



## **VOLUNTARY ACTION HISTORY SEMINARS**

VAHS seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research

### **SEMINAR ABSTRACT**

9<sup>th</sup> June 2014

**Thomas Davies**

**City University London**

International NGOs: New Directions for Historical Research

Drawing from his experience writing *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society*, Dr Thomas Davies will discuss new directions for historical research into voluntary action at the transnational level. He will commence by considering the extensive array of international non-governmental organizations that developed before the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these organizations have been neglected in existing accounts, and consideration of these organizations provides new answers to the question: 'What was the first international?' Dr Davies will also elucidate the transition that took place especially from the late eighteenth century onwards by which ancient forms of transnational association such as religious orders, missionary groups and secret societies were superseded by 'modern' international non-governmental organizations. In contrast to conventional accounts, Dr Davies will explore the significance of looking beyond the 'Western' context in order effectively to understand the emergence and historical evolution of transnational voluntary action. In his analysis of the evolution of international non-governmental organizations from the late nineteenth century through to the present day, Dr Davies will also challenge conventional approaches by outlining a cyclical perspective incorporating the role of factors internal to international non-governmental organizations as well as external dynamics. A key theme in the seminar will be discussion of the diverse array of historical sources available to those investigating the transnational dimension of voluntary action, and the opportunities and challenges that these sources present.