

Seminar:

**Assembling Missionary Knowledge:  
The Making and Reading of Evangelical  
Periodicals in Britain and the South Pacific,  
1793–1820**

Speaker:

**Dr Kate Tilson**

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**Tuesday 27 May 2025, 4.00–5.30pm BST**

Faculty of Divinity, West Road & Online



**Abstract**

In the London Missionary Society (LMS) library in Tahiti in 1834, bound volumes of evangelical periodicals were situated amongst the books. These included missionary periodicals, which catalogued and celebrated evangelising projects around the world, as well as children's magazines and literary reviews. Through exploring how missionaries interacted with periodical culture in the early nineteenth century, this paper works to disentangle missionary knowledge networks and to locate the formation of their intellectual worlds. A key concern here is how British periodicals reconfigured missionary conceptualisations of 'home' and 'mission', amidst complex and often difficult cross-cultural encounters on the ground. In turning away from the idea that evangelical periodicals were solely vehicles of propaganda, the paper opens up a space in which to discuss how these texts extended evangelical networks overseas and coalesced with other knowledge traditions. The paper begins with a focus on London and the evangelical energy behind the emergence of world-spanning print channels from the late eighteenth century. The second half of the paper turns to the LMS mission station in Tahiti and the patched together character of evangelical periodicals, the mobile texts that constituted their pages and connected readers across the globe. The paper draws upon a vast missionary archive and argues for a combined-source approach for the study of periodicals. More widely, it asks questions about the study of religion, media and the materiality of knowledge, and it brings the evangelical knowledge industry into a more globalised context.

Dr. Kate Tilson is a Junior Research Fellow at Clare College, University of Cambridge. She is a historian of British missions in New Zealand and the wider South Pacific and is especially interested in histories of cross-cultural knowledge production, print culture, medicine and the environment. Her work has appeared in several academic journals, including *Cultural and Social History*, the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* and the *Social History of Medicine*. She is writing her first book on missionary print culture in the South Pacific and she has started a new project on missions, childhood and children's literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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