

# **HIS298Y1 Themes and Issues in History: The History of Britain from Earliest Times to the Industrial Revolution**

**University of Toronto, Summer Abroad  
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Stonehenge



Matthew Paris, Map of Britain



Edinburgh Castle

## **Course Description**

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This course introduces students to more than 5,000 years of British history from the prehistoric period to the industrial revolution in the modern age. Topics include the historical development of British identities, Celtic culture in the Iron Age, the Roman Empire, Picts and Scots, early medieval England, Viking incursions, the Norman Invasion, Gothic art and architecture, the Black Death, Renaissance and Reformation, Tudors and Stuarts, witchcraft, overseas exploration, early modern science, the Enlightenment, and industrialisation. Students will study primary source evidence in a variety of forms (including chronicles, literature, recipes, music, and art), with special attention to the historic sites that we will be visiting.

## **Instructor Biography**

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Mairi Cowan is an Associate Professor, Teaching Stream, in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Toronto Mississauga. She is also an Associate of Trinity College and an Associated Scholar at the Centre for Medieval Studies. Her historical research focusses on the medieval and early modern world, with specializations in Scotland and New France. Among her recent books and articles are studies that examine local traditions in twelfth-century Glasgow, the Catholic Reformation in Scotland, experiences of childhood in the Renaissance Scottish court, colonial efforts to “Frenchify” Indigenous people in seventeenth-century Québec, and Jesuit missionaries’ beliefs about demons. Professor Cowan is also interested in studying how best to teach and learn history, and in her teaching she focusses on guiding students through authentic historical problems while helping them to develop the skills they need to discover, understand, and engage with the human past in a historically responsible way. She is the recipient of several teaching awards, including the E.A. Robinson Teaching Excellence Award, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations Teaching Award, and the Canadian Historical Association’s Excellence in Teaching with Primary Sources Award.

## Course Goals

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1. Understand the basic outlines of British history from earliest times through the Industrial Revolution.
2. Make use of primary and secondary sources to interpret the past.
3. Engage with current debates and uncertainties in the field of British history, including how that history is understood and used today.
4. Connect course materials to sites of historical interest.

## Learning Outcomes

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By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. describe and analyze the significance of people and events that shaped the history of Britain from its earliest human inhabitants until the nineteenth century;
2. interpret primary sources from multiple perspectives;
3. read primary and secondary sources with a sympathetic yet critical eye;
4. write a clear and persuasive primary source-centred research project.

## Required Texts

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1. Morgan, Kenneth O. *The Oxford History of Britain*.  
(You have several options for how to obtain this book. You may purchase it new in either print or ebook form. You may also rent it as an ebook. Or you may purchase a used copy. If you prefer a book with pictures and are willing to spend more money for it, you may instead purchase Morgan's *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*. It contains the same text, but with a lot of colour photographs. Any edition is fine, so long as it contains all the chapters that we will be reading in this course.)
2. An assortment of sources available on Quercus or through the University of Toronto Library system. Please see the Course Outline and Schedule of Readings at the end of this syllabus for further information.

## Evaluation

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Short Research Essay, due before departure	10%
Group Presentation	5%
Map and Terminology Test	10%
First Critical Site Response	15%
Second Critical Site Response	15%
Final Test	20%
Participation	20%
Study Abroad Reflection	5%

## Assignments

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### Short Research Essay (10%)

This essay will be due before the course begins. It will orient you to the themes and materials of the course, and help you understand the history of some of the sites that we will be visiting.

You will be supplied with a choice of questions and a list of resources. Choose one of the questions to answer, and use at least one of the recommended resources along with your course readings to answer it in an essay of between 1250 and 1500 words in length.

Essays will be evaluated based on the clarity and focus of the thesis; the use of evidence from course readings and at least one additional source; organization; and the effective use of language.

#### Group Presentation about a Site (5%)

Each group will present for 10-15 minutes about their site in order to prepare the rest of the class for the visit.

The grade is a completion grade: everyone in the group who speaks will receive full marks, provided that the group as a whole fulfills the basic requirements of the presentation. These requirements are as follows:

- Provide a basic introduction: What is the site?
- Explain the historical background: When was it built or made? Who made it? What significant things do we still not know, or what do specialists debate about the construction or historical use of the site?
- Offer advice for us as visitors: What is there to see now? What two or three things do you recommend that we pay special attention to?
- Respond to questions: If students have questions after the presentation, do your best to answer them.

#### Map and Terminology Test (10%)

This test will ask you to identify places on a map, and to identify the correct definitions for important terms.

#### Critical Site Responses (2 x 15%)

Choose one site from List A, and one site from List B. In a paper of about 500-750 words, discuss how the visit to the site enriched your understanding of British history. (Did it teach you something that was not mentioned in the course readings? Did it give you a new perspective on what the course readings said? Did being there deepen your understanding of something you thought you already knew?)

Critical site responses will be evaluated based on the focus of the response; the accuracy of information about the site and British history; the strength of the links made between the site and the course readings; and the effective use of language. You may either do this assignment alone, or in a group of 2 or 3. If you choose to do this assignment in a group, you agree that each member of the group will receive the same grade.

##### List A

- Stonehenge
- Old Sarum
- Salisbury Cathedral
- Hampton Court Palace
- The British Museum as an institution
- One object in the British Museum that is linked to the content of this course
- The Globe Theatre

##### List B

- Edinburgh Castle
- Mary King's Close
- New Lanark

- The Ashmolean Museum as an institution
- One object in the Ashmolean Museum that is linked to the content of this course
- Something in Oxford, London, or Edinburgh that was made after the time period studied in this course, but that memorializes or imitates or remembers something that we have studied (e.g., a neo-gothic building, an example of Arts and Crafts design, a nineteenth-century object in a museum that is meant to look medieval, a modern statue commemorating an ancient or medieval or early modern person)

#### Final Test (20%)

This test will include sections on identification of sources, short answers, and an essay.

#### Participation (20%)

We are a community of learners in this course. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to this community through active and thoughtful participation. Most sessions will begin with a lecture, but will then turn to a discussion of the readings assigned for that day. The more you contribute with your thoughts, ideas, stories, and experiences, the more you will get out of this course.

In an accelerated course like this one, the reading load will feel very heavy. You are strongly encouraged to do most of your readings – at least *The Oxford History of Britain* – before the course begins.

Participation will be evaluated based on consistent thoughtful engagement with course material.

#### Study Abroad Reflection (5%)

This assignment gives you a chance to sit back and think about this course, its content, and the experiences you had in Britain. What have you learned, and how has this course influenced your thinking? You may either submit a written reflection of about 500-750 words, or an audio recording or video essay of about 5 minutes in length.

Reflections will be evaluated based on their thoughtfulness; the links they make between course materials, especially on-site visits, and your personal experiences and attitudes; and the extent to which they demonstrate an honest and sincere attempt to grapple with how this course has influenced you as a scholar and a person.

## **Tentative Course Schedule**

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*Please note that all readings should be completed before the session begins.*

1. Introduction to the Course: What and Where is Britain?
2. Britain's Pre-History
3. Celts and Romans
4. Early Medieval Britain
5. On location at Stonehenge, Old Sarum, Salisbury Cathedral
6. Norman Britain and midterm test
7. The Later Middle Ages
8. On location at Hampton Court, British Museum, Globe Theatre
9. The Tudors and an Age of Reformation
10. The Stuarts and an Age of Witchcraft
11. On location in Edinburgh to see Mary King's Close
12. On location in Edinburgh to see Edinburgh Castle
13. On location in Edinburgh and New Lanark
14. Britain Abroad and the Ashmolean Museum
15. Science and Enlightenment
16. The Industrial Revolution
17. History, Memory, Nostalgia