

## Weekend Courses 2024-25

### **'Six historic trials: Warren Hastings, Oscar Wilde, Captain Dreyfus, the Nuremberg trial, *Lady Chatterley* and the David Irving trial'**

**Start date:** 2 May 2025

**End date:** 4 May 2025

**Venue:** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge  
CB23 8AQ

**Tutor:** Dr Seán Lang

**Course Code:** 2425NRX044

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#### **Tutor biography**

Dr Seán Lang was for seventeen years Senior Lecturer in History at Anglia Ruskin University, where he specialised in modern European history and the history of the British Empire. He has taught widely at school, sixth form and university level and is a regular broadcaster on radio and television, commenting on history, education and current affairs, especially issues relating to the British monarchy. He is a regular lecturer for the University of Cambridge International Summer Programme and has taught courses on topics including the American and French revolutions, Napoleon, Victorian politics, the British Empire, British rule in India and the First and Second World wars.

He has published on British medical work in colonial India and has written textbooks on *Parliamentary Reform, 1785-1928*, *Nazi Foreign Policy, 1933-1939* and *Why the First World War Broke Out* as well as four history titles in the popular 'For Dummies' series, including *First World War for Dummies*; he also contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to Winston Churchill*. He is currently working on a collection of essays called *What History Do We Need?*

He has written extensively for theatre and has had work performed in Cambridge, London, Edinburgh, Oxford, Norwich, Australia, Canada and Ireland. He is Director of the theatre company Based On a True Story.

Dr Lang is a former Honorary Secretary of the Historical Association and has worked with government and with Council of Europe on developments in school history.

## Summary of content

The path from studying history to practising law is one which many history graduates have taken, and it is not difficult to see why: both depend on the use and interpretation of evidence to support the presentation of a case. But the relationship between the two can go much deeper: many historical trials can also act as doorways into an understanding of their historical context and of its relevance to today.

This course considers six celebrated trials, each very different from the others yet each also illuminating many aspects of the society that produced it. The impeachment of Warren Hastings (1788-1775) took place in the medieval grandeur of Westminster Hall – scene of the trial of King Charles I – and it was concerned with the ethics and morality of the East India Company's government of Bengal. Yet its political setting was fitting for what was also a political trial, a battle between government and opposition, in which the prosecution also established the underlying assumptions that would underpin British imperial expansion in the century that followed.

A century later saw France similarly engulfed in a trial that also seemed to put in question the very nature of the republic. The trials for treason and espionage (1894-1906) of the Jewish military intelligence officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, tore the country apart as it became increasingly clear that Dreyfus had been framed, and cast doubt over some of the most cherished institutions and assumptions of the Third Republic.

Meanwhile, Britain was shocked by a series of trials in 1895 involving the fashionable playwright, Oscar Wilde, accused and convicted for homosexual activity. This was much more than an individual tragedy, for it revealed an undercurrent of British society that many ignored, and which left British society deeply shaken. By the 1960s, what was becoming called the Establishment was still trying to fight against creeping sexual liberalism by taking Penguin Books to court for publishing DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but this time public attitudes had changed, and Lady Chatterley enjoyed a much happier fate than had Oscar Wilde.

The antisemitism revealed in the Dreyfus Case was echoed by the visceral hatred for Jews highlighted by the Nuremberg Trial (1945-1946) of Nazi leaders instituted by the victorious allies at the end of the Second World War. It established the principle that government are answerable to international law but, to the disappointment of some, it did not treat the Holocaust as a separate case from other Crimes Against Humanity. Fifty years after Nuremberg there were some who were denying the Holocaust ever happened and their day of reckoning also came in courtroom (1996-1999), when the British writer David Irving unsuccessfully and disastrously sued the American historian Deborah Lipstadt for libel. In a world of post-truth and fake news, can history and law keep the truth safe?

## Aims

This course aims to:

- introduce you to the complex relationship of history and law
- help you to place and understand a series of landmark legal cases in their historical, social and political contexts
- help you to discuss and make an informed assessment of their continuing historical significance of these legal cases and their continuing relevance today

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## Course sessions

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### Friday

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

19:00	Dinner
<b>20:30 – 22:00</b>	<b>Burke v the Lord of Bengal: the impeachment of Warren Hastings</b>
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Dreyfus and the Agony of France</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Victorian Values v Oscar Wilde</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
<b>16:30 – 18:00</b>	<b>Lady Chatterley sets the Sixties Swinging</b>
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
<b>20:00 – 21:30</b>	<b>The British Love of Murder</b>
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>‘Civilisation cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated.’ Nazism in the dock at Nuremberg, 1946.</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Truth, Libel, History and the Holocaust – Irving v Lipstadt</b>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

**Presentation of the course**

The main method of presentation will be illustrated lectures, with time built in for discussion. We will also look at some source material to see how it can be evaluated to help us understand the issues and the outlook of the people who created it.

**Learning outcomes**

As a result of the course, you will gain a greater understanding of the subject and you should be able to:

- talk with confidence and knowledge about major themes relating to the trials covered in the course
- discuss with insight and understanding the historical issues and questions the trials raise for the historian
- reach an informed assessment of the ways in which history and law can relate to, and learn from, each other

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## Reading and resources list

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There are no compulsory readings for this course. However, you may find the below recommended reading list of interest to supplement your course.

### **Warren Hastings:**

Bernstein, Jeremy, *Dawning of the Raj: the Life and Trials of Warren Hastings* (London: Aurum 2001)

Dalrymple, William, *The Anarchy: the Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (London: Bloomsbury 2019)

Sheridan, Richard Brindsley, *At the Trial of Warren Hastings* (London: The Perfect Library 2014)

### **Oscar Wilde:**

Ellmann, Richard, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Vintage 1988)

Sturgis, Matthew, *Oscar: a Life* (London: Apollo 2019)

Wilde, Oscar, *The Annotated Prison Writings of Oscar Wilde* (Harvard University Press 2018)

### **Lady Chatterley:**

Bedford, Sybille, *Would You Let Your Wife Read This Book?: The trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Daunt, 2016)

Lawrence, D H, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin various dates)

Rolph, C H (ed.), *The Trial of Lady Chatterley* (London: Penguin, 1990)

### **Dreyfus:**

Harris, Ruth, *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (London: Penguin 2011)

Read, Piers Paul, *The Dreyfus Affair: the story of the most infamous miscarriage of justice in French history* (London: Bloomsbury 2013)

Zola, Emile, *The Dreyfus Affair: "J'Accuse" and other writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1998)

### **Nuremberg:**

Neave, Airey, *Nuremberg: a Personal Record of the Trial of the Major Nazi War Criminals in 1945-47* (London: Grafton 1989)

Persico, Joseph E, *Nuremberg: Infamy on Trial* (New York: Viking 1994)

Tusa, John and Tusa Ann, *The Nuremberg Trial* (London: BBC 1995)

Taylor, Telford, *The Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: a Personal Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury 1993)

***Irving v Penguin Books:***

Evans, Richard, *Telling Lies About Hitler: the Holocaust, History and the David Irving Trial* (London: Verso 2002)

Lipstadt, Deborah, *Denying the Holocaust: the Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (London: Penguin 2016)

Lipstadt, Deborah, *Denial: Holocaust History on Trial* (London: Ecco/HarperCollins 2017)

**Note:** Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) students 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 ICE course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*(Information correct as of April 2024)*