

# PREFACE

*Vides* has always been about making connections. The essays make connections between different kinds of creative output or historical evidence to generate new insights into the past. The production process, meanwhile, helps students on the MSt in Literature and Arts stay connected after the last of the programme's formal meetings in Oxford. This issue of *Vides* has been created at a time when our connections have been tested in extraordinary ways. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives since last spring. One of its consequences is that the creators of this issue have not, for the most part, seen each other in person for over a year. They have also, for most of that time, been unable to see books, paintings, and other historic artefacts without the aid of a screen, as libraries, archives, and museums have closed their doors. While the pandemic has cast a long shadow, this issue has also been produced in the wake of anti-racist protests in the early summer of 2020. These protests and the conversations and actions they prompted have encouraged us to think about how the past is present in our society and how best to understand and commemorate it.

This issue of *Vides* shows what can be achieved through hard work and collaboration even at a time of unpredictable and unprecedented challenges. Creating a new issue of *Vides* involves much more than writing essays, though this is no small task. There is also the work of copy-editing each essay

according to agreed style guidelines, checking the permitted uses of each image, designing the covers and layout, arranging the contents, and writing an introduction. Everyone who has played a part in this process can be proud of what they have achieved.

The essays in this issue offer a brilliant kaleidoscope of perspectives on the past. Some consider how individuals presented themselves and how they were represented by others. Another cross-section of essays looks at the experiences of groups of people and how they were perceived, represented, and manipulated. Some essays shine a light on developments in science, while others explore how artists and writers took inspiration from religion and ritual. A number of essays focus on the influence of British culture and the workings of British imperialism in other parts of the world, while other essays look at the influence of other cultures on Britain. In the past year we have been reminded that history is not fixed—it is a collection of stories that are constantly changing as they are retold. I am sure that readers of this issue will find plenty of stories to interest them and make them look at the past with fresh eyes.

**Carly Watson**

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