Tel: 020 7361 3010
Email: libraries@rbkc.gov.uk
Web: www.rbkc.gov.uk/libraries or www.londonhistoryfestival.com

Festival directors:
Richard Foreman, Chalke
Dave Walker, The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Tickets: Kensington and Chelsea events
Price: £5 (£3 concessions) per event
Tickets for events at Kensington Central Library are on sale at all Kensington and Chelsea Libraries. Postal applications for tickets can be sent to the Local Studies Library at Kensington Central Library.

Payments in person or by post should be made in cash or by cheque only. Please make cheques payable to The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Payments by credit or debit card can be made via Librariesline on 020 7361 3010.

Kensington Central Library
Phillimore Walk, London, W8 7RX
Tel: 020 7361 3010

Weekly Blog...
The Library has a weekly blog about the history of Kensington and Chelsea, the Library Time Machine (http://rbkclocalstudies.wordpress.com). I and others tell stories arising from the history of the Royal Borough using pictures and photographs from the extensive Local Studies and Archives collection at Kensington Library.

Dave Walker, Local Studies Librarian, Kensington and Chelsea Libraries
Hugh Sebag-Montefiore

Appearing on 21 November
Hugh Sebag-Montefiore,
The Somme

In the course of your research did you work out what went wrong from the British point of view on the first day of the Battle of the Somme?

The main reason for the disaster on 1 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme was that Generals Sir Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France, and Sir Henry Rawlinson, the commander of British troops on the Somme, failed to come up with a sensible attack plan. Rawlinson, who was the more cautious of the two, might have hesitated in Haig had not their previous dealings made it hard for him to do so. He had made a mistake during a previous battle, Haig had saved him from being sacked, and as a result Rawlinson was under a moral obligation not to contradict his superior officer. There were other causes: British soldiers captured before the attack began told their German interrogators what was going to happen. Rawlinson’s good luck message on the morning of the attack, intercepted by the Germans, told them the assault was about to commence. The decision to blow up the mine under the German strongpoint near Beaumont Hamel ten minutes before zero hour, also alerted the Germans that an attack was imminent. As a result, when British troops advanced at zero hour, the Germans were in their trenches waiting for them...

I gather your book does not just cover the first day of the battle. Was there anything unexpected which came up during the subsequent four months?

I expected the book to focus almost exclusively on the fighting. However when I went to the Australian archives I was surprised to find they had retained the Red Cross files which enabled me to describe an aspect of the battle after 1 July 1916 which I had never dreamed of covering; the heartbreaking tale of how the parents of missing soldiers tried to find out what had happened to them. Following this theme, I made some pretty gruesome discoveries...

Was it a fair fight? I am sad to say both sides committed what we would today describe as war crimes. However some of the commanders became so desensitized by all the horrors they saw that killing off a few inconvenient prisoners became commonplace. I have described some of the cases I came across in the book...
The Silk Roads: A New History of the World
Monday 14 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

Peter Frankopan discusses the passage of world history and the relationship between the East and West. The East was once a seat of trade, culture, science and religion. The author will also discuss how India and China are again shaping the world. The Silk Roads are on the rise again.

Paul Lay, editor of History Today, will interview Peter Frankopan for the event.

Game of Queens
Tuesday 15 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

The sixteenth century was an Age of Queens, when powerful women ruled huge swathes of Europe. Sarah Gristwood, author of Game of Queens, discusses queens regent and regnant from Isabella of Castile to Elizabeth of England - and asks what the challenges they faced have to teach us about the present day?

Heroes and Villains
Thursday 17 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

Dan Snow talks about his favourite heroes and villains from history, including Richard I, General Wolfe, Napoleon and Wellington. Dan will also take questions about his adventures and television programmes, as well as the work he is doing with the History Hit podcast.

The Somme
Monday 21 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

Bestselling historian Hugh Sebag-Montefiore talks about one of history's most iconic battles, how the Somme encapsulated the tragedy and stoicism of the Western Front. He will also discuss the lessons learned from the battle and how the so nearly tragedy led to triumph.

Saul David, author of 100 Days to Victory, will be interviewing Hugh Sebag-Montefiore.

The Hundred Years War
Tuesday 22 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

Michael Jones talks about the Hundred Years War, with special reference to the Black Prince and the Battle of Agincourt. How did the conflict help shape England? How much has Shakespeare influenced our perception of Henry V and the war? Ask questions and join in the debate.

Sophie Ambler, author of the forthcoming Simon de Montfort and England’s First Revolution, will be interviewing Michael Jones.

The Peasant’s Revolt
Thursday 24 November, 7pm
Kensington Central Library

Sophie Ambler interviews acclaimed historian Juliet Barker about the Peasant’s Revolt - its causes, climax and legacy. How pivotal was Richard II’s role in the events? What was life like in medieval England, for both its rulers and the ruled? How much do the grievances of the people in 1381 resonate today? Join us for a fascinating discussion.
Sarah Gristwood

Appearing on 15 November

‘Game of Queens’ - good title! But surely we’ve heard something like that before, just recently...

Appearing on 15 November

‘Game of Thrones’ is purely intentional! Honestly, when you look at the beheadings, burnings, massacres, manipulations, forced marriages and incests in the factual story, you might as well be dealing with a fantasy. But there is a serious point here, too. The sixteenth century - or rather, the time from Isabella of Castile’s accession in 1474, to Elizabeth I’s death in 1603 - saw an explosion of female rule, which we’ve scarcely equalled today. Large swathes of Europe were run by a reigning queen or a female regent - and I think it’s no coincidence that it was in this era the chess queen got the powers we know today.

If not Jon Stark and Cersei Lannister, then power from mothers to daughters and mentor to protégé. Isabella of Castile to her daughter Katherine of Aragon, and on to Katherine’s daughter Mary Tudor. From the French regent Anne de Beaujeu to Louise of Savoy, through Louise’s daughter Marguerite of Navarre to her own daughter Jeanne d’Albret (heroine of the Protestant Reformation), and to Marguerite’s admirer Anne Boleyn and finally to Elizabeth Tudor. Women would find themselves at the forefront of the great religious divides that wracked the sixteenth century, and in the end, after the Massacre of St Bartholomew’s Day, religion would drive them apart. But it really had been an Age of Queens - and what fascinates me is that although some of these women are household names, others are virtually unknown in the English-speaking countries.

Your book was being published just as a woman prepared to contest the world’s most powerful office - President of the USA. Do you see any resemblance between the sixteenth century’s female leaders, and those of our own day?

More than I can even begin to tell you! They faced many of the same expectations, the same problems over who (and if) to marry, they were judged and attacked in the same ways. But read Margaret of Austria and Louise of Savoy discussing the ‘Ladies’ Peace’ of 1529 - how they could quickly sort the business if only their men would stop posturing and get out of the way - and you realise they had the same strengths, too. It may sound anachronistic, in an era before Germaine Greer or Guerrilla Girls, but this was a sisterhood which recognised their own bonds as women, and their ability to exercise power in a specifically feminine way.

Any resemblance to Game of Thrones is purely rational. Comfortingly rational.

Phil Mansel is a historian of France and the Middle East. He has lived in Paris, Beirut and Istanbul, and has frequently returned to Aleppo since his first visit in 1969. In 2012 he won the London Library Life in Literature award, and in 2015 became a Chevalier des Arts et Lettres. Aleppo: The Rise and Fall of Syria’s Great Merchant City is his third book on mixed cities of the Mediterranean, after Constantinople and Cairo. It owed its wealth to its position at the end of the Silk Road, at a crossroads of world trade, where merchants from Venice, Isfahan and Agra gathered in the largest suq in the Middle East. Throughout the region, it was famous for its food and its music. For 400 years British and French consuls and merchants lived in Aleppo; many of their accounts are used here for the first time.

In the first history of Aleppo in English, Dr Philip Mansel vividly describes its decline from a pinnacle of cultural and economic power, a poignant testament to a city shattered by Syria’s civil war.

Aleppo lies in ruins. Its streets are plunged in darkness, most of its population has fled. But this was once a vibrant world city, where Muslims, Christians and Jews lived and traded together in peace. Few places are as ancient and diverse as Aleppo – one of the oldest, continuously inhabited cities in the world – successively ruled by the Assyrian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman and French empires. Under the Ottomans, it became the empire’s third largest city, after Constantinople and Cairo. It owed its wealth to its position at the end of the Silk Road, at a crossroads of world trade, where merchants from Venice, Isfahan and Agra gathered in the largest suq in the Middle East. Throughout the region, it was famous for its food and its music. For 400 years British and French consuls and merchants lived in Aleppo; many of their accounts are used here for the first time.

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The Spy of Venice: Shakespeare’s lost years between 1585 and 1592

Thursday 10 November, 7pm

Kensington Central Library

Benet Brandreth is an expert on Shakespeare’s language and times, the rhetoric coach to the Royal Shakespeare Company and The Donmar, and a writer and performer whose last one-man show was a five-star reviewed sell-out at the Edinburgh Fringe and on its London transfer. He is qualified as an instructor in the Filipino Martial Arts and as a stage combat choreographer and he is the two time winner of the World Public Speaking Competition.

Benet Brandreth is the author of The Spy of Venice, his debut novel, which was published on the 24th March. On top of all that he is a leading IP barrister. His father is Gyles Brandreth.

The Spy of Venice is a novel about Shakespeare's lost years between 1585 and 1592 where there is no historical record of him. With historical record left blank, Brandreth has created a suspenseful, seductive and sharp reimagining of Shakespeare’s life. There are clever allusions to Shakespeare’s work throughout along with factual encounters and conversations woven into the thread of the story.

Aleppo: a Warning from History?

Monday 28 November, 7pm

Kensington Central Library

Aleppo: The Rise and Fall of Syria’s Great Merchant City by Philip Mansel

I.B. Tauris, Publication date: 10th March 2016, Hardback £17.99

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