

MA in History

Prospectus 2025-26

Durham University



Programme Overview

Core Module: Themes, Readings, Sources

All students taking the MA in History will be enrolled on the core module. This module is assessed in two ways. Students will write an essay based upon one of the theoretical or empirical approaches they have learned on this module. In Easter Term students will prepare an academic presentation of their initial ideas for their dissertation for the departmental MA conference.

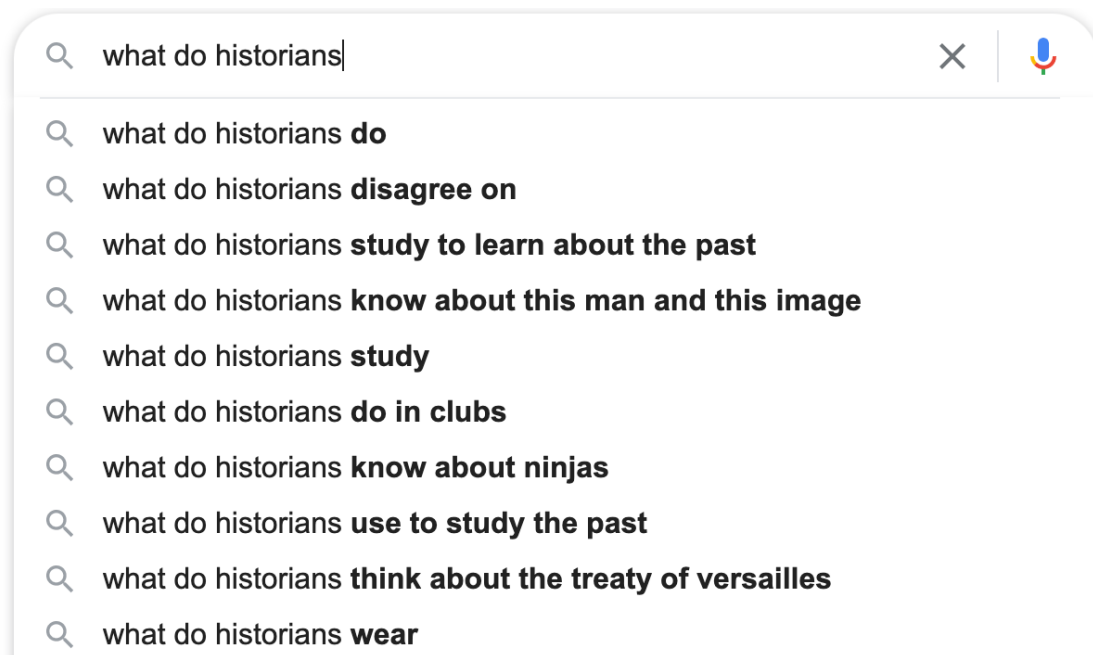
Optional Modules

In addition to their core module, students will take either two or three optional modules. A provisional list of the optional modules in History can be found below. Students are also free to take optional modules in other departments of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. A list of the options available for 2024-25 can be found [here](#). Please note, not all of these options will be available in 2025-26. A full list will be provided for offer holders at a later date.

Dissertation

Over the course of your MA in History you will work under the supervision of one of the historians in the department to research and write a dissertation. A list of potential supervisors can be found [here](#). You can choose any period and topic that you wish. There are two options. You can write a dissertation of 15,000 words and take three optional modules, or you can write a dissertation of 20,000 words and take two optional modules.

Core Module: Themes, Readings and Sources



This is the core module of the History MA. It will address some of the questions above. It is designed to assist students, regardless of specialism, to become more independent learners and researchers by offering training in historical skills, methodologies, and theories, and surveys the discipline's core knowledge and key practices. We will scrutinise primary sources from multiple periods, and across broad thematic and historiographical areas. Seminars a fortnightly and each is led by a different subject specialist in the History Department. Some seminars will focus on the key skills you will need to be a historian, other will examine key themes in historiography.

Module Convenor: [Dr Chris Courtney](#) (With guest tutors for every seminar)

Seminar Topics May Include:

An Introduction to Archives

Conducting Oral History

Approaches to Local History

Gender and History

Museums and History (Including a trip to [Durham Oriental Museum](#))

Module Details:

This module serves to introduce you to a range of skills and approaches. In addition to writing an essay on your chosen topic, you will also be given the opportunity to give an academic research presentation at a specially organised MA conference.



Palaeography

Late Antique, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern.

The ability to read and transcribe, to date and place, and to analyse and understand the writing, books and documents of past ages, comprehending the circumstances and contexts in which they were produced, is fundamental for all advanced work in the humanities. This broad-ranging course provides training and practice in the skills and methods involved. No prior knowledge or experience is assumed. Knowledge of Latin, while helpful, is not essential; the course also includes writing in the vernacular (above all in English). Almost every session incorporates first-hand examination of medieval and renaissance books and documents from Durham's rich collections. Normally, there is opportunity to experience the work of a conservation studio in caring for historic books and documents.

Module Tutor: [Professor Richard Gameson](#)

Seminar Topics May Include:

Introduction: History, Methods, and Significance of the Discipline

Scribal Work - and Recording It: Transcription

Transcription practice; abbreviations

Late Antiquity

The Post-Roman World

Conservation of Books and Documents

Medieval English

Late Medieval to Early Modern English

Humanistic Hands

From Script to Print

Module Details

On this module examine medieval and renaissance books and documents. Become familiar with the collections held in the [Palace Green Library of Durham University](#). Learn key skills in palaeography, including reading, transcription, dating and placing texts. Be assessed via the transcription and analysis of a selection of script specimens.

Sources of Political Power in South Asia, 1400–1800

This module investigates spheres of the political and political protagonists in early modern South Asia. Building on recent advances in the field of political culture in the subcontinent we will study the sources of power that ambitious people needed to tap into to formulate, build and consolidate political rule, to challenge it and to overthrow it. From warrior gangs to warrior queens, former slaves to imperial princes, renegades and rebels to prophets and saints, we will study what constituted political power in early modern South Asia and how it changed, who was able to articulate it and how. A particular focus will be on the transregional histories of political power and traditions that connected the subcontinent with western and Central Asia as well as the Red Sea region. Global and locally sensitive approaches to history will complement each other to gain a multi-layered insight into the historical trajectory of political formations of the period.



Module Tutor: [Dr Christopher Bahl](#)

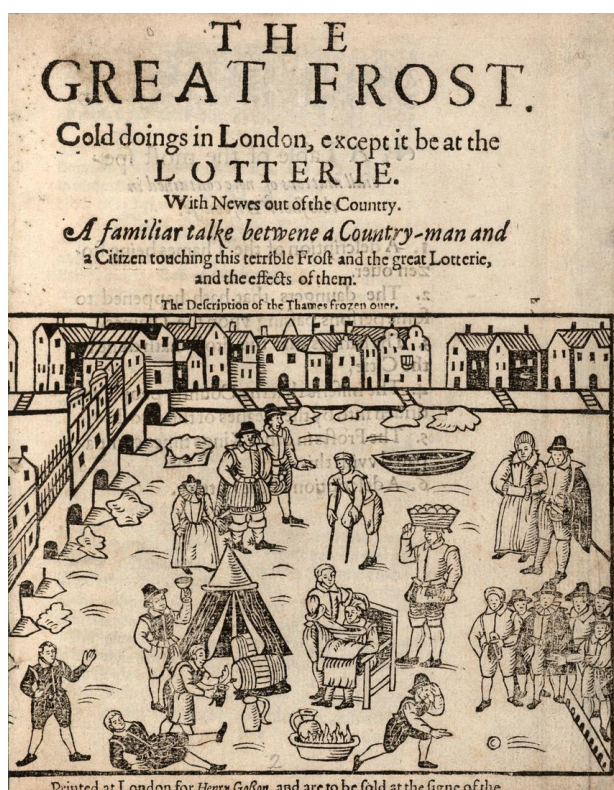
Seminar Topics May Include:

- Gender and Political Power
- Transregional Histories
- Power and Slavery
- The Politics of Early Modern South Asia

Module Details

You will participate in fortnightly seminars during which you will learn about the politics and societies of various regions in South and Central Asia and the Middle East. You will explore how translational approaches can enhance our understanding of global history. You will be assessed through an essay on a topic of your choice.

Negotiating Life in The Early Modern England



This module will support students in developing an independent command of primary material in the economic, social and local history of early modern England. Students will explore the relationship between archival, printed and material sources such as houses and landscapes. A major theme of the course is the ways in which the settled and registered population that is documented in parish registers, property and inheritance transfers, tax records and the like, relates to people and communities living in England who were not part of the registered population of the realm. These included marginalised poor and mobile groups, some of whom were living in poverty, while others – such as Gypsy bands – chose to live in parallel with settled society. The tutors on this course are experts in the history of early modern England.

Module Tutors: [Dr Adrian Green](#) and [Dr Alex Barber](#)

Seminar Topics May Include

Household & Home - Architecture
Politics & Protest
Crime & Work
Wealth & Poverty
Gender & Sexuality
Death

Module Details

In the first half of the module, you will explore some of the core themes in the social history of early modern English history. In the second half, you will examine the specific historical experiences of members of the Gypsy community living in England in that period. The module will be assessed through two essays.

An Exhibitionary Complex: Museums, Collecting, and the Historical Imagination



This module takes Tony Bennett's concept of 'the exhibitionary complex' as the starting point for considering the development of museums over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries – and up to the present day, as museums confront their colonial and imperial roots. The module will equip students with an understanding of museum and collecting history as well as key literature in museum studies. Although British and continental European museums are one focus, the module views museums through a global lens. It considers how colonial and imperial ways of collecting, curating, and visiting museums have shaped the imagination of peoples, places, and pasts, and how that relationship informs contemporary debates around repatriation and decolonisation.

Module Tutors: [Professor Christina Riggs](#), [Professor Markian Prokopovych](#)

Seminar Topics May Include:

- Cabinets and Curiosities
- Museums and the Nation-State
- Experiencing the Museum
- Museums and Empire from Central Europe
- Museums, Colonialism, Empire
- Archaeological Collecting, Human Remains, Racialisation
- Reinvention and Repatriation

Module Details

Through fortnightly seminars and a field trip to at least one local or regional museum, you will learn about research resources for studying museums, including their own institutional archives offer. You will research and write an essay that develops one of the seminar themes, shaping it to meet your own interests and presenting your work in class.

Global Gender Histories: Archives, Power, Publics



Global gender history encompasses—among other things— women’s histories, queer histories, and histories of masculinities. The global lens on gender enables historians to better understand the interplay of local, regional, and planetary processes at work. Global gender histories are concerned with the intersections of gender, race, class, sexuality, (dis)abilities and draw on interdisciplinary methodologies, to explain how people and publics have experienced, enforced and transformed gender. As a team-taught module, individual seminars will be taught by a variety of regional specialists working on a wide range of historical periods, broadly focused on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While topics will range from medicine and economics to performance and law, the seminars will each attend to gender’s historical relations to archives, power, and publics. They will also encourage students to develop their own areas of expertise.

Module Tutors: [Dr Radha Kapuria](#), [Dr Rachel Johnson](#), [Dr David Minto](#)

Seminar Topics May Include:

Gender, Archives, Empires
Gendered ‘Ways of Seeing’
Recovery and Representation, Visibility and Voice
Gendering Commodities and Commerce: Sexual Economics
Health, Medicine and Gender
Gendered Performance
Bodies, Communities, Violence

Module Details

You will be introduced to both classic and cutting-edge approaches to the study of gender history and thereby gain a critical knowledge of the primary sources, research questions, and methodologies that inform gender historiography. You will learn how to identify and critically interpret primary sources to make a targeted intervention in scholarly discourse regarding gender history. You will write essays using theoretical insights and primary source analysis.

Serious Fun:

A History of Sport from the Late Middle Ages to the Present



Sports, from their earlier manifestations in late medieval and early modern Europe to their current role in occupying much of the leisure time of the populations of an increasingly globalized world, are an exceptionally rich subject of historical investigation. The history of sport allows students to focus on a wide variety of topics. These range from the educational, moral, religious and political discourses that have surrounded sport, to the history of the body, of bodily practices and individual sports, to sport's role in mirroring and shaping narratives of class, gender, ethnicity, ideology, nation, empire, trans- and internationalism. Special attention will be dedicated throughout to sport's semi-autonomous status between following its own rules and functioning as a sub-system of society.

Module Tutor: [Prof Kay Schiller](#)

Seminar Topics May Include

- Old Ways of Playing
- Origins of Modern Sport
- The Diffusion and Internationalization of Sport
- Glocal Sports
- Sport, Class, and Mass Culture
- Sport and Politics
- Sport, Race and Gender

Module Details

You will participate in fortnightly seminars with students interested in the history of sport from throughout the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. You will be introduced to both classic and cutting-edge approaches to sports history. You will present findings in presentations and write a 5,000-word essay using theoretical insights and primary source analysis.

The Nature of History: Approaches to Environmental History



Environmental history is one of the fastest-growing subfields of the historical profession. Rising interest in the mutually constitutive relationship between humans and the environment has spurred new approaches to historical research. The objective of this module is to provide a thorough introduction to environmental history from a global perspective. It will examine the development of environmental history and explore some key debates within the field. As a team-taught course, individual seminars will be taught by a variety of regional specialists working on a wide range of historical periods.

Module Tutors: [Dr John Lee](#), [Dr Chris Courtney](#), [Prof Jonathan Saha](#)

Seminar Topics May Include:

The Origins of Agriculture,

Humans vs. Forests,

Imperialism and Botany (Including a Trip to [Durham Botanical Gardens](#))

An Environmental History of Dragons

War and the Environment

Module Details

You will participate in fortnightly seminars with students interested in environmental issues from throughout the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. You will be introduced to both classic and cutting edge approaches to the study of environmental history. You will learn about cultural, social, and scientific approaches to the study of past environment. You will present this research findings. You will write essays using theoretical insights and primary source analysis.

The City in History



It is projected that by the middle of the twenty-first century, two thirds of humans will be city dwellers. Yet the dramatic urbanisation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is only the latest wave in a long-term process. Cities have centres of innovation and change for thousands of years; human history is a story of the growth of the city. This module will ask what it means to think of the city as an object of historical study, tracing the contours of urban history from ancient through medieval to modern times. We will explore how city-building gave shape to imperial power and how urban segregation inflected the creation of racial ideologies and religious practices. Some weeks will take particular cities as case studies, while others will adopt a wide, thematic lens. This is a team-taught module led by specialists from a range of historical subfields who will introduce students to a range of approaches to understanding the city and urban life.

Module tutors: [Dr Graham Barrett](#), [Prof Christian Liddy](#), [Prof Markian Prokopovych](#),
[Dr David Schley](#), [Prof Justin Willis](#)

Seminar topics may include:

- What is a City?
- Colonial and Postcolonial Cities
- Christianity and the City
- Urban Mobilities
- Segregation and Inequality in the Modern City
- The Global City

Module details:

Seminars will meet fortnightly and will feature readings drawn from classic texts in urban history and more recent scholarly works. You will discuss the readings with experts in the field and prepare two summative assignments—a short source-based paper due in the first term, and a longer research paper due at the start of the third term. You will present your findings to the class at the end of the second term.

A Safe Democracy? Constitutionalism, Extremism, and Political Violence in Modern England



Module Tutors: [Dr Matthew Johnson](#), [Dr Andrzej Olechnowicz](#)

The Brexit victory in the 2016 referendum was about many things, including, for some, a sense that England was unique. One historically persistent and significant expression of this exceptionalism has been the view that England was a uniquely stable, constitutional, liberal, consensual, practical and successful nation-state, unlike the unstable, strife-torn and dogma-ridden nations of Europe, which sooner or later end in revolution, authoritarianism, and tyranny. This is certainly a comforting view, not least for a cross-party political class; but is it a correct view? The objective of this module is to explore this terrain by clarifying its conceptual bases, examining both published and manuscript primary sources, and engaging closely with problems of historiography. This module explores this question, examining the political currents that shaped England during the tumultuous first half of the twentieth century.

Seminar Topics May Include:

- Militarism and Empire: From South Africa to Ireland
- Militant Struggle: From the Suffragettes to the General Strike
- The Economic Impact of the Great War
- Labour Activism and the General Strike
- A “Golden Age” of Democracy and the rise of British Fascism in the 1930s
- The Second World War and the Fate of British Democracy

Module Details:

On this you will examine the key historical debates on British political history. You will also have an opportunity to explore primary sources from this period. You will be assessed through an essay on a topic of your choice.