Margery Kempe in the 21st Century
University College, Oxford, 5th – 7th April 2018

Organisers: Dr Laura Varnam (University College, Oxford) and Dr Laura Kalas Williams (Swansea University)

The Book of Margery Kempe (c.1448) has gained extensive scholarly attention since the discovery of the only surviving manuscript in 1934. Margery Kempe’s Book is considered to be the first female autobiography in the English language and is now recognised as an important text in the canon of English literature. Her infamous form of dramatic, visceral, and unapologetically-loud piety has been subject to multiple interpretations. Scholarship has focused upon the Book’s authorial complexity, its orthodoxy, its codicology, its value as a work of protofeminism, its medical significations, its historicity, and its crucial interplay with other European writings, influences, and transmissions. Recent work has included important discoveries of related, medieval documents from Poland, and the deciphering of the elusive recipe from the manuscript’s final folio.

This landmark, international conference seeks to bring together Kempe scholars, both long-standing and new, to interrogate the status quo and significance of Margery Kempe Studies in the 21st century. In the age of multidisciplinary scholarship, and in the light of the striking renewal of energy for Kempe Studies, this three-day conference will reassess critical approaches to The Book of Margery Kempe and invite new and innovative research avenues. As a perhaps unprecedented event in its singular focus upon Margery Kempe’s text, life, and afterlife, this conference will enable scholars working in diverse fields to engage in valuable dialogue and to consider the future of Kempe Studies.

As well as critical responses to Margery Kempe’s life and text, the conference will also incorporate artistic and creative interpretations which will further broaden this rich and pioneering field. We are delighted to be able to showcase Máirín O’Hagan and Sarah Anson’s play Marge & Jules, an exciting performance based on the meeting of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, documented in Margery’s Book.

We are delighted to confirm the keynote speakers as Professor Anthony Bale (Birkbeck), Professor Liz Herbert McAvoy (Swansea), Dr Sarah Salih (King’s College, London), Professor Diane Watt (Surrey), and Professor Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa (Shizuoka).

We invite abstracts of 300 words for proposals for 20 minute papers on topics that might include, but are by no means limited to:
• Twenty-first century approaches to Kempe and her Book
• The role of the Book as a literary work and / or its place in the literary canon
• The Book as situated within the context of Medieval Studies
• Margery Kempe's place, or liminality, in medieval society
• The place of the Book within Gender Studies and / or feminist and / or queer theory
• Margery Kempe within her European context and textual transmission
• Theological approaches to Kempe: her orthodoxy, heresy, marginality
• The historicity of the Book and the ramifications thereof
• Palaeographical or codicological concerns
• Methodological and epistemological approaches to the Book
• Kempe in relation to the institution of the Church and its representatives
• Weeping / crying, both contextually and philosophically
• Scientific, medical and / or psychological interpretations and contexts
• Aspects of mysticism and spiritual rapture or ecstasy
• Issues of spiritual embodiment and physiology
• The Book in relation to the history of emotion and / or the senses
• Representations of domesticity, family, life cycle and kinship in the Book
• The materiality of the Book and / or Kempe's experience
• Visual or iconographic culture as played out in the Book
• Place and / or space: locality, travel, movement, pilgrimage
• The archaeology or architecture of Kempe's world
• Food, fasting, the Eucharist, and the politics of consumption
• Voice-hearing, visionary experience, metaphysicality

This is an exciting opportunity to bring together esteemed and emerging scholars of Kempe from around the world to explore the implications of our growing and nuanced understandings of the Book in the context of 21st century multidisciplinary scholarship, and its place in the canon of literature.

**We anticipate that this landmark event will generate global interest, and numbers will be limited. Therefore, priority for registration will be given to those individuals who have papers accepted.**

Paper abstracts of no more than 300 words, plus a short biography, should be sent to Dr Laura Varnam and Dr Laura Kalas Williams, at margerykempeconference@gmail.com no later than 1st October 2017.

We are very grateful to University College, Oxford for their generous support in funding the conference and to the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship.

For more information, please follow us on twitter @ConfMKempe and visit our website: www.margerykempeconference.wordpress.com