

ONLINE TALK, COTTON

List of Speakers and details of their talks:

Sally Fox of [Foxfibre®](#)

An iconic figure in the fashion industry, Sally Fox has been spinning, knitting and weaving since childhood. It was her passion for making that led her to see this market potential for long-staple organic cotton. It was the financial support of the crafting community that allowed her to quit her job as a scientist and devote her life to developing cross-pollinated varieties of cotton. Heirloom cotton was once abundant and grew in a rainbow of shades including green, yellow, blue and brown. Fox did what no one thought was possible. She had bred ancient, genetically diverse naturally pest-resistant varieties into long-staple cotton. These varieties could be grown using organic farming methods and had staple lengths long enough to allow the fibre to be machine spun into high-quality yarn. This was revolutionary and for the first time made organically grown coloured cotton available to a new generation of designers who wanted to avoid the environmental damage caused by pesticides and chemical dyes. Each fibre; Redwood, Coyote, New Green, and Buffalo took a decade of cross-breeding before it could be brought to the market. The slow fashion movement with its hand-spun fibres can be elitist and cost-prohibitive to conscious consumers, but by democratising indigenous cotton Sally Fox has made it an economic reality for all. Getting this spectacular cotton into mainstream industry use remains her ultimate goal.

Description of talk:

In 1982 (having just finished up my BSc in Integrated Pest Management from the University of California at Riverside) while working for a cotton breeder as his pollinator and pest resistance evaluator, I came across seeds bearing brown fibre in a greenhouse drawer. Thrilled to finally see a colour in cotton and learning that these seeds had been supplied by the USDA as a source of innate insect and plant disease resistance genetic traits, I immediately focused on the fibre itself. Which was not pleasant or easy for me to spin. Setting out, using classical plant breeding methods, to breed a cotton whose lint had the colour, but on an easier to spin fibre. I envisioned a textile world where cotton could be grown organically in colour. Thus, reducing pollution at the farm and at the mill. These vibrant cottons allowed many a farmer success in trying to farm cotton organically in the US. By 1995 we had over 5000 acres of organic production in the parts of the US where insect pressures resulted in 12 or more pesticide applications per year on the conventional farms. But when the textile industry shifted from processing in the US, Europe, and Japan in the late '90's white

cottons became the predominant cotton used for organic production in India, which became the main area of organic cotton production and processing. My work with these cottons of colour and vigour continues here in the US, funded only by the sales of the products themselves.

Barbara Hahn

Barbara Hahn is Professor of History at Texas Tech University, and was the Associate Editor of Technology and Culture as well as a Marie Curie International Incoming Fellow to the European Union at the University of Leeds. She received her PhD from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, where she studied the tobacco industry and its interactions with tobacco agriculture over three centuries. She is the author of *Making Tobacco Bright* (2011) and, with Bruce E. Baker, *The Cotton Kings: Capitalism and Corruption in Turn-of-the-Century New York and New Orleans* (2016), along with many journal articles and commentary. Her most recent book is *Technology in the Industrial Revolution*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2020.

Description of talk: Cottonopolis

The Industrial Revolution – the mechanisation of textile production in late eighteenth-century Britain – was a classic case of rapid and revolutionary technological change. It was also, like all historical events, a product of the interactions between local contingencies and global processes. The town of Manchester was the prism that focused world systems into new configurations as its merchants' invested capital in machinery and factories. This presentation explores the specific contingencies of the location, its laws and people, to explain the timing of mechanisation and its reconfiguration of world economic power.

Marzia Lanfranchi

[Marzia Lanfranchi's](#) mission is to shape a healthier fashion system by breaking companies' silos and building bridges across supply chain segments. She has worked in various roles, ranging from fabric development at Burberry, responsible sourcing and social compliance for brands, retail and marketing to even the agricultural industry. Thanks to her experience—from seed to store—she has a thorough understanding of how supply chains operate and is well-versed in the key sustainability challenges facing the textile industry today.

Giorgio Riello

Giorgio Riello is Chair of Early Modern Global History at the European University Institute. He is the author of *Cotton* (CUP 2013 – winner of the World History Association Book Prize 2014), *Luxury: A Rich History* (OUP, 2016 - co-authored with Peter McNeil), and *Back in Fashion:*

Western Fashion from the Middle Ages to the Present (Yale UP, 2020). He has published on global trade between Europe and Asia, and on material culture and fashion in the early modern period. He has recently co-edited *Dressing Global Bodies* (Routledge, 2020) and *The Right to Dress: Sumptuary in a Global Perspective* (CUP, 2019). He is currently completing a book (with Dagmar Schaefer) entitled *Cultures of Innovation: Silk in Pre-Modern Eurasia* and is developing a project entitled 'European Factories of the Indian Ocean, 1600-1780', considering the system of trade in the Indian Ocean.

Description of talk: *Indian Cotton Textiles and the Atlantic Trade*

From the late seventeenth century, large quantities of cheap cotton cloth were sold to the West Indian plantations as well as to North American and African markets. This was cloth produced in India or copies made in Europe and sold across the Atlantic. It was used to purchase enslaved people who were transported from West Africa to the sugar and cotton plantations of the West Indies and the Americas. This paper shows the importance of Europe in connecting the Indian and Atlantic Oceans and the global scale of the textile trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Trevor Burnard

Trevor Burnard is Wilberforce Professor of Slavery and Emancipation at the University of Hull and Director of the Wilberforce Institute. He is a specialist in the Atlantic World and slavery in plantation societies. He is the author of *Only Connect: A Field Report on Early American History* (Virginia, forthcoming); *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution* (2020) and *The Atlantic World, 1492-1830* (2020). He recently curated a special forum in the journal, *Slavery and Abolition* on Black Lives Matter and Slavery. He is a member of the senior management board of the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre.

Description of talk:

Cotton is indeed, as historian Giorgio Riello argues, the fabric that has made the modern world. It is a commodity that connects the world – from its origins and cultivation in Asia; its use as a fabric in Europe; its role in facilitating trade between Europe, Asia and West Africa, including the development of the Atlantic slave trade; and its transition to the Americas, where by the early nineteenth century it formed a crucial part of antebellum southern plantations and American exports. This lecture looks at cotton in global context and in particular its particular history in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in India, Africa, Europe (especially Britain), the West Indies and the United States. It will look not just at the production of cotton and its close relationship with both slavery and capitalism but in how cotton was consumed by discerning customers, especially women.

Adele Stafford

Adele Stafford is a textiles artist whose work is an ongoing investigation of fibre as a material and its connection to agriculture and place. Over the last ten years, she's worked under the name [Voices of Industry](#), producing hand woven garments as representative of a particular piece of land and the stewards who reside there. Adele has extensive experience in the sustainability sector for apparel and textiles and currently works with leading brands and manufacturers on addressing climate impact throughout the value chain. Adele lives on a small farm in the Green Mountains of Vermont where she and her husband are building a regenerative orchard and market garden.

Description of talk:

Cotton has long embodied a complicated and sordid narrative, in spite of its ubiquity as a dominant natural fibre. Through both historical and contemporary examples, we'll examine cotton's agricultural legacy and its role in a vastly changing climate.