Interviewer

Okay, so I'm going to dive straight in, actually, and ask, how did you learn how to teach undergraduates with primary sources? How did you learn how to teach them? So did you receive any support or instruction from anyone else at all or did you just sort of dive straight in?

Respondent

Well, it's a standard part of teaching history certainly at undergraduate level. All history undergraduates have to do a final year course called a special subject, which is heavily based on the use of original sources. The way I tend to structure the course is that we have two classes a week, one class where we focus on historiography and scholarship, so what other scholars have said about the sources. The other class is purely devoted to close analysis of the sources themselves, and students are assessed on their ability to analyse sources, through what's called a ‘gobbet exercise’. Gobbets are simply extracts from sources which have been seen in class. They have to write commentaries on those. Students also in their final year have to do a dissertation, which is heavily based on primary sources. And their undergraduate training really builds up towards this close analysis of sources they... students…clearly historians need to engage with source material because that's the basis on which we build historical arguments, and the sources are evidence to support and illustrate those arguments. So really straight from year one, we have to encourage students to engage with primary sources. It may be that some of my colleagues at the modern history end, where they have to deal with a large body of historiography, they may focus more on that in their seminar teaching. Certainly myself as a mediaeval historian I introduce... there is some historiography, what historians call secondary sources, which I introduce students to through seminars, but much of the seminar teaching I do in years one and two is focused on primary sources and the lectures that run alongside those seminars are designed to provide context, in order to understand those sources. So the sources help to illustrate the themes of the lectures and give students a deeper appreciation of the issues raised in the lectures. So basically, I think anybody teaching history at University has to be able to teach students how to use original source material. I didn't do a higher education qualification so I don't know whether that training is provided there. I don't know to what extent it is actually tailored for the training of historians, but I have done a PGCE and in my first academic post in Bangor, before I came to Southampton, I did benefit from the mentoring of an older colleague who introduced me to the teaching of a special subject and other courses which relied heavily on source material. And clearly, as an undergraduate I was exposed to that material myself. Obviously from the other side of the desk as it were.

Interviewer

Fantastic, thank you. And do you use any...do you make any of your ideas or collections of sources available to others? So any of the primary sources that you use in your teaching, do you allow others to use that?

Respondent

Not, not at the moment. Some of the sources which I use with students are not taken from published source collections or printed sources - they come from my own research. And most of the sources that I work with are in Latin, so I have done English translations of these for my students. Yes, it might be something I consider in the future to produce a source collection, or at least to make these sources available online so others can use them in their teaching.

Interviewer

Were you able to make use of any primary sources from others before you started...when you started?

Respondent

Oh yes, I mean, there are many published source collections out there. I mean, some are you know very well established like English historical documents, which were published in the early 20th century in several volumes. There are some online source collections. There's the Fordham Mediaeval Sourcebook which is very useful and I direct students to that. But I mainly make use of printed source collections and my teaching ... the themes I choose to teach I've chosen, partly because there are existing source collections already available. So for example, my special subject which is on mediaeval love sex and marriage. One of the reasons why I chose to develop that is because there are quite a number of source collections dealing with the mediaeval women or mediaeval marriage. So clearly that saved me a lot of work and doing lots of my own translations. Yeah.

Interviewer

I wonder if you could pick one of your modules so that we can discuss it in more detail. For example what were your pedagogical aims, why you developed it, how it evolved over time?

Well, maybe I'll take this one because I'm teaching it at the moment. Right, so this is the first part of the special subject which is on mediaeval sex and marriage. And the way I conceive this is as an interdisciplinary module, or the discipline narrative comes in to other modules that I teach as well. What I mean by that is that it doesn't just draw upon conventional historical sources, but also brings in evidence that we associate with other discipline. So for example literature. So the special subjects is on mediaeval sex and marriage as I've said. So, part one of the course, we bring in mediaeval romance and courtly love literature and we take a particular author, Katerina?? de Trois?? who wrote in the late 12th century in northern France. Now it's problematic using imaginative literature as historical evidence as it doesn't necessarily represent a mirror on reality. But it does tell us what the intended audience for this literature ... what their ...not necessarily what their life was like but perhaps how they would like it to be. So it tells us something about their attitudes and aspirations. So by the late 12th century, the Christian/ the Catholic Church was exercising a great deal of control over marriage, and to some extent the lay aristocracy resisted that control because obviously marriage was very important for them for determining inheritance and the passage of property and titles, and there were, you know, strictures on sexual behaviour imposed by the church. So, this literature is written for the lay aristocracy. So it gives us some insight into their attitudes towards marriage, what they saw of marriages being for, which is not necessarily the same as the church. So it gives us another insight because as you probably appreciate a lot of the sources that we cover, they do come from the church. So looking at its teachings and rules about marriage....This part of the course covers the period before 1200, so we don't have a lot of evidence or what reality was, what was actual practice, but we have a sense of what the norms and rules were. So the literature does give us some insight into popular attitudes or at least the lay aristocracy's attitudes towards those rules. When it comes to the second part of the course, again, we make use of literary sources, including the writings of a French author called Marie de France. And obviously it's interesting here to have a woman's view point. So these are sort of short storeys, and many of them are about women who are in ill-matched marriages and they're trying to escape those so it gives some insight into sort of women's attitudes towards marriage. Again, it's dealing with a very small section of society but at least it's giving us one lay group's views. Also later on in the course we look at Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, we look at the Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale. And the Wife of Bath has been seen by some scholars as sort of a feminist mouthpiece. Others have questioned this and say "Well, actually, it's an ironic depiction of women and she's not actually a very good advocate for her sex, that in many ways she fulfils a lot of male clerical prejudices about women. So, again the course is encouraging students not only to interpret conventional historical sources but also approach literature as historians. We also use visual sources toward the end and particular the Arnolfini marriage portrait. And in particular.... I mean this is a painting that's full of religious symbolism. So we use it to try and say, well, you know, what is the artist expecting the audience / the viewer to understand in this picture? The symbolism might appear hidden to us but mediaeval people were used to looking at religious art which was full of code and symbolism and they were used to reading mediaeval pictures. So, they would have brought this approach to this picture and again that suggests something about lay attitudes and knowledge.

Interviewer

That's really interesting. So thank you for that, that's brilliant. What challenges do you face incorporating primary sources in this course? Do you have any challenges? I mean you've just explained brilliantly how you've used those, but are they are there any challenges that you can think of?

Respondent

There's the challenge of translating some for the students. I mean clearly it's always a challenge for students trying to put these sources into a wider context and they may not have all the relevant background knowledge for approaching some mediaeval sources. We don't tend to have say survey courses in say mediaeval history in years one and two. So some students you know I have to work with and then encourage them to do background reading. Others may have done previous courses of mine so they've already done that reading, so I mean that's particularly a challenge in year three. You know the students have come from / have done various courses in the past; so simply because they choose a course on mediaeval love sex and marriage it may not be the word 'mediaeval' that's attracted them there! They may have done maybe a lot of modern or even early modern history before, which doesn't prepare them as fully as other students who've done more ancient mediaeval courses.

Interviewer

And you incorporate primary sources in all of your courses in a similar way?

Respondent

Yes. I mean, probably less in year one, but there's an increasing content of primary sources in year two and three. Year one the students really need more direction on secondary reading. So some of the seminars deal with set secondary reading. By the time you move on to the second and third years students can be expected to do more of their own...you don't have to give them the reading on a platter. You simply advise them on what they need to read, make a great deal of use of student presentations and seminars, so that forces at least some of the students to do some reading to provide further context for the others and for the sources that we examine in class.

Interviewer

Excellent. And in this course does anyone else could provide instruction on primary sources for this course or is it you…?

Respondent

These are all modules which I convene and teach myself. No one else.

Interviewer

You don't have any teaching assistants? Fine. Thank you. Right, moving on to finding primary sources. How do you find primary sources that you use in this course?

Respondent

They come from various places. I mean, I've had to build up the sort of collection of sources for these modules over a number of years. Clearly there's a lot to be brought together. The first one I teach is particularly a special subject. And I mean, a lot of the sources are identified through the secondary literature. But then you may come to discover that there is only a Latin edition, so you have to do some translation work. But as I said, you know, there's a wide number of source collections available. And I think since the 1990s, you know, we've no longer been able to impose language requirements for special subjects. Before then you might say “You can only do this special subject if you have French or Latin.” So students were expected to read the sources in the original; they might make use of certain sources of... or have the aid of an English translation, but they were expected to study the originals. That's no longer a realistic assumption. Classical languages have died off even in private schools, largely. Most the students coming to us now do not have a language other than English, which is a shame, but I mean it is the reality. And so a lot of source collections have appeared since the 90s, reflecting that reality. Also, it seems that a lot of American History professors make use of primary sources. So actually a lot of these source collections come from the States.

Interviewer

Okay. That's interesting. And the library staff, do you come to the library for any of your primary sources at all or is that not...?

Respondent

Yes, I did originally when I was bringing them together. Yes. I mean, some source collections I bought myself just so I could have my own copy and not deprive the students. And I have encouraged the library to order additional copies of some or an electronic copy where available. Because even though I provide students with the sources, if they want to go beyond the selection I've provided, particularly when it comes to preparing a dissertation, or perhaps they want to do a self-devised essay developing on a particularly ???, it means they have access to a wider range of sources that I provide, you know, in class.

Interviewer

So I think, have you answered the question "Do you keep a collection of digital or physical sources that you use the teaching?" Do you keep a collection of all the primary sources that you use the teaching? Presumably you do?

Respondent

Well, yeah, I mean... some I have in electronic form, particularly my own translations. And I used to photocopy sources for the students, but now because we've been steered away from copying for environmental reasons, so now I'm scanning them and placing them on Blackboard. But a lot of them, I'm scanning actual printed texts.

Interviewer

What challenges do you face in finding appropriate sources to use?

A tricky one.

Respondent

Usually I know where to locate them because the courses we teach are based on our own research interest. So I already have awareness of what sources are available in English translation. It was particularly difficult when putting together the special subject because there were...yeah, I mean, I had to make choices about which sources to use sometimes, with the literary tax, some of the ??????? maybe it was all I'll be interested in was simply too long. So, you know, it's a question of practicality. Yeah, with some of the ones where I only found them in Latin. Then I still went ahead with my own English translation simply because I didn't feel it was a topic we could leave out. And while source collections are very good, they don't always include everything that you might want.

Or they may give very selective extracts where you might want fuller ones. I mean, sometimes I've had to draw upon different source collections to cobble together a sort of patchwork of... to give us as full an extract from the source we need to cover as possible.

Interviewer

Right now we're going on to how students find and access primary sources themselves. So, do you...I think you mentioned earlier about in Year one you tend to guide them towards a primary source where as in later years.

Respondent

Well I was talking more about secondary sources there. I provide extracts from secondary resources, so historiography. So that forces them to do some set reading, but as they go through they should do more and more of their own directed reading without it being offered to them on a platter. With the prime sources I always provide those. But I do, in course bibliographies, I do you give an indication of primary sources so they can investigate further, particularly if they want to use them for an essay or dissertation.

Interviewer

Do you teach students how to find primary sources at all?

Respondent

Essentially only when it comes to the dissertation. There they're doing quite a specialised topic so you can give them an indication of what is out there, and where to look. I mean, it's always a big problem with doing a dissertation on mediaeval history in that of course almost all the sources are in Latin. Students generally do not have Latin. So, they may want to do a topic which is not viable simply because there are not sources in translation available or there are so few there's not enough there for them to build a dissertation on. So you have to steer them towards something else.

Interviewer

So how do the ways in which you teach with prime sources relate to goals for student learning in their discipline, or in your discipline rather?

Respondent

Oh, well, I mean that they're essential. So, I mean, students are going to critique effectively the arguments of established historians. They can do that partly on the basis of the sources. So, you know, so you can say "Well, does the evidence support the arguments that these historians are putting forward?" And well the best way for students put their own original arguments forward is on the basis of their own analysis of the sources. So they are integral to what we do. We do have some exercises which are purely about source analysis. So as I've said, for the special subject they have to do this Gobbet exercise where they have to comment on a selection of seen sources. In year one we have these Cases and Contacts courses here. Mine is on the papal power in mediaeval Europe. There, one of the exercises is a commentary where they have to comment on one source out of three and also comment on a concept or key word. But I encourage students wherever possible to make use of primary sources in their essays, and particularly if they do a self-devised question.

Interviewer

And do you teach students what a primary source is, do you sort of nail that down so to speak?

Respondent

It's something we... I mean, generally, we expect students to have learned this at school, what the distinction is between a primary and a secondary source. The GCSE in history is well, it's, it's based on the school's council project history which was piloted in the mid 80s, which I happen to do. So I know what they do at GCSE and they are heavily exposed to sources and they're taught that you know that historians build up their understanding of the past on the basis of primary sources. And so they for example, one of the topics they do at GCSE is Medicine Through Time and they have a sort of source book for that. So by the time they come to A levels, even before they come to us, history students should know what a primary source, how it's distinct from a secondary source and also already have developed some skills and analysing sources. Yeah.

Interviewer

To what extent is it important to you that your students develop information literacy or civic engagement through working with primary sources?

Respondent

Sorry, can you repeat the question?

Interviewer

Yeah. To what extent is it important to you that your students develop information literacy, or civic engagement through working with primary sources?

Respondent

Right. What do you mean by information literacy here?

Interviewer

Can you help me with this one Interviewer 2?

Interviewer

Yes, so it's just about how to use data. It's literacy, which is part of like soft skills that the students or ??? we should develop it? So it's about understanding data and data sets and how is a piece of information different? So how is the information structure different from just data? Does that makes sense? So for example, if you have data you might have, you know a list of names - surname and address, but it becomes information when you put them in the context. So when you say "this word is actually the name, and this is a surname, and this is the address", and normally they are all... name, surname and underneath you might have the address. So that becomes information, before it's just data. Does that make sense?

Respondent

No! I don't understand. Maybe it's something that's more applicable to other disciplines.

Interviewer

But what about civic engagement?

Interviewer

Yes, like going to museums or...

Interviewer

So how do they learn and connect with places where, I don't know, going to a library? So you're actually researching and using primary sources and you might decide to actually go physically to the place where that primary source is stored more than...

Respondent

That's something that we would do more at MA level. I mean students obviously when they first come here are given library tours but after that we expect them to know their own way around the library and learn how to retrieve information there with the support of the library staff. We do more hands-on work when it comes to MA work. So I used to run an MA on mediaeval Renaissance culture where we established a connection with Salisbury Cathedral archive and library and we took students there to handle original documents. But there of course, you know, students would have acquired not only the relevant language skills ie Latin, but also the skills in reading mediaeval handwriting. And that's something that realistically you can only feature at MA level. So there you'd have hands-on experiences. Some of my colleagues do take students on field trips, particularly, you know, for the more archaeological modules, but also others. I have a colleague who teaches a course on Henry the Eighth who takes the students to Hampton Court. And also students do the group project in their second year which is a research project and may involve them yes, in going to museums. It might be to develop something called a 'public outcome'. They have to do an assessment so they may choose to put on an exhibition. But it might be as part of their research - they are looking at artefacts in museums or even works of art in galleries and not simply printed sources that they would find in the library.

Interviewer

Okay thank you. So in what formats do your students engage with primary sources for example print editions, digital images, documents in an archive, born digital material, oral histories?

Respondent

Okay, well given that I do mediaeval history, oral history doesn't come in obviously! But as I've said, we make use of some visual sources and there I mean particularly if you're talking about old master paintings like the Arnolfini marriage portrait. Though it appears... well I think that it shows you on the cover there (points to photo on module spec) you can't reproduce that adequately as a photocopy. So we always tend to look at that as a digital image online. And of course the value of that is that you can blow up the image and explore details of the picture. And in this one that's particularly important because there are lots of everyday objects shown in this image, which at first glance might seem to be there by chance. But they're there for a reason. There's some symbolic meaning. So we need to... I mean we spend about an hour looking at this picture. And also there is other visual material I'll bring in what…are sort of analogous material to this. But most of the sources I mean, if we're talking about texts yeah, I mean, we're looking at printed copies or we're looking at...I mean I tend to scan those now and put them on Blackboard. The students can choose to print those out, or just look at it on their laptop.

Interviewer

Thank you. Do your students use any digital tools to examine or interact or present the sources? You mentioned that they do a presentation. So for example do they use like a collaborative annotation platform or 3D images or...?

Respondent

I mean when they're doing presentations, they tend to do PowerPoint. And I encourage them to send me the PowerPoint slides, which we can then post on Blackboard, so that it becomes a resource for other students. And likewise, if I use PowerPoints... I don't do PowerPoints in all my lectures but where, you know, it's useful to have the visual images. So for example, in, which one is it – X (name of module). I do a lecture of mediaeval art, so you can't do that without a PowerPoint! So and that goes on Blackboard as well. And I refer students to online resources with other images of mediaeval religious art. So there's a website called The Mediaeval Church, so I encourage them to go and look at that because one of the set essays is about mediaeval art. So that means, you know, they can explore further images to, literally, illustrate their argument.

Interviewer

And how do you reference primary sources or how do you cite primary sources? Or, how do you get the students to cite primary sources?

Respondent

Um, I mean, sometimes if they're in a handout, they'll simply reference the handout, but where possible, I try to give them the bibliographic information, so where the extract came from. That way they can follow it up and see if there's other related material, but also they feel more comfortable they've got an exact citation. And with the gobbets exercise, we all, for the special subject, we always give now the bibliographical reference(?), so, where the extract comes from, because part of what they have to do is to place the source not only in its historical context, but also in its textual context. So it's always part of a bigger source. It's always part of a seen source. So when we give them the seen sources, we say, yeah, "This is where this comes from". We give them the reference. Because we have expectations of them in terms of referencing, well, it should also apply to us.

Set a good example!

Interviewer

So what advice would you give a colleague who's new to teaching on how to teach primary sources? Do you have any hints and tips?

Respondent

I think they need to select sources which relate to the lectures they intend to give. So that provides context and background. I mean, going back to the history GCSE, the pilot project for that Schools Council Project History. One of the most criticised elements of it, which has now been removed, was an unseen sources paper, which students generally did badly at because, surprise, surprise, they didn't know the context. So it was hard for them to make proper sense of the sources. So I think that's very salutary. So, yeah, I mean, I think you always have to provide context through lectures, through directed secondary reading.

Interviewer

And looking towards the future, what challenges or opportunities do you think people will encounter when teaching undergraduates with primary sources?

Respondent

The opportunities I think will be really going beyond printed resources, that there's so much electronic material out there and I suppose the challenge is knowing what there is there. You know, we may know of certain websites but there may be others that are less well known to us. I think particularly it would be useful to know what digital resources are coming out of the United States. Because clearly they have far more undergraduates than us and they develop resources to teach them. Some of those resources make it into print, so as I said, a lot of the source collection we use actually comes from North America. But I mean, many must also be online and may not be accessible outside of the institutions where they're used. It would be good if people started sharing these things more. And one problem is I found I mean, I had a colleague in London who's teaching course on mediaeval marriage and I saw he had some sources I want to use for this course but then he stopped teaching it and everything was taken down! And he did supply me with one of the sources that I'd seen there but simply because he done a type written translation, but all that electronic material was just gone, which seems such a shame. He clearly put a lot of work into building it, this resource, and then when the course was no longer running, that disappeared.

Interviewer

So preservation is really important then of resources? And like you said, people spend a lot of time creating these things, if they suddenly just disappear then there needs to be some kind of continuity and ...

Respondent

Yes, and accessible.

Interviewer

And accessibility. Okay.

Have you got any questions that you'd like to ask us?

Respondent

How are you going to use the interview material, what's the aim?

Interviewer

So we're going to transcribe the audio, obviously, and then we're going to, like theme it together. So put it into what's called coding. And then analyse it. And it's going to be put into a... it's a big project with, alongside American universities, we're all doing the same thing and also Sheffield as well. Us and Sheffield are the only two UK universities involved with this project. And it's going to be put together in a massive report. And it's designed to find information about how people teach with primary sources with the aim of helping us to be able to provide services and resources for people. So it's basically to better understand how it is used in undergraduate teaching, so we can try and better support.

Respondent

So who are 'we'? Are you a company?

Interviewer

Oh, no!

Interviewer

So we're part of the digital scholarship team. So we're based in the library.

The idea is actually to follow the entire course from creation, publication we use material. So the report will have recommendations on how the university here could support stuff, which could be: we need to create some training to explain what we can do. There is definitely some preservation that might emerge of the materials that you have produced. Yeah, so it's building up a recommendation for us. And then at the same time each institution involved will submit a report with their own recommendation to kind of understand where is the teaching with primary sources of going and kind of benchmark us against someone else. So we're going to share... what again, it's all going to be anonymous, translates and everything. So, but it's just generally to identify which trends are coming up from teaching with primary sources of undergraduates and then see what's the difference between where we are now and where US institution are and then you learn from each other in sharing,

Respondent

Sharing good practice.

Interviewer

Does that kind of answer?! Could I ask you an additional question? It's actually about the citing of primary sources. So when you add for example, the image of the painting on the front, how do you make the students know what is there and where they can find it? Do you use any standard way?

Respondent

Yeah, I mean, the...I mean, you can simply say it's in the National Gallery in London, but I mean, usually I would give a website address showing/ indicating where there are reproductions/ good reproductions in this online, particularly ones where there are details where you can zoom in on the detail (where) that's enabled.

Interviewer

And in, in the case of the translation that you are doing from Latin? How do the students will then use...?

Respondent

Yeah, I mean, that's difficult. I mean I can only say it's my translation, it's not published. And I can simply say what I'm translating from. So obviously, I can cite the Latin printed edition that I use, but my English translation of X and whatever it is.

Interviewer

I'm just interested in the archive, our library archive. Do we have any Latin resources/primary sources that you use in your teaching at all?

Respondent

In the archive? Yeah. Again, when I ran this MA (name of masters course). I used to take students in one week -there are a box of medieval deeds, Latin deeds. And I know another colleague took students in to look at a mediaeval manuscript book. But I think that's a limit of what you have. And that was the way we used to teach students how to read medieval handwriting, what we call palaeography in the original incarnation of the course, and then the MA was suspended and we decided we'll revive it to attract more students because there was an issue with student numbers on the MA. We wanted to make use of a wide range of local resources. And I'd also taken students up to Winchester, to the archive there, but I didn't want to make too much of the Winchester connection because that's just giving students a reason to go and study at the University of Winchester. So I developed this connection with Salisbury because there's no University there. They didn't seem to have a collaboration with any local university. It's not too difficult to reach from Southampton. So we used to run three sessions and they obviously were very receptive towards the collaboration. Unfortunately, the MA in its revived form has now been suspended as well because again, there were concerns about student numbers so it's difficult to keep these initiatives going.

Interviewer

Thank you very much. Thank you.

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