

MA in Rural History

Awarding Institution:
Teaching Institution:
Faculty of Arts and Humanities

The University of Reading
The University of Reading
Programme length: 12 months
full time, 24 months part-time.
Date of specification: July 2002

For students entering in 2002
Programme Director: R. W. Hoyle
Board of Studies: Postgraduate Studies in History
Accreditation: N/A

Summary of programme aims

The MA in Rural History aims to provide students with the skills and confidence to undertake an original piece of research in their chosen area, and to provide an underpinning for further research at doctoral level as well as offering a satisfying and rewarding experience for those who take the MA as an end in itself. Additionally, the programme aims to augment students' existing skills so that they may further or advance a career in a cognate profession within the knowledge economy.

Transferable skills

The University's Strategy for Teaching and Learning has identified a number of generic transferable skills which all students are expected to have developed by the end of their degree programme. In following this programme, students will have had the opportunity to enhance their skills relating to career management, communication (both written and oral), information handling, numeracy, problem-solving, team working and use of information technology.

The MA in Rural History is designed to ensure that students continue to develop these transferable skills, in parallel and integrated with the acquisition of more specialist knowledge, understanding and skills concerned with the conduct and management of historical research and enquiry appropriate at postgraduate level

Programme content

The MA in Modern History is designed within a 180 credit modular system, with 60 credits awarded for the dissertation and 30 credits for each of the two core courses, *Debates in Rural History* and *Sources and methods in Rural History*. Each student will also undertake two modules (30 credits each). All units are at M level.

In the Autumn term, all students (including part-time students in their first year) will take the core module *Debates in Rural History*. Full time students will also take a module from the list of options. In the Spring term all students (including part-time students in their first year) will take the core module *Sources and methods in Rural History*. Full time students will also take a further module from the list of options. Part-time students will take an option module in each of the two terms of their second year.

Debates in Rural History will aim to introduce students to the very rich seam of writing about rural history, and to discuss the concepts and methodologies employed in examining problems within the subject. *Sources and methods in Rural History* will introduce the wide range of source materials available to rural historians, and outline the techniques available for their utilisation.

Students will also begin work on their dissertation early in the Spring term. Part-time students will be invited to identify the subject area of their dissertation in general terms by the end of the Spring term of their first year so that some reading and research can be undertaken over the Summer vacation. All students will provide the course director with an authoritative title for his approval by the ninth week of the Spring term before they intend to submit. Dissertations will be submitted by 20 September of each year. The summer term will be devoted to the detailed research and writing up of the dissertation under the guidance of the supervisor, and to dissertation seminars.

Further elements of instruction, notably palaeography, will be arranged as necessary.

<i>Mod Code</i>	<i>Module Title</i>	<i>Credits</i>	<i>Level</i>
RHMAC1	<i>Debates in Rural History</i>	30	M
RHMAC2	<i>Sources and methods in Rural History</i>	30	M
RHMAD9	<i>Dissertation</i>	60	M
RHMAO3	<i>Option 1</i>	30	M
RHMAO4	<i>Option 2</i>	30	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements

This programme may be taken over two years. Part-time students will take the same modules as full-time students according to the scheme indicated above.

Progression requirements

The Pass mark in each of the modules is 50%. Candidates have the right to one re-sit of any failed element. Candidates presenting themselves for re-examination are not eligible for the award of a Distinction or Merit.

Summary of teaching and assessment

The relationship between class contact hours, visits to libraries and archives, seminars and student-centered learning varies across the units and is detailed in the individual module descriptors. In general, the course is structured to mix core courses which introduce the conceptual and methodological bases of Rural History with more detailed options which apply those concepts and methodologies to more specific situations.

Assessment is solely by means of coursework. This comprises one essay of 4,000 words in *Debates on Rural History* and an essay of 4,000 words previously presented as a seminar paper in *Sources and methods in Rural History*. Each option will be assessed by an essay of 4,000 words. The dissertation shall be no longer than 20,000 words including critical apparatus and any appendices.

To be eligible for the award of an MA, candidates must secure an overall average mark of 50% and a pass mark in the dissertation. Candidates who achieve an overall average of 60-69% and a mark of 60% or above in the dissertation will be awarded a Merit. Those achieving an overall average of 70% or above and a mark of 70% or above in the dissertation will be awarded a Distinction.

Admissions requirements

Entrants to the programme are normally expected to have obtained an Upper-Second Honours degree in a course with a substantial element of History or a discipline relevant to rural history, for instance geography or agriculture. However, approaches are warmly invited from

overseas candidates and those with non-traditional qualifications who can demonstrate suitable ability and commitment. Each application will be considered on its merits.

Admissions Tutor: R. W. Hoyle

Support for students and their learning

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. The Rural History Centre, which is the national centre for the study of rural history, has the largest specialist library and archive in the country together with the object collections of the Museum of English Rural Life. It has therefore offers unique opportunities for learning and self-directed research. At the University level, learning support includes IT services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has subscriptions to a wide range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) facilities. Language tuition is available. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by the programme directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

In the School, a director is in overall charge of the programme and has responsibility for allocating students to courses and to research supervisors, ensuring that students and supervisors meet regularly, overseeing the progress of individual students, providing detailed feedback on their work as well as pastoral care and support. The programme begins with an induction session. Students will be provided with a handbook which outlines the programme, gives bibliographical advice and contains practical information about staff, sources of specialised help, submission deadlines etc. Whilst the RHC will provide a range of facilities for students, including informal and formal seminars in the Rural History Centre and, after the Centre's relocation to St Andrew's, accommodation, students will be encouraged to be fully involved with the History Research seminar and postgraduate research group, and to take advantage of such facilities as the workshops associated with the Stenton lecture. It will also be expected that they will attend – and in some cases perhaps speak at – the Rural History Centre's annual conference. All students will have the opportunity to give a research presentation on the general area of their dissertation during the summer term. Students will also be encouraged to attend seminars held elsewhere, including those in the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and the economic and social history seminars held in the University of Oxford. They are also encouraged to attend the conferences held by the British Agricultural History Society, for which some financial assistance may be available.

Career prospects

Many of our postgraduates may already be in established careers in the heritage or recreation industries or may be wishing to develop new skills after their retirement from paid employment. We see our objective as training our postgraduates in clear thinking, research skills, diligence, independence, adaptability and the ability to understand people and situations in the world at large. Additionally, they have the ability to locate, collate and process a wide variety of information, assess its value and use it to arrive at sound conclusions. This makes them attractive to a wide range of employers, especially in the 'knowledge economy'. We expect some of our students to use the MA as a springboard into a wide range of professions including those in the heritage and countryside industries as well as into teaching or further advanced study.

Opportunities for study abroad or placements

The character of the course precludes such opportunities.

Educational aims of the programme

The programme aims to provide a structured yet flexible framework which allows students to develop and follow their own interests within a rigorous academic setting, and to ensure they develop skills which will be appropriate to a range of occupations including the academic discipline. The subject-specific skills and the confidence which they acquire while undertaking the programme will allow them to produce an original, independently researched dissertation of 20,000 words, which will make a contribution to our existing knowledge and understanding. The MA additionally provides research training for those who wish to proceed to doctoral work at Reading or elsewhere. It is our hope that the degree will also train some of the next generation of rural historians and so be influential in shaping the future profession.

Programme Outcomes

The programme provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate knowledge, understanding, skills, qualities and other attributes in the following areas:

Knowledge and Understanding

<p>A. Knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. nature of debate and dispute in historical writing and discourse2. the range of primary and secondary sources available for the study of rural history3. elements of change and continuity in rural history4. methods and skills appropriate to the study of rural history5. strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to the study of rural history6. current debates and issues in rural history as seen through a historical perspective.	<p>Teaching/learning methods and strategies</p> <p>Acquisition of knowledge of fields 1-6 is promoted across the programme through seminar discussions, seminar presentations, seminars given by visiting speakers, site visits, tutorials and workshops. The module <i>Debates in Rural History</i> draws on a wide range of secondary literature drawn not only from history, but also from geography, the works of contemporary rural sociologists etc, to illuminate our understanding of change in the countryside and in agriculture. Students will therefore become acquainted with a variety of approaches to historical problems.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Students' knowledge and understanding are tested through assessed essays and the dissertation.</p>
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Skills and other attributes

<p>B. Intellectual skills – able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. integrate theory and practice2. analyse and interpret data and information3. evaluate and select relevant research methodologies4. negotiate both primary and secondary sources5. think critically, logically and independently, leading to an ability to manifest a nuanced appreciation of issues and an ability appropriately to challenge received opinions6. provide a synthesis of the current state of scholarship and debate in their chosen area of specialism7. define and solve problems8. demonstrate an understanding of their own modes of interpretation and an awareness of hermeneutical complexity in analysing texts9. demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge	<p>Teaching/learning methods and strategies</p> <p>These skills are developed throughout the programme through seminars, seminars given by visiting speakers, workshops, site visits and through individual consultation with essay supervisors, the research supervisor and the Programme Director. They are most especially the focus of attention in the research and writing of the dissertation, which is performe an original piece of work, based upon primary sources and which involves engagement with current scholarship. The inculcation of these intellectual skills is also a significant aspect of the <i>Sources and methods in Rural History</i> module.</p> <p><i>Assessment</i></p> <p>Intellectual skills are assessed through coursework essays, particularly the project which is part of the <i>Sources and methods in Rural History</i> module. This requires students to show an awareness of historical theory as appropriate to their own field of enquiry, to critically appraise the primary sources and to situate their own research within the subject’s broader historiographical context. Above all, it is in the dissertation that students are assessed on their possession of these skills and ability to apply them in practice.</p>
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C. Practical skills – able to:

1. locate information sources, including through the use of IT
2. select, collate and present information in a variety of contexts
3. be able to handle a range of archival sources with understanding of their strengths and weaknesses
4. develop and implement an individual research programme and strategies
5. engage in group discussion
6. Write an accurate text, using properly referenced footnotes

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Skills 1, 2, 3 and 4 are developed primarily through the research project, which involves tutorial supervision and feedback from the research supervisor and programme Director as well as upfront student activity. These skills are also the focus of specific seminars and guest lectures in the *Sources and methods* module, with ‘hands on’ sessions being devoted to IT training. Skill 1 is also developed through site visits to Libraries and archives, and training in the use of on-line catalogues. Skill 6 is embedded in all modules but particularly tested in the dissertation. Skill 5 is developed on all modules and additionally honed through the oral presentation on the research project and through participation in postgraduate and Departmental research seminars.

Assessment

Skills 1-6 are formally assessed through coursework essays and the dissertation and skills 4 and 5 are additionally tested informally in individual tutorials with staff and by participation in the postgraduate seminar

D. Transferable skills able to:

1. communicate effectively, both by oral and written means, and also graphically, subject to the particular choice of option
2. operate effectively within a group
3. demonstrate time/task management skills
4. handle information, including through the use of specialist databases as appropriate
5. undertake autonomous learning
6. solve problems
7. deal with complex issues in a systematic and creative manner
8. exercise initiative and personal responsibility
9. show a competence in numeracy within the parameters of the subject

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

The teaching and acquisition of these transferable skills is firmly embedded in all areas of the programme. Thus, the ability to write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose (e.g. a progress report, textual analysis, coursework essay, dissertation) is a *sine qua non* of success in all aspects of the MA. All students are expected to participate in and lead seminars and group discussions and to defend their research proposals; and they will also develop and maintain co-operative networks and working relationships with their peers, essay and research supervisors and other members of academic staff within the University. Team working feeds into skill 5 which is primarily, though not exclusively, embedded in the research project: for example, coursework essay topics are initially generated by the students and reflect their individual interests. Skill 3 is inculcated throughout the programme, for example in prioritising assignments and working to deadlines, and is particularly evidenced in the research project which involves the establishment of research goals and intermediate milestones and the prioritisation of activities. The location, collation and processing of substantial handling of substantial amounts of information is above all integral to the research project, though the skill pervades all of the modules.

Assessment

The transferable skills are assessed formally by means of coursework essays and the dissertation. They are tested informally at peer group sessions, seminars and tutorials.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.

