

History of Universities Seminar

Summer 2021

Convenors

Miles Taylor (University of York, UK)
Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang (Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan)
Heike Jöns (Loughborough University, UK)
Tamson Pietsch (University of Technology Sydney, Australia)

Contact email

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Timing

Wednesdays, 2.00-3.30 pm (BST/UTC+1), online via Microsoft Teams

Webpage for registration

<https://www.histgeog-uni.net/history-of-universities-seminar/>

14 July 2021

Universities in years of pandemic: 1665, 1918, 2020: a roundtable discussion

Plague and the University of Cambridge

Evelyn Lord (Wolfson College, Cambridge)

From the Black Death onwards Cambridge suffered frequent outbreaks of the plague; for example 3 outbreaks in 1520s, 3 in the 1530s, and 3 in the 1540s. The usual response of the university was to dissolve or postpone its terms, and cancel all university sermons, assemblies and teaching. Scholars were sent home, and colleges closed. The first section of the paper discusses the effect of these closures in the 16th century on the university, the second section examines the role of the university as part of the town of Cambridge during two plague epidemics. It outlines the relationship of the university and town in the 17th century. Both fought for rights and privileges, and for control of the streets, but in the time of plague these differences had to be put aside and town and gown had to cooperate to enforce the plague orders. The paper will compare two periods of crisis in Cambridge, the plague epidemic of 1630 and the Great Plague of 1665/1666. The first demonstrates the pro-active involvement in the town of the vice-chancellor Dr Henry Butts, and the second a much more hands off approach by the university. It includes a discussion on the way in which the colleges reacted to the two epidemics, and how this affected the general economy of the town, and draws conclusions on the overall effect of the 1665/1666 outbreak on town and university.

Evelyn Lord is an emeritus fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge, and before retirement was Course Director for the University of Cambridge Masters in Local History. Her PhD. was awarded by the University of Leicester, and following that she had a post-doctoral appointment

at the John Rylands Research Institute, University of Manchester, and a lectureship at the University of Derby. Before returning to higher education she was employed in the State Paper Room of the British Museum, now part of the British Library. As well as *The Great Plague*, published books include work on the Knights Templar in Britain, and *The Hell Fire Clubs*, her latest publication is as joint editor and contributor to a collection of essays on *Shaping the Past*, published by the University of Hertfordshire Press in 2020. She is the chair of the Cambridgeshire Association for Local History, and convenor of a 40 member strong research group working on landscape and local history in East Anglia and elsewhere.

How US HEIs responded to the influenza pandemic of 1918

James W. Thomas & Holly Ann Foster
(University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg)

As colleges and universities respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, many in the media call it unprecedented. This is not the first time that institutions of higher education have had to respond to an epidemic, however. A historical review of college and university reactions to illnesses such as yellow fever and the 1918 influenza pandemic provides prior examples of institutional responses to epidemic diseases.

James W. Thomas is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at the University of Southern Mississippi. His background includes historical research, student affairs, and academic advising. **Holly Foster** is an Assistant Professor and Program Co-ordinator for the Higher Education/Student Affairs program at the University of Southern Mississippi. Her area of interest is student life, both past and present.

The place of the university

Joe Moran (Liverpool John Moores University)

My presentation will explore the future of the university as a place in the time of Covid. How can we retain an idea of the university as a community of students and scholars in the age of the Zoominar, the Panopto lecture and the virtual learning environment? I contrast the year 2020 with 1964, the year my parents arrived at the University of Lancaster as two of just 296 students in its cohort. Here they encountered a revival of the medieval ideal of the university as a self-sufficient society of scholars, and a determination to end the “9 to 5 university”. After bed and breakfast in their Morecambe digs, they were expected to spend their waking hours on campus. Without mourning a golden age of universities that never existed, I want to explore how to retain those unquantifiable aspects of a university education that can’t be reduced to digital delivery.

Joe Moran is Professor of English and Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University and author, most recently, of *First You Write a Sentence* (Penguin 2018) and *If You Should Fail: A Book of Solace* (Penguin 2020).