

Following Rudyard Kipling's 'The Absent-minded Beggar'
19th June 2010, University of Bristol

This conference will concentrate on a single poem, 'The Absent-minded Beggar'. Written to raise money for the families of soldiers fighting in the Boer War, it was an immediate success, and is credited with raising between £250,000 and £300,000 (£14 and £17 million in today's money). Claims have been made that it is the most practically effective poem in English.

What, though, does it mean when we say a poem raised £250,000? How does a poem raise money? How did this poem become so immediately famous, nationally and internationally? How long did that fame last, and what were its literary and cultural effects?

To discuss these and other questions, the conference brings together a panel of speakers from the disciplines of English Literature, History, and Theatre Studies (Professor Peter Bailey, Professor Tim Kendall, Dr John Lee, Dr Simon Potter, and Professor Edward Spiers). Following the poem's route to fame takes us to the Victorian Music Halls and Theatres and their stars. It takes us back to read again the new, campaigning mass-circulation newspapers and to understand how news flowed around the imperial and international telegraphic system. It calls for an understanding of the kind of charitable giving that existed before the Welfare State, as well as for a sense of how the British public responded to the Boer War, and who made up the army that was fighting, and writing, in that war. It asks us to imagine and enter into the cultural life of 1899, as Victoria's reign came towards an end, and a new century, with new challenges, began. Above all, it is a journey which points up the sheer size of Kipling's literary and popular stature, and the global nature of his audience.

All -- researchers, students, and readers -- are welcome to the conference, which will be held in the University of Bristol's School of Humanities, close to the centre of Bristol. Most of the day will be taken up with papers from the speakers. Questions will be welcome at the end of each paper, and there will be a general round-table discussion / Q&A session to conclude the conference.

Registration: Before 1st June -- £15 full / £10 concessions and £10 full without lunch / £5 concessions without lunch.

Conference Website http://web.me.com/postrestant/TAMB/Following_The_Absent-minded_Beggar.html