History Writing in Britain and Ireland, 1820 - 1920

Course Outline and General Reading

The nineteenth century marked the high-tide of historical writing in Britain’s public culture. By the 1850s the historian as moral philosopher, as political scientist, as cultural critic and as prophet of the future was everywhere celebrated, and large works of history rivalled popular novels on publishers’ best selling lists. At the same time the study of history, once despised in the universities as mere dilletantism, was rapidly establishing itself as a respectable academic discipline, and by the end of the century the methods of research, standards of accuracy, forms of publishing and organising institutions of the modern historical profession had been firmly established.

Similar tendencies were discernible in Ireland in the early decades of the nineteenth century. But by the second half of the century a serious divergence had arisen over the nature and purpose of historical research between Ireland and Britain. In the former the political and cultural critics and free-lance men of letters writing for a broad popular audience with overt (and often opposed) political and ideological purposes continued to dominate while historical research in the universities languished. But in Britain the university historians burrowing in the archives and writing generally for their peers steadily asserted their ascendancy as the authoritative practitioners of history. And, as political, and cultural relations between the two countries began rapidly to deteriorate in the early years of the twentieth century, so two very different conceptions of the value of history began to assume an important role at the heart of this process of separation.

This course seeks to trace the course of History’s history in Britain and Ireland through a variety of avenues. The careers and works of the great representatives of both countries—Macaulay, Carlyle and Froude Stubbs, Acton, Maitland and Gardiner in England, and Taaffe, Ferguson, Prendergast, Lecky, Gilbert, Bagwell, Orpen, MacNeill—on the other—
will be examined. The structures and contexts of research, teaching and publication will be explored. And a critical analysis of the great themes of the leading historical works – the Norman Conquest, the Reformation, Cromwell, Empire, and the running sore of Ireland – will reveal the degree to which contemporary ideological preoccupations influenced supposedly detached historical interpretations.

Course Outline

Week One: Lecture: Perspectives, problems and procedures in the study of British and Irish literary culture in the nineteenth century.

Week Two: Lecture: Cultural contexts and political conflicts: the late Enlightenment and its Critics

Seminar: British and Irish Historians compared: Sharon Turner’s *History of England during the reign of Henry VIII* (1827) and Dennis Taaffe’s *An Impartial History of Ireland* (1809)

Week Three: Lecture: Conditions of literary production and distribution: the frameworks of writing, publishing and reading in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century

Seminar: Heavy-weight journals: *The Edinburgh Review, The Quarterly Review, Blackwood’s* and *Fraser’s*

Week Four: Lecture: ‘The Whig Interpretation of history’: Ferguson, Mackintosh. Hallam and Macaulay

Seminar: Henry Hallam’s *Constitutional History of England* and
Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England*

**Week Five:**  **Lecture:** Romantic History: Scott, Carlyle, Mitchel

**Seminar:** Thomas Carlyle’s *History of the French Revolution*

**Week Six:**  **Lecture:** Sectarian History: Lingard Arnold, Milman and Froude

**Seminar:** James Anthony Froude’s *History of England from the death of Wolsey to the defeat of the Armada*

**Week Seven:**  **Lecture:** History for an English Nation: Sharon Turner, Freeman, Stubbs and Round

**Seminar:** The English in Ireland: Froude, Prendergast and Lecky

**Week Eight:**  **Lecture:** History for a British Empire: Froude, Seely, Bryce

**Seminar:** J.R Seely’s *The Expansion of England*

**Week Nine:**  **Lecture:** Professionalisation: History in the Universities, old and new, 1850 – 1900

**Seminar:** The Cambridge History Tripos and the *Cambridge Modern History*

**Week Ten:**  **Lecture:** Scholars versus Scholars: the struggle for history in Ireland
Seminar: Bagwell, Orpen, Sullivan, McNeill

Week Eleven: Lecture: The triumph of positivism and the defeat of idealism.

Seminar: Historians and the outbreak of World War I.

General reading

( More specific references to particular topics will be given during the course)

General reference:
Michael Bentley, Companion to Historiography (London, 1997)
Ernst Breisach, Historiography, Ancient, Medieval and Modern (Chicago, 1983, 1994)

Nineteenth Century Britain:

(a) General:
Derek Beales, From Castlereagh to Gladstone, 1815 – 1885 ( London,1970)

Asa Briggs, *Victorian People* (Harmondsworth, 1964)

G.F.A. Best *Mid-Victorian Britain 1871-75* (London, 1975)

(b) Cultural and Intellectual:


Adrian Desmond, *Archetypes and Ancestors: Palaeontology in Victorian London, 1850-1875*


Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford, 1941)


(c) Historians and Historiography:


Ciaran Brady, *Interpreting Irish History: the debate on historical revisionism* (Dublin, 1994)


A D. Culler, *The Victorian Mirror of History* (New Haven, 1985)

Duncan Forbes, *The Liberal Anglican idea of history* (Cambridge, 1952)


Rosemary Jann, *The Art and Science of Victorian History* (Columbus, Ohio, 1985)

G. Kitson Clark, ‘The origin of the Cambridge Modern History’, *Cambridge Historical Journal* 8 (1945), 57 - 64


Christopher Parker: *The English historical tradition since 1850*  
(Edinburgh, 1990)

Christopher Parker, *The English idea of history from Coleridge to Collingwood*  
(Aldershot, 2000)

Thomas Peardon, *The transition in English historical writing, 1760-1830* (New York, 1966)


Reba Soffer, *Discipline and Power: the University, History and the making of an English Elite* (Cambridge, 1994)


Benedict Stuchtey and Peter Wende (eds), *British and German Historiography, 1750 –
1950: traditions, perceptions and transfers
(Oxford, 2000)
Hugh Tulloch, Acton (London, 1988)

Blair Worden, Roundhead reputations: the English civil wars and the passions of posterity (London, 2001)

Deborah Wormell, Sir John Seeley and the uses of history (Cambridge, 1980)

Jeffrey Von Arx, Progress and Pessimism: religion, politics and history in late nineteenth century Britain (Cambridge Mass, 1985)

Course Requirements:

Attendance at tutorials is mandatory and subject to the same rules as apply for attendance at List I and List III courses. A presentation will be made in each of the seminars by at least one course attendee. This presentation may or may not (according to taste) be used as a basis of the required essay. One essay is required for credit in this course. The essay is due on Monday 25th March 2013.