August 2025

We write to congratulate you once more on being offered a place to read History and Modern Languages (French) at St Peter’s. We hope that you will find the next three years here stimulating and rewarding.

Now is the time that we begin to ensure that teaching arrangements are in place for the coming year; and in this connection, there is one important thing we must ask you to do, please, which is to make some choices about your programme of study for the first year. The other purpose of this letter is, therefore, to explain how the first year of the degree works and the choices you need to make now. We fear that this will involve some exposure to Oxford University jargon!

The First Public Examination is known as the Preliminary Examination (Prelims for short). Prelims are taken at the end of the first year and, provided you achieve a pass mark, your performance is not classified (though distinctions are awarded) and does not count towards your final degree. The Prelims examination comprises four papers which you need to choose now. More information about those choices can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/ba-history-and-modern-languages>.

As you will see from the landing page of this website, first-year History and Modern Languages students study:

1. Three language papers;

2. Two literature papers;

3. European and World History; and

4. Either History of the British Isles, or Optional Subject, or Approaches, or Historiography, or a Foreign Text.

You will receive more information from your tutor for French about choices 1 and 2 in the list above. What follows here is some guidance on choices 3 and 4.

3. **European and World History** (EWP). This is straight-forward: you simply need to select one of the following:

I 370-900: The Transformation of the Ancient World

II 1000-1300: Communities, Connections and Confrontations, 1000-1300

III 1400-1650: Renaissance, Recovery & Reform

IV 1815-1914: Society, Nation & Empire.

Short descriptions of these periods can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/european-and-world-history>. Lectures and tutorials for this paper take place in the spring term (known as Hilary term).

4. Either **History of the British Isles**, or **Optional Subject**, or **Approaches**, or **Historiography**, or a **Foreign Text**. Since this represents a choice of one option from five it is less straight-forward. In what follows we will take each option separately.

4 (a) **History of the British Isles.** The lectures for these courses take place in the first term (Michaelmas term).If you opt for this, you will need to select one of the following periods (short descriptions of these periods can be found at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/history-british-isles-first-year>):

I 300-1100

II 1000-1330

III 1330-1550

IV 1500-1700

V 1688-1848

VI 1830-1951.

4 (b). An **Optional Subject** based on the study of selected primary texts and documents. A list of the optional subjects can be consulted at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/optional-subject#/>. All Optional Subject sources are in English (sometimes using translations). This paper will be studied in the summer term (Trinity Term), and you do not need to choose your optional subject until midway through your first year, allowing you time to explore possibilities and to discuss them with your tutors in Oxford. All you need to do now is choose between taking and Optional Subject and the other alternatives for 4.

4 (c). **Approaches**. This paper is concerned with the ways in which the writing of history has been influenced by other disciplines, methods, and techniques. You will be required to show knowledge of at least two different ‘strands’ for Approaches from the seven set out below:

(i) Anthropology and History

(ii) Archaeology and History

(iii) Art and History

(iv) Economics and History

(v) History of Women, Gender and Sexuality

(vi) Sociology and History

(vii) Histories of Race

(viii) Environmental History

You should feel free to choose whichever two strands appeal the most, though it may help for you to know that ‘Archaeology and History’, ‘Art and History’, ‘Sociology and History’, and ‘Histories of Race’ will all be taught in St Peter’s College, whereas teaching for the other strands will be taught by tutors in other colleges.

4 (d). **Foreign Text**: If you have a well-developed language (A-Level or equivalent), you may wish to consolidate this strength by taking a foreign text. Texts are available in Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Russian; details of the texts can be consulted at <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/historical-methods#/>

4 (e). **Historiography**. Formally speaking, you could choose to take this option but we do not recommend this because it is not taught at St Peter’s.

**Some guidance on your fourth choice.** Feeling confused? If so, we would not blame you since there is a lot of information to absorb and deciding between the various options can be difficult! Our **recommendation** to you would be to go for either 4 (a) **History of the British Isles** or 4 (b) An **Optional Subject**. The particular advantage of 4 (a) is that you would be taught in college with other students in your cohort; and the main advantage of 4 (b), beyond simplicity at this stage, is that students tend to enjoy the challenge of papers which are focussed on a selection of primary sources.

To summarize: it would be helpful if you would now select your choice of **European and World History** and one of the options for 4 listed above.

We would be grateful if you could respond by email as soon as possible, and by **29 August** at the latest to both [stephen.baxter@spc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.baxter@spc.ox.ac.uk) and [stephen.tuffnell@spc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.tuffnell@spc.ox.ac.uk). Once we have received your response we will send you introductory reading lists for the summer and start to arrange teaching. If you are in doubt, please do not worry, and do not hesitate to contact us by email for further advice.

We hope you enjoy the rest of the summer and look forward to meeting you again in the Autumn.

Yours sincerely,

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