What is Old Age? New Perspectives from the Humanities

Saturday 23rd February 2013

On Saturday 23rd February, the HRC conference ‘What is Old Age? New Perspectives from the Humanities’ was held as Warwick. It was a packed one-day conference, designed to bring together scholars from across the humanities, and to consider what our disciplines might have to offer the ever-growing interdisciplinary study of old age.

Scholars came from all over the globe (from as far away as Kiev, Toronto and Texas), and from across the disciplinary spectrum. It included established names from the humanistic study of ageing (such as historian Lynn Botelho who spoke on a ‘good old age’ and sociologist Julia Twigg who spoke on clothing and ageing), as well postgraduates and people in the early stages of their career. There were contributions from anthropologists and historians, scholars of film and literature, and yet in spite of the huge range of disciplinary perspectives, there was a sense of continuity amongst many of the papers. Common themes running throughout the day included independence and dependency, ageing femininity, fear and expectation of loss, and the diversity of representations of ageing.

Keynote speeches were given by Professor Helen Small of Pembroke College Oxford, who gave an intriguing account of national differences in the ‘double standard’ of gendered ageing, and Professor Pat Thane from Kings College London, who finished the day with an overview of the understandings and experiences of age in the past.

From the beginning, this day was pronounced as one for a wide range of scholars to make connections and begin conversations. It was a buzzy day, full of laughter and good food! On ruminating on the value of the day over wine at the end, the organiser suggested that perhaps its greatest asset was that ‘we all had a nice time’. A good spring-board for other events and collaborations in the future.