

V&A Academy

LONDON 1666- 1851: EMPORIUM AND EMPIRE

V&A

Introduction

In the two hundred years after the Great Fire London emerged as the world's greatest city, the metropolitan capital of the largest empire in history, consisting of grand houses and elegant squares, a river teaming with ships from all corners of the globe, and a galaxy of artists, writers, actors, musicians and master craftsmen drawn from all over Europe. Industry came with empire and from the early 1800s new docks, canals, warehouses and eventually railways girded London and sped up the ebb and flow of people and goods. Yet this achievement was marked by widespread social unrest. Events such as the Gordon Riots showed how the London mob could threaten the peace of the prosperous. In response new institutions such as the workhouse, the penitentiary and the police were created to still the grumbling hive, along the way creating a new infrastructure of metropolitan government.

Information

Wednesdays, 21 January – 25 March 2026, 11.00-15.30. Onsite and Online.

Watch lecture recordings on demand, available at the end of each day, until Wednesday 3 June 2026*

Your course leader

Mike Berlin is a Lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London. He is a specialist in the social history of early modern London and has published extensively on the history of London's guilds. Before joining Birkbeck, he was a research officer at the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research.

Note: V&A Academy programmes are subject to change without notice.

** Meet & Greet for either online or in-person*

** *Gallery talks will not be recorded; additional ticket holder will receive further details where to meet. Usually Exhibition Road Entrance, Blavatnik Hall*

Week 1 – Wednesday 21 January 2026

London Life in the Eighteenth Century

- 10.45 Introduction **Mike Berlin**
- 11.00 London's Coffee Houses **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Jokes and Slang in Eighteenth Century London **Simon Jarrett**
- 14.30 The East India Company and the taste for the exotic **Nikke Ariff**
- 15.30 In-person Meet & Greet **Mike Berlin** – In-person ticket holders only*

Week 2 – Wednesday 28 January 2026

Patrician London

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) **Nikke Ariff** *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 Palaces and Great Houses **Caroline Knight**
- 12.30 High Society: Home House and Polite London **Leo Hollis**
- 14.30 The Great Estates: The Georgian Building Cycle **Mike Berlin**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) **Nikke Ariff** - *additional ticket holders only***

- 15.45 Online Meet & Greet **Mike Berlin** – Online ticket holders only*

Week 3 – Wednesday 4 February 2026

Plebian London

- 11.00 Mobs and Riots **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Food and Drink in Eighteenth Century London **Sara Pennell**
- 14.30 Dust and Dirt **Mark Jenner**

Week 4 – Wednesday 11 February 2026

‘Made in London’: the Trades of London

- 11.00 Spitalfields Silk Weavers **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Huguenot Gold and Silversmiths **Tessa Murdoch**
- 14.30 The London Furniture Trade **Adam Bowett**
- 15.30 Wood Carving Clunie Fetton (Group A, B) – *additional ticket holder** only*

Week 5 – Wednesday 18 February 2026

The London and the Georgian Art World

- 11.00 Portraits and Patrons in Eighteenth Century London **Justine Hopkins**
- 12.30 Academies and the Rise of High Art in Eighteenth Century London
Kathy McLauchlan
- 14.30 Caricatures and Prints in Eighteenth Century London **Mike Berlin**

Week 6 – Wednesday 25 February 2026

City of Spectacles: London Amused

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – *additional ticket holders only***
- 11.00 Circuses, Ballooning and Spectacles **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Garrick and the London Theatre **Giles Ramsay**
- 14.30 Actresses and the cult of celebrity **Malcolm Jones**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) – *additional ticket holders only***

Week 7 – Wednesday 4 March 2026

London Greened: Squares and Gardens

- 11.00 London’s Squares **David Marsh**
- 12.30 London’s Gardens **David Marsh**
- 14.30 London’s Pleasure Gardens **Mike Berlin**

Week 8 – Wednesday 11 March 2026

The World in a City

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – additional ticket holders only**
- 11.00 The First Multicultural City **Mike Berlin**
- 12.30 Georgian London's African Connection **S I Martin**
- 14.30 London and Slavery **William Pettigrew**
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) – additional ticket holders only**

Week 9 – Wednesday 18 March 2026

London Improved

- 11.00 John Nash and Regent Street **Geoffrey Tyack**
- 12.30 The Iron Grooves of Change: Roads, Docks, Canals and Railways **Mike Berlin**
- 14.30 London's Architects: Barry, Pugin and Scott **Megan Aldrich**

Week 10 – Wednesday 25 March 2026

London Observed

- 10.00 Gallery Talk (Group A) – additional ticket holders only**
- 11.00 The Great Stink: Water Pollution and Sanitary Improvement **Rosemary Ashton**
- 12.30 London Fog **Christine Corton**
- 14.30 Representing the London Crowd
- 15.30 Gallery Talk (Group B) - additional ticket holders only**

Additional study options

This 10-weeklong course is part of the London course series over three terms, available online, in-person or in-person with gallery tours.

With our in-person London walking tours you can complement your learning.

London 1666-1851: Emporia and Empire – Spring term (January 2026)

London: The Global City 1851 – 2020 - Summer term (April 2026)

A History of London: 1066-1666 - Autumn term (September 2026)

Walking tours

Stratford Walking Tour: London from the East with Mike Berlin

Friday 27 February, 20 March 2026

Hackney Wick & Fish Island Walking Tour: Sense of Place with Colin

Thursday 22 January, 19 February 2026

Egypt in London with Mike Berlin

Friday 6 February 2026 – waiting list

Spitalfields Walking Tour: Immigration and Creativity with Mike Berlin

Friday 20 February & 13 March 2026 – waiting list

South Kensington Walking Tour with Mike Berlin

Friday 8 May, 22 May 2026

Hampstead Walking tour with Christine Lalumia

Friday 24 April 2026

The City of London: Medieval City to Modern Metropolis with Mike Berlin

Berlin (Autumn term) coming soon

Discover all the walking tour events and courses via [V&A Academy](#)

V&A Members enjoy priority booking at term launch. [Find out more](#)

Email courses@vam.ac.uk to join a walking tour waiting list if the event shows as sold out.