114 (3): 424–457.

Robert B. Pippin (1987). Kant on the Spontaneity of Mind. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 17 (2): 449–475.

Houston Smit (2009). Kant on Apriority and the Spontaneity of Cognition. In Samuel Newlands & Larry M. Jorgensen (eds.), *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes From the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams*. Oxford University Press.

We will assign the actual readings during the course of the term. Further suggestions for readings are welcome.

Meetings are held in the **Lodge Seminar Room, 3.30–5.00pm on Tuesdays**, weekly from 1 May to 29 May. They begin with a short presentation and are followed by general discussion. All are most welcome. If you would like to be emailed the details of the readings, please contact Katharina Kraus.

# Philosophy and History of Physics Reading Group

## The Rise of Field Physics

This reading group meets on **Tuesdays, 2.30–3.30pm in Seminar Room 1**. Organised by Hasok Chang, Simon Schaffer, Nazim Bouatta and Jeremy Butterfield.

1 May **Nazim Bouatta**

8 May **Jeremy Butterfield**

15 May **Hasok Chang**

22 May **TBC**



# Science and Literature Reading Group

## Collectors and Collecting

We meet on **Mondays from 7.30 to 9pm in Clare College**. Please note that our first meeting is in a different room from usual. Some readings are available online: follow the links at [www.hps.cam.ac.uk/seminars](http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/seminars). Copies of the harder-to-obtain items will be placed in our box file in the Whipple Library.

Organised by Daniel Friesner (Science Museum), Esther Momcilovic (HPS) and Liz Smith (Darwin Correspondence Project). For more information, or to join our email list, please contact Daniel Friesner or Liz Smith. All welcome!

- 30 April Close to home (in the Thirkill Room)  
Coultas, Harland (1858). Wild flowers and their teachings. *Lady's Home Magazine* 11, pp. 245–7.  
Budgen, L.M. (1850). The caged lady-birds. A fragment. *Episodes of Insect Life*. 2d ser., pp. 10–21.  
Gaskell, Elizabeth (1848). *Mary Barton*. London: Chapman and Hall. Volume 1, chapter 5 (pp. 55–84).
- 14 May Collecting and drama (in the Godwin Room)  
Conrad, Joseph (1900). *Lord Jim*. Edinburgh: Blackwood. Chapter 20 (pp. 189–203).  
Wells, H.G. (1894). Aepyornis island. In *The Country of the Blind, and Other Stories*. Fairfield, IA: 1st World Library 2006, pp. 67–80.  
Doyle, Arthur Conan (1902). *Hound of the Baskervilles*. London: George Newnes. Chapter 7.
- 28 May The romance of collecting (in the Godwin Room)  
Byatt, A.S. (1990). *Possession*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1990. Pages TBA.  
Davies, Martin (2005). *The Conjuror's Bird*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. Chapters 1–6 (pp. 1–54). Or the whole thing if you're keen!
- 11 June Modern perspectives (in the Godwin Room)  
Rieber, John Ney (1995). *Books of Magic: Bindings*. New York, NY: DC Comics.  
Bantock, Nick (1999). *The Museum at Purgatory*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

# AD HOC

AD HOC is a history of chemistry reading group based in Cambridge and London. While our main focus is historical, we also consider the philosophical, sociological, public and educational dimensions of chemistry. This term's theme is '**The Material Culture of Chemistry**'.

The group meets four times per term, on **Mondays, 5pm–6.30pm in Seminar Room 1**. Readings are available from the Whipple Library, and also circulated via our mailing list. A parallel series of meetings is held in London. For details, visit our website, [www.hps.cam.ac.uk/adhoc](http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/adhoc).

Organised by Hasok Chang and Jenny Rampling.

30 April **Vanessa Heggie (HPS, Cambridge)**

Vital elements: biochemistry, respiration and exploration

Vanessa Heggie, 'Experimental Physiology, Everest and Oxygen: from the Ghastly Kitchens to the Gasping Lung,' *British Journal of the History of Science* (forthcoming, Sept. 2012).

A. Mosso, *Life of Man on the High Alps*, 2nd Edn, trans. E. Lough Kiesow (London: Taylor Unwin, 1898), Chapters XIV ('Chemical Activity of the Respiration on the Alps') and XV ('Analysis of Asphyxia and of Mountain-Sickness'). Online at: <http://archive.org/details/lifeofmanonhigha00mossuoft>

14 May **Anna Marie Roos (University of Oxford)**

Salt chemistry and early modern natural history

Anna Marie Roos, 'Salient theories in the fossil debate in the early Royal Society: The influence of Johann Van Helmont,' *Controversies Within the Scientific Revolution* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), pp. 151–171.

Anna Marie Roos, 'All that glitters: fool's gold in the early-modern era,' *Endeavour*, Dec. 32(4) (2008): 147–51.

28 May **Spike Bucklow (Hamilton Kerr Institute, Cambridge)**

White lead: the material culture of an 'alchemical' pigment

Spike Bucklow, 'Lead white's mysteries' (draft chapter from a forthcoming volume).

11 June **Robert Anderson (Clare Hall, Cambridge)**

Dealing with laboratories

Robert G.W. Anderson, 'Approaching laboratories' (draft article)

# History and Theory Reading Group

## Uses of the Social from Fleck to Kuhn

This term we continue our series of ‘classic’ works in HPS, this time with a sociological theme. Our aims are to find out what some influential thinkers have meant by the social by exploring their use of that notion; and to find out how historians of science can and have used that notion.

Meetings take place on **Fridays, 2.30 to 4pm in Seminar Room 1**. Hard copies of the readings will be placed in a box in the Whipple, and soft copies sent to the hps-discussion list in advance of each meeting. All are welcome. Please note that the first three meetings will take place weekly, not fortnightly. Organised by Michael Bycroft and Minwoo Seo.

27 April **Josh Nall** introduces Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi, ‘The Rights and Duties of Science’, *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies* 10 (1939), 175–193.

Michael Polanyi, ‘The Growth of Thought in Society’, *Economica* 8 (1941), 428–456.

Mary Jo Nye, ‘Scientific Freedom and the Social Functions of Science’ (ch. 6), in *Michael Polanyi and His Generation: Origins of the Social Construction of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 183–222.

4 May **Nick Hopwood** introduces Ludwik Fleck

Extracts from Ludwik Fleck, *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (Chicago, 1979).

Secondary readings TBC.

11 May **John Forrester** introduces Thomas Kuhn

Kuhn, ‘The Priority of Paradigms’ (ch. 5) and ‘Postscript’, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1970).

John Forrester, ‘Kuhn’s Case: Psychoanalysis and its Paradigm’, *Critical Inquiry* 9 (2007), 1–27.

25 May **Nick Jardine** introduces Peter Winch

Peter Winch, ‘Social Studies of Science’ (ch. 3) and ‘The Mind and Society’ (ch. 4), in *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (Routledge, 1958).

Colin Lyas, “‘I Was Investigating the Notion of the Social’: The Idea of a Social Science’ (ch. 2) in *Peter Winch* (Acumen, 1999).

Nick Jardine, ‘Uses and Abuses of Anachronism in the History of Science’, *History of Science* 38 (2000), 251–70.

# Language groups

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## Latin Therapy

Latin Therapy will meet on **Fridays in the Lodge Seminar Room from 4–5.30pm**. The first meeting this term will take place on 27 April and the last on 15 June. All levels are welcome and beginners are strongly encouraged to come along. Each week we will cover some introductory grammar, followed by a text suggested by members. The pain of the ablative absolute will be salved with copious tea and biscuits!

More information can be found at our website: [www.hps.cam.ac.uk/latintherapy](http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/latintherapy). To be added to the mailing list, or to suggest a text, please contact Susannah Gibson.

## Greek Therapy

Greek Therapy meets **every Wednesday during term time in the Lodge Seminar Room from 5.30 to 7pm**.

We are an informal group for beginners and for experienced readers of Greek seeking to brush up their skills. The first forty-five minutes of every session consists of a basic grammar session and reading simple texts, followed by a further forty-five minutes of reading a slightly more advanced text (we are currently reading Plato's *Protagoras*). For information or to be added to the mailing list, please email Liz Smith.