

## BJHS special issue: On time: history, science and commemoration

### Introduction

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Time is a fundamental concept that we typically take for granted in our everyday lives. Rarely do we look at our wristwatch and think how seconds, minutes and hours came to take on such importance. Even less do we reflect on all the work that goes into making seconds, minutes and hours appear as something as natural as the world around us.

What is time? How is it we have come to order our lives in such regulated and precise ways? How has our conception of time changed throughout history? The idea to reflect upon such weighty questions emerged at a conference organized by the British Society for the History of Science on the subject of 'space' held at the University of Kent in 1994. It seemed to many participants that the topic of time would make an equally interesting subject for a meeting. In particular, one question came to the fore: did space dominate time or time dominate space? In the event it took the dawning of a new century to provide the impetus, excuse and opportunity to organize a meeting to discuss such matters. It also quickly became clear that other historical societies and institutions had similar aims. The result was a joint three-day meeting, co-organized by the BSHS, the Royal Historical Society and the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, held at the impressive Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool, in September 1999.

This unprecedented coalition demonstrated the importance and productivity of bringing together historians of different backgrounds and interests. The bridging of traditional boundaries was also symbolized by Ludmilla Jordanova's unique position as both president of the BSHS and vice-president of the Royal Historical Society. The whole event, not surprisingly, attracted significant media attention and was deemed by all concerned a great success. This special issue of the *BJHS* is a small sample of the diversity and richness that characterized the meeting.