



Q&A

Jane Robinson
Social Historian



What area of research do you focus on and why?

I focus on social history. That's the history of how 'ordinary' people like us lived and spent their days, sometimes achieving some extraordinary things in the process. I think that by studying people who have been ignored in the past - in my case, it's usually women - we learn to question the assumptions that are so often made about our ancestors by more traditional historians..

What book in your field should everyone read?

Gosh. Am I allowed to say one of my own? I'd recommend 'Bluestockings' because it's about the fight for education for women. Did you know that 100 years ago doctors were still arguing that if girls went to university their wombs would wither and they'd become infertile? Or that women weren't allowed to take degrees from Cambridge until 1948? Also, it's being developed into a TV drama series at the moment, which is SO exciting!

Which book inspired you to study history?

I have to make a confession here. I didn't study History. I did 'A' level, but then studied English at university. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, so English was perfect because it opened unexpected doors for me. Never believe those who say an arts/humanities degree is a waste of time and money. It gives you loads of transferable skills and can lead you in so many different directions. Who'd have thought I'd end up writing history books? Certainly not me. I guess the book that inspired me most, though, was 'Jane Eyre' because it was about a plain girl called Jane who lived in Yorkshire and who was fallen-in-love-with by a handsome, fiery character. At the time, I was a plain girl called Jane who lived in Yorkshire... I couldn't believe how real the book seemed, as though it was written yesterday. It persuaded me that history is about the present as well as the past.

What book are you currently reading?

I'm currently reading a murder-mystery by a Canadian author called Louise Penny. I have to read loads of serious stuff for work, so for relaxation I like something light.

Which historian has had the greatest influence on you?

I love the work of a historian called Dorothy Middleton, who no-one's ever heard of. She wrote a book about intrepid Victorian women travellers, which opened my eyes to the fact that not all Victorian women spent their lives quietly doing what they were told by men.

What is the best museum you have ever been to?

My very favourite museum is the one in our own village because it's all about places and people I feel I know really well - and yet every time I go there, I learn something new. Local museums are great for social history.

We hope to welcome you to CamVC soon!



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