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 dilettantism, 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; F.W Maitland

**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)
Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maiguashca, and Attila Pók (eds), The Oxford History of Historical Writing: volume 4: 1800 - 1945

Nineteenth Century Britain and Ireland:

(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)


Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats*, (Seattle, 1972)


(b) Cultural and Intellectual:


Stefan Collini: *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual life in*
Britain, 1850 – 1930 (Oxford, 1992)
Stefan Collini; Donald Winch; John Burrow, That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History (Cambridge, 1978)

Philip Davis, The Victorians (Oxford, 2002)

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

Humphrey House, The Dickens World (Oxford, 1941)


Raymond Williams, Culture and Society in England, 1750 – 1950 (Harmondsworth, 1961)

(c) Historians and Historiography:


Michael Bentley, Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of


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


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


G.R. Elton, *F.W Maitland* (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*
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)


**Assessment Requirements:**

As this is a year-long module, assessment is entirely based on written course work. **There is no final examination.**

Assessment will thus take the form of **Two** essays of approximately 4,000 – 5,000 words, one to be submitted each term. In order to encourage progression, integration and synthesis, the weighting for the first essay will account for 40% of the total assessment and the second essay will count for 60%.

Additional coursework is required in the form of **Two** short seminar presentations per term which may be undertaken either individually or as part of a group presentation.

**Dates of Essay submission:**

Essay 1  (JS Single Honors only in one of the 2 List II’s taken):

**Monday 5 December 2016**

(JS-TSM, JS-HPS, and SS-HPS taking both subject together)

and of essay in second of two List 2 year-long modules (JS Single Honors), on **Either Monday 5 or 12 December 2016**

Essay 2  (JS Single Honors only in one of the 2 List II’s taken):

**Monday 27 March 2016**

(JS-TSM, JS-HPS, and SS-HPS taking both subject together) and of an essay in the second of two List 2 year-long modules (JS Single Honors): on **Either Monday 27 March or 3 April 2017**