



## The reign of Edward II

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|-------------------|--|--------------------|---------------|
| <b>Start date</b> | 20 April 2018                            | <b>End date</b>    | 22 April 2018 |
| <b>Venue</b>      | Madingley Hall<br>Madingley<br>Cambridge |                    |               |
| <b>Tutor</b>      | Dr Rosemary Horrox                       | <b>Course code</b> | 1718NRX027    |

**For further information on this course, please contact**

Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr  
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**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Rosemary Horrox MA PhD FRHistS, Fellow, Director of Studies in History of Fitzwilliam College.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

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| 19:00         | Dinner                                   |
| 20:30 – 22:00 | Introduction                             |
| 22:00         | Terrace bar open for informal discussion |

### Saturday

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 07:30         | Breakfast                                    |
| 09:00 – 10:30 | Edward as Prince of Wales                    |
| 10:30         | Coffee                                       |
| 11:00 – 12:30 | The ascendancy of Piers Gaveston             |
| 13:00         | Lunch  |
| 14:00 – 16:00 | Free   |
| 16:00         | Tea  |
| 16:30 – 18:00 | Gaveston's death and its consequences        |
| 18:00 – 18:30 | Free   |
| 18:30         | Dinner                                       |
| 20:00 – 21:30 | Friends and enemies: the political community |
| 21:30         | Terrace bar open for informal discussion     |

### Sunday

|               |                                     |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| 07:30         | Breakfast                           |
| 09:00 – 10:30 | The Despenser regime                |
| 10:30         | Coffee                              |
| 11:00 – 12:30 | The deposition and its implications |
| 12:45         | Lunch                               |

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

1. to give students a more balanced view of the reign;
2. to answer the fundamental question: how was a medieval king expected to govern, and in what ways did Edward II fail to meet those expectations?

### Content:

Edward II was the first king of England since the Norman Conquest to be deposed and murdered. His removal followed a reign dominated by the king's love for two favourites, Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the younger, whose influence triggered series of political crises. Edward's dramatic fall has attracted the attention of several writers, notably Christopher Marlowe, whose play has largely shaped the popular image of Edward II as the king who failed to put public duty before private affection, and, as a result, lost all for love. More recently, Edward has become something of a gay icon, an image enshrined in Derek Jarman's reworking of Marlowe.

For historians Edward's deposition has proved equally compelling. The reign seems to offer an unrivalled opportunity to study the failure of royal power, and so draw conclusions about how medieval government *ought* to work. Not surprisingly, the result has been a very wide spectrum of interpretation. For Tout and his circle earlier this century Edward's reign was an exercise in royal absolutism - with the king attempting to wield unrestricted power through his household and thereby alienating the nobility, who wished for a more 'constitutional' form of government in which they and the departments of state acted as a brake on the king. All recent historians have - quite rightly - rejected that interpretation. But in so doing they have, perhaps, thrown out the baby with the bath water and created a picture of medieval political life entirely driven by selfish motives, whether it is nobles struggling for patronage or a king too besotted with his favourites to govern adequately.

### Presentation of the course:

This course's approach will be broadly chronological, but within that framework there will be discussion of wider themes, such as the nature of fourteenth-century government, including the balance between central and local power, and the importance attached to law and order. Edward's domestic problems were fought out against the background of war with Scotland and worsening relations with France, and the impact of war on the medieval state will be considered.

### As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. be aware of the events of the reign and of the context in which they occurred;
2. be familiar with the interpretations placed on those events by twentieth-century historians.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

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| Author                 | Title   |
|------------------------|---|
| Michael Prestwich      | <i>The Three Edwards</i>                              |
| Seymour [JRS] Phillips | <i>Edward II (Yale English Monarchs series, 2010)</i> |

Among the monographs the following has a useful introductory survey of the reign as a whole before focussing on the Despenser regime:

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Natalie Fryde | <i>The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II</i> |
|---------------|--|

Far and away the best contemporary source is the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, either in the old edition by N. Denholm Young or in a new version by Wendy Childs, both were produced as parallel texts (English/Latin) and are well worth reading if you can get hold of a library copy.

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 06 April 2018