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Sean Moore, Assistant Professor of English travels to England

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Sean Moore

Assistant Professor of English - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Moore traveled to England in March 2010 to present a conference paper at the University of Cambridge.



Sean Moore at Nordkirchen Palace in Germany

I travelled to the University of Cambridge in March to present a paper at a conference, "Questioning 'Credible Commitment': Rethinking the Glorious Revolution and the Rise of Financial Capitalism." This scholarly meeting aimed to revise the 1989 claims of the economists Douglas North and Barry Weingast that the 1688 Revolution in England introduced a new political system that gave people who lent money to the government more confidence that it would pay them back. The conference took place at Newnham College, the women's college at Cambridge, and accommodations were provided at Sidney Sussex College, a college founded by Queen Elizabeth I that counts historical figures such as Oliver Cromwell among its alumni.

The conference was somewhat daunting for me because I was the only English professor among an international group of economists and financial historians who used a lot more econometric data about the period than I did. Still, interdisciplinary input was valued at this conference and my paper, "John Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel and the Problem of Contract: The Stopping of the Exchequer and the Memory of Non-Credible Commitment" was well received. My paper claimed

that Dryden's poem, which has generally been taken as one on the religious theme of the Exclusion Crisis (1679-1681) – the controversy in Parliament over whether King Charles II's Catholic brother James could succeed him on the throne – was really about money. In 1672, King Charles, like many modern governments including present-day Greece, had defaulted on his national debt, which was largely owed to a group of London Puritan goldsmiths and their depositors, some of whom were members of Parliament. This failure to pay back loans resulted in resentment against the King and challenges to his rule like Parliament's bill to exclude James from succession. My paper argued that Dryden employed coinage imagery in the poem to shift blame for the default to the goldsmiths themselves, who he accused of debasing the coinage by clipping the edges off of coins and selling the gold and silver on the international market.

The conference featured many events, such as a plenary lecture on the history of English war financing by Patrick O'Brien of the London School of Economics and the launching of a new resource for scholars of economic history, the European State Finance Database. I made many new acquaintances at the conference and there is talk of organizing other conferences and events at Cambridge on the history of public finance in the early modern period and the eighteenth century.

My participation in the conference was made possible by a bursary from the University of Cambridge and a CIE travel grant, and I am grateful that even in these tough economic times, UNH continues to fund its faculty's participation in international scholarly meetings and research.



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