

HISTORY DEPARTMENT READING LISTS

How important is reading?

Just have a look at this from Cambridge university website.....

**How can you find out more about the history that you are studying?
How can you find out more about history that you think you might like, but haven't studied yet?**

One of the most important things that all universities look for in their History applicants is genuine subject interest. So it is crucial, if you decide to apply to read History at university, to show your interest by exploring history further in your own time. Undoubtedly the best way to do this is through reading. Moreover, reading is fundamental to all historical study, research and writing, and getting into the reading habit now will really help your development as a historian.

It's probably no surprise, then, that quite a lot of Cambridge applicants have contacted us over the years to ask for our advice on what they should be reading. Good historians are analytical and make their own sound decisions. So rather than simply telling you all to read some sort of artificial, fixed syllabus, we'd prefer you to approach the question of reading exploratively, looking to your own interests and instincts. In short, you should read what you like or what you like the look of.

But how do you decide what you like or what you might like? This can be done in a number of ways, for instance by:

- Thinking hard about your current course, or recent courses, of study;
- Reading general histories: Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*, for example;
- Watching television documentaries;
- Asking teachers or lecturers who know you what they think you might find interesting;
- Visiting historic sites;
- Browsing in libraries, shops or on the web, and picking books that grab your attention.

How can you find books and articles on a particular subject?

- Obvious places to explore are the history sections in libraries and shops (online or on the high street);
- Alternatively, you can access reading lists for different types and periods of history through the History Faculty website. From the [Undergraduate](#) section go to *Tripes Papers* to find lists of 'Part I papers' or 'Part II papers' listed by year. These links will give you lists of courses running in a particular year. If you then click on an individual paper, you will find a description of that paper and also, near the bottom, a link to its reading list (If you click on a course offered by most universities there will usually be a list of suggested key texts)
- Another good tip for finding more books/articles on a subject is to look at the bibliographies in relevant history books. These list the sources which historians have read during the course of their research.

What should you seek to gain from your reading?

This question often elicits the response: 'It is important that you enjoy the history you are reading about.' We certainly hope you enjoy lots of the history that you read, but none of us enjoys everything, because we're

not all interested in the same things and don't all respond in the same ways to a subject whose content and execution can differ very greatly.

The key thing, in fact, is that you learn from what you read and to do this you need to read analytically. This means making mental notes and asking questions all the way through your reading. You might try asking yourself the following questions when you finish a book or an article, and writing down your answers:

- Can I summarise the argument the historian has made?
- What evidence does the historian offer to substantiate his/her argument? Historians are like barristers in court: they must convince people of their case. To do so they must use evidence judiciously and convincingly;
- Is this historian's argument similar to, or different from, others that I have read?
- Do I agree or disagree with the argument being made here?
- Why? Is it properly evidenced? Is it coherent? Does it contradict itself?
- Doing this will help you understand what you have read and remember it later.

HERE IS SOME SUGGESTED READING IN RELATION TO BRITISH HISTORY-

It is important that you start to read beyond the period which you study at school- develop an interest and challenge yourself.

- The series 'A Short Introduction to...' are a good summary of the key events in a historical period. They also have suggested further reading.
- Podcasts such as the BBC's *In Our Time* or from the website *History Today* will also offer interesting thoughts and analysis.
- BBC History magazine will provide articles of interest with suggested further reading.

Medieval

- S Reynolds: *Kingdoms and Communities*
- J C Schmitt: *The Holy Greyhound*
- J Holt: *Robin Hood*
- F Barlow: *The Feudal Kingdoms of England 1047-1216*
- D Douglas: *The Norman Achievement*
- D Douglas: *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact on England*
- R Hilton: *Bondmen Made Free*
- G Holmes: *The Later Middle Ages 1272-1485*
- J R Lander: *Conflict and Stability in 15th Century England*
- R W Southern: *The Making of the Middle Ages*
- A Gurevich: *Categories of Popular Medieval Culture*
- S Shahar: *The Fourth Estate: Women in the Middle Ages*

Early Modern

- C Russell: *The Causes of the English Civil War*
- P Laslett: *The World we have lost*

- J H Plumb: *The Growth of Political Stability in England*
- J C D Clark: *English Society 1688-1832*
- K Wrightson: *English Society*
- J Brewer: *The Sinews of Power*

Modern

- E P Thompson: *The Making of the English Working Class*
- E J Hobsbawm: *Age of Revolution, Age of Capital, Age of Empire, Age of Extremes, Industry and Empire*
- P Clarke: *The Keynesian Revolution in the Making*
- P Clarke: *Hope and Glory: Britain, 1900-1990*
- M. Desai: *Marx's Revenge*
- Niall Ferguson: *The Ascent of money, Empire*

Speak to your History teacher for further suggested readings that are period specific.

Historians

A list of suggested historians to explore different periods.

- Orlando Figges (Russia)
- Richard Evans, Ian Kershaw (Nazi Germany)
- Mary Beard (Ancient Rome)
- G R Elton, David Starkey, Mark Nicholls (Tudor)
- Christopher Hill, David Smith (The Stuart Period and the Civil War)
- A J P Taylor
- Eamon Duffy (Religious History in the 16th century)
- Hugh Trevor Roper (Early Modern Britain and Nazi Germany)
- E H Carr (Soviet Union, What is History?)
- Joanna Bourke (Gender History)

There are also **novels** which will broaden your understanding

- Balzac: *Lost Illusions*
- Cervantes: *Don Quixote*
- Conrad: *Nostramo*
- Dostoevsky: *Crime and Punishment;The Brothers Karamazov*
- George Eliot: *Middlemarch*
- Henry James: *The Bostonians*
- Thomas Mann: *The Magic Mountain*
- Solzhenitsyn: *Cancer Ward*
- Stendhal: *The Red and the Black*
- Tolstoy: *Anna Karenina, War and Peace*
- Turgenev: *Fathers and Sons*
- Zola: *Germinal*

Having an understanding of Historiography and the history and of History will also be of benefit

- Bentley, Michael. *Modern Historiography: An Introduction*.
- Arnold, John. *A Very Short Introduction to History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

These books below will also help you to consider historical problems and how history can be perceived in different ways

- N Bloch: *The Historian's Craft*
- R G Collingwood: *The Idea of History*
- M Foucault: *Madness and Civilisation*
- E H Gombrich: *Art and Illusion*
- C Geertz: *The Interpretation of Cultures*
- J Keegan: *The Face of Battle*
- G Lichtheim: *Marxism*
- A D Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being*
- A Macintyre: *A Short History of Ethics*
- Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities*
- Barrington Moore: *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*
- W H Walsh: *In Introduction to the Philosophy of History*
- Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- J Tully & Q Skinner: *Meaning and Context*
- J Scott: *Gender and the Politics of History*
- A Hirschman: *The Passions and the Interests*
- Karl Marx: *The Communist Manifesto*