Was she a rock of constitutional stability in a sea of bloody revolution (as Edmund Burke might say) or a corrupt, rotten oligarchy on the verge of well-deserved collapse (as Tom Paine thought)? What was it like to gain (and lose) an Empire? What did slavery in the Americas mean to the British at home?

Whether watching a hanging at Tyburn, speculating on the newly invented stock market, chasing pirates or seeking suitable marriage partners at Bath, British men and women in the 18th century faced a world that had been dramatically remade by consumer capitalism, Enlightenment ideas, political revolution(s) and warfare on an unprecedented scale.

Readings include works by John Locke, Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Olaudah Equiano and Jane Austen.