

Dr Laura Carter
lc449@cam.ac.uk

University of Exeter, Department of History
Penryn Campus, Cornwall
TR10 9FE

15 March 2019

Re. Lecturer in Modern/Contemporary British History

Dear Professor Richard Toye and the Selection Committee,

I am an historian of twentieth-century Britain with interests in education and social change. I have a huge amount to contribute to your world-class Department of History at the University of Exeter. I am a brilliant researcher and teacher in equal measure, I am intensely committed to good citizenship in our discipline, and I can offer the expertise you need in British social and cultural change since 1945.

Current research

I was awarded my PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2017, prior to which I had already held a Lectureship in Modern British History at King's College London. I currently work as a postdoctoral Research Associate on an ESRC-funded project about the history of secondary education in the UK, based back at Cambridge. This is a truly collaborative role, and the experience has both challenged and sharpened my identity as a researcher. At the same time, I frequently assume a leadership role in areas of the project. For example, I have negotiated with archives for us to gain access to school punishment records closed under GDPR, and I am running a collaboration with Cambridge Digital Humanities training historians to use social media as a site of historical research.

In addition, I am currently completing the manuscript of my first book (based on my PhD thesis), provisionally entitled *Histories of Everyday Life: The Making of Popular Social History in Britain, 1918-1979* for the Oxford University Press *Past & Present* book series. This book, which will be submitted this summer, is a social history of social history in modern Britain. It describes how non-academic historians developed a new breed of social history in the mid-twentieth century and popularised it across a range of institutions that produced histories for a mass audience. In tracing an alternative genealogy of social history with conservative and liberal roots and geared toward mass education, my book fundamentally challenges the existing origin story of socialist social history in the 1960s. It concludes that, by the 1970s, my mid-century 'history of everyday life' became untenable because of the problematic project of 'multicultural' education and the teaching of British Empire history in comprehensive schools. As Britain's population became more ethnically diverse and female participation in post-16 education increased, citizens demanded a social history that could accommodate the analysis of power. This shift evacuated the 'history of everyday life' from the educational spaces it had once occupied and enabled the hegemony of the 'new' academic social history in mainstream British culture.

I have published three articles on modern British history in top peer-reviewed journals to date. I have also completed the research for two further articles (one co-authored) coming out of my postdoctoral work. In addition to my monograph, these two articles will be ready for 2021 REF submission. The single-authored article is on girls' experiences of British secondary modern schools, using life-histories I have constructed from the qualitative and quantitative data of the postwar British birth cohort studies. The co-authored article is a methodological piece about how historians can use longitudinal datasets, stemming from work undertaken by myself and an historian colleague with a sociologist colleague. It will highlight my commitment to speaking across disciplines as a social and cultural historian of modern Britain.

My diverse research portfolio promises productive synergies with existing members of your department. For example, Martha Vandrei's rethinking of British historical culture in new arenas of intellectual activity chimes with my own attempts to make interventions in this field, typically colonised by biographies of 'Great Men' historians. My attentiveness to interrogating the 'everyday' has obvious links to the work of Gemma Clark and Catriona Pennell. My postdoctoral work on sociological expertise and secondary education is closely aligned to Jon Lawrence's recent work, as well as to Kate Fisher's interest in understanding how sexual knowledge is absorbed through agencies of expertise. In addition, I believe my work on the place of imperial history in postwar British secondary schools could generate fruitful conversations and collaborations with the many scholars in your department working more broadly on the British Empire.

Future research

My next piece of research will be on the vexed project of 'multicultural' education that dominated debates about race and ethnicity in British secondary education between c.1968 and the publication of the 'Swann Report' under Thatcher in 1985. This is a natural extension of my first book and my postdoctoral research, which have collectively convinced me that we are sorely lacking an *historical* study of this topic. Questions of race and ethnicity in education are dominated by sociological accounts. Whilst offering essential structural critiques, they often fail to connect classroom practice to broader processes of social and cultural change. Moreover, recent scholarship on black British history has foregrounded the anti-racist education movements that came from communities of colour, but more work needs to be done to connect these to mainstream educational experiences. My project will investigate the meaning of 'multicultural' education to British pupils, parents, and teachers (of all races and ethnicities) in the 1970s and 1980s through an analysis of curricula, school culture, and the reverberations of 'multicultural' discourses in everyday life.

Drawing on digital history methodologies developed within my current research team, I will gather experiential sources for this project through a 'netnographic' study of 'school-reunion' Facebook groups, which will then be taken 'offline' for a series of group oral histories. Although this is a national project, I hope to carry out the majority of the geographical case studies in South Wales and the South West (also where I am originally from and went to school), both for the social media and school source bases. Being based in Exeter would obviously be ideal for such research. I envisage that this project would generate important links with history groups and schools in the region, building on the department's already strong commitment to local 'impact'

work. I intend to apply to the new British Academy/Wolfson Fellowship scheme in 2020 or 2021 for funding, as my ideas develop.

I have a sound understanding of the research funding landscape because I was involved from the very beginning on the ESRC project I presently work on. Myself, my (now) postdoctoral colleague, and the PI collaboratively wrote grant applications for both the ESRC and the Leverhulme Trust over the course of two years (2015-2017), during which I became knowledgeable about the processes and criteria of UK funding bodies. I am therefore extremely well equipped to work on new funding bids in the future, alone, as mentioned above, and with colleagues at Exeter as new relationships blossom.

Teaching and research supervision

My undergraduate and postgraduate teaching experience is very broad. During my time as a Lecturer in Modern British History at King's I taught across modules covering wide-ranging methodologies, time periods, and places, and in formats including lectures, co-taught seminars, and small and large seminar groups. Co-teaching thematic third-year courses with medievalists, Africanists, and historians of political thought taught me to be a reflexive teacher. For example, I introduced mid-semester feedback sessions in all of my modules so I could actively improve my offering to students during the course of my short, one-year contract. For my MA gender history modules, I brought my commitment to intersectionality into my teaching by arranging trips to black feminist photography exhibitions and queer bookshops. This also gave King's students an experiential, multi-media flavour of modern British history. These efforts and more were rewarded when I was nominated by my students for a King's Rising Star Teaching Award at the end of the year. At Exeter, I would naturally be keen to teach on the 'Uses of the Past' module, as well as to propose my own third year special subject on a topic such as youth, gender, and race in Britain since 1945.

I miss the stimulation of such diverse courses and pedagogies and would welcome the return to a fuller teaching schedule at a large department such as Exeter. At Cambridge I teach one-to-one, supervising both undergraduate and MPhil students. I advised over twenty MA research students at King's, and now supervise both MPhil and undergraduate dissertation students at Cambridge, most recently on the Supplementary Schools movement in London and on British-Chinese experiences of growing up in England since the 1980s. I am therefore familiar with the challenges and pitfalls students face in conceiving of new projects, and I am enthusiastic about taking on research supervision at PhD level as my next step.

Impact

My current job as a Research Associate combines research *and* impact. As a finalist in the 2016 BBC Radio Three/AHRC New Generation Thinkers competition, I was well-prepared for this challenge. I built and run our project website as well as managing our social media presence. This has generated some exciting new opportunities, including acting as an historical advisor to the production team behind the recent BBC2 'living

history' series 'Back In Time for School', and giving public talks at the Museum of Cambridge about education in the 1960s. I am currently developing further public engagement collaborations with our Project Partners, the Historical Association and the Sutton Trust, in 2019.


At the same time, I continue to work on a more political impact project very close to my heart. In 2017 I devised and curated a pop-up exhibition of women historians at the Institute of Historical Research in London, highlighting the absence of women in the 'Great Men' story of our discipline. We have since built a virtual gallery online and are adding more portraits to the display this year to celebrate the work of women historians of colour across Britain's global and imperial networks, in light of the Royal Historical Society's recent report 'Race, Ethnicity, & Equality in UK History'. Some of these women have since been added to the ODNB through my role as an Advisory Editor. At the end of 2018 I worked with a team of female filmmakers from Kingston University to produce a film about the exhibition. In all these settings, I've learnt to speak passionately and engagingly to different audiences. I would love to put these skills to work in designing and running high-profile and creative public impact initiatives at Exeter in the future.

Administration

I am a fierce independent worker when I need to achieve my personal goals, but also thrive in a team both intellectually and practically. My time at King's provided insight into the structures, policies, and procedures of a busy Department: the good, the bad, and the ugly! I always fulfilled my administrative and personal tutoring roles with commitment and compassion. I am now a Fellow of a Cambridge College where I participate in College life in tandem with my research job. And at both King's and Cambridge I have gone beyond the call of duty by involving myself in departmental gender equality and diversity initiatives: chairing King's women's lunches, working on first-year curriculum reform, and acting as an Athena SWAN postdoctoral representative. If appointed at Exeter, I would make helping to generate progressive change a real priority, as a citizen of the Department and of the University. I feel very strongly that in today's higher education landscape administration and teaching are as important to our institutions as research. Since I excel in all three areas, you will always find me happy to carry my load.

I hope to have the opportunity to discuss all of the above with you further at interview later this year.

Yours sincerely,



Laura Carter