While there has been a strong emphasis on writing the British empire into world history in recent years, few scholars have been tempted to write the British empire into European history or indeed to write European history into the British imperial past. On the contrary, a number of historiographical initiatives taken in the last decades have resulted in an increasing isolation between those studying Britain’s imperial past and those investigating its role in Europe.

This seminar explores a case study in which these separate historiographies intersect. It focuses on the ways in which Britain and Germany co-operated (and collided) in the North Sea in the long nineteenth century. In analysing these interactions, the paper will argue that the British imperial and European national pasts are inseparably bound up with one another.

Dr Jan Rüger teaches Modern European History at Birkbeck, University of London. His research focuses on the history of Britain and Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His monograph The Great Naval Game: Britain and Germany in the Age of Empire (Cambridge, 2007) explores the theatre of power and identity that unfolded between the two countries in the decades before 1914. His research interests also include the relationship between laughter and power in modern Germany, a topic on which he has published a number of articles. He is currently writing a new history of the Anglo-German relationship.