St Peter’s College
History at Oxford: The First Year

This document explains the History Preliminary Examination course (usually known as ‘Prelims’), which takes up your first year reading History in Oxford, and suggests some introductory reading. Some of the books listed will be in print and available in paperbacks; others can be ordered through your public library. Some may be difficult to find. Don’t worry if you cannot find a book; simply move on and read another from the lists.

The first university examination for historians is at the end of the first year. It is a pass/fail examination and the examiners recognize the best candidates by awarding them distinctions.

There are four papers in the examination, and work for these will take up the whole of the first year. For those reading History as a single honours degree, they are as follows:

I. a period of British History;
II. a period of General History (denoting European History, but with the possibility of a strong extra-European component);
III. an Optional Subject, which focuses on one of a choice of topics explored through the original sources;
IV. EITHER (a) Approaches to History, which is a paper designed to introduce you to interdisciplinary ways of studying history; OR (b) Historiography: Tacitus to Weber, which deals with important historians and their works; OR (c) Foreign texts, where you have a choice of Classical Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Russian; OR (d) Quantification in History, which is an introductory paper to statistical methods.

Those reading Joint Schools, i.e. History and Politics, History and Economics, History and English, and History and Modern Languages, follow the same course with variations explained below.

I. British History
This will be studied in the Michaelmas term (first term) with Dr. Kate Davison at Merton College. You will be starting with the late medieval/early modern period, and you will need to make a choice between paper 3 (1330-1550) and paper 4 (1500-1700). Useful introductory works which may help you make your decision are:

M. H. Keen, England in the Later Middle Ages
A.J. Pollard, Late Medieval England, 1399-1509
J. Sumption, Trial by Battle, Trial by Fire and Divided Houses - long but very readable
C. Carpenter, The Wars of the Roses
C.S.L. Davies, Peace, Print and Protestantism 1450-1558
J. Guy, Tudor England
S.E. Brigden, New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603
B. Coward, The Stuart Age
M. Kishlansky, A Monarchy Transformed? England 1603-1714

II. General History
This will be studied in the Hilary term (the second term, in the new year). The paper is studied thematically, and you will need to choose between four options: 370-900; 1000-1300; 1400-1650; 1815-1914. You need not make your choice until after you have arrived in Oxford and discussed it with your tutors. Each period
is studied by focusing on themes across broad geographical and chronological spans. Themes include economic life, social structures, cultural and religious trends, population history, technology and warfare. Useful introductory reading includes:

370-900
J. Herrin, The Formation of Christendom
R. Hodges, D. Whitehouse, Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe
J. Nelson, Charles the Bald
M. Whitlow, The Making of Orthodoxy: Byzantium, 600-1025

1000-1300
R. Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350
R. W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages
G. Holmes ed., The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval Europe

1400-1650
R. Bonney, The European Dynastic States, 1494-1660
J.R. Hale, The Civilisation of Europe in the Renaissance

1815-1914
E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution 1789-1848, The Age of Capital 1848-1875, and The Age of Empire, 1878-1914

Robert Gildea, Barricades and Borders

III. Optional Subjects
Currently the topics on offer are:

2. The Age of Bede c.660-c.740.
3. Early Gothic France c.1100-c.1150.
5. English Chivalry and the French Wars c.1330-c.1400.
11. Revolution and Empire in France 1789-1815.
12. Women, Gender and the Nation: Britain, 1789-1825.
13. The Romance of the People: The Folk Revival from 1760 to 1914.
14. Haiti and Louisiana: The Problem of Revolution in the Age of Slavery
15. The New Woman in Britain and Ireland, c. 1880-1920.
17. 1919: Remaking the World.
18. Radicalism in Britain, 1965-1975
19. The World of Homer and Hesiod (as specified for Preliminary Examination in Ancient and Modern History).
20. Augustan Rome (as specified for Preliminary Examination in Ancient and Modern History).
21. Industrialization in Britain and France 1750-1870 (as specified for Preliminary Examination in History and Economics).
Not all options will necessarily be available. You do not need to make a choice until the Hilary term.

IV. The fourth paper is studied over the Michaelmas and Hilary term. Most St. Peter’s undergraduates choose to study Approaches to History, which is designed to broaden your perceptions of historical study by relating History to other academic disciplines. The paper covers five such approaches, and students at St. Peter’s study two: Anthropology and Gender in Michaelmas and Hilary terms respectively. Introductory Reading:

**Anthropology**
C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge*
M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*
E.P. Thompson, ‘History and Anthropology’ in his *Making History*, pp. 201-222.

**Gender**
J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*
O. Hufston, *The Prospect before Her. A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800*
L. Lee Downs, ‘From women’s history to gender history’ in Berger, Feldner and Passmore, (eds.)
*Writing History: Theory and Practice*
S.B. Ortner and H. Whitehead, *Sexual Meanings: the Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*
M. Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, ch. 1.
D. Riley, *Am I that Name?*

If you have a mathematics A level and are particularly interested in statistics, then you might consider Quantification in History.

If you have a language you would like to use, then obviously the Foreign Texts paper is worth serious consideration. You will be required to read the text in the original language, and in the examination passages will be set for comment but not translation. A reading knowledge is essential, but the level is no higher than that, and if you have a basic command of one of the languages you should not feel intimidated. The texts have all been chosen to open up important areas of historical debate.

**Prescribed texts:**
  iii. Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Regime et la Revolution*
  v. Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, Bk. I
  vi. Juan Díaz del Moral, *Historia de las agitaciones campesinas andaluzas*
  vii. Leon Trotsky, *1905*, pp. 1-9, 17-245
**JOINT SCHOOLS**
*History and Modern Language Students*
You need only study two courses of History in the first year, and we usually recommend that in addition to the compulsory period of **General History** (chosen from one of the four periods listed above) you take the **Approaches to History** or **Foreign Texts** paper.

*History and English Students*
You also study two courses of History in the first year. A **British History** paper is compulsory, and St. Peter’s students do either paper 3 (1330-1550) or paper 4 (1550-1685). Again we usually recommend that in addition you do the **Approaches to History** or **Foreign Texts** paper.

*History and Economics Students*
You study three History papers in the first year: a period of **General History** (chosen from one of the four periods listed above); an **Optional Subject**, for which you are required to take either option 8 (Nobility and Gentry) or option 15 (Working Class Life 1870-1914), or an option only for History and Economics candidates called *Industrialization in Britain and France 1750-1870*; and one of the paper IV choices, and we normally advise undergraduates reading History and Economics to choose the **Quantification in History** paper.

*History and Politics Students*
You study three History papers in the first year: a period of British or General History (chosen from the periods listed above); The Optional Subject entitled ‘Theories of the State’ on the history of political thought for which you read texts by Aristotle (*The Politics*), Hobbes (*Leviathan*), Rousseau (*The Social Contract*) and Marx (including *The Communist Manifesto*); one of the historiographical/methodological options listed under IV on page 1 (we would suggest that if you don’t have a language you take the paper ‘Approaches to History’). You also study the ‘Introduction to Politics’ paper drawn from PPE school.

We look forward very much to meeting you on your arrival in Oxford. No doubt this document will give rise to many questions, but they can wait until you come to St. Peter’s and we can meet you personally. Until then we wish you well and hope you enjoy some of the books we have suggested.

Prof. Stephen Baxter, Clarendon Associate Professor and Barron Fellow in Medieval History  
Prof. Stephen Tuffnell, Associate Professor in U.S. History