



Study abroad.

## SYLLABUS

### **TURNING POINTS IN ENGLISH HISTORY FROM CAESAR TO THE CIVIL WAR**

**Instructor: Prof. Randall McGowen**

**Contact Hrs: 40**

**Language of Instruction: English**

**LONDON, ENGLAND (NCSA)**

#### A. Content and Objectives

This course will provide students with an overview of English history that will enable them to benefit more fully from their NCSA term. My aim is to introduce the basic institutions, ideas, and events that played a decisive role in shaping the British experience. Without some such historical introduction, students can have little hope of making sense of the puzzling variety of names and places they will encounter during their time in England. Of course it is impossible to present a complete survey of fifteen hundred years of history in ten weeks. Instead we will examine in detail key turning points in the evolution of that society. This task becomes easier because the excursions will help to reinforce the lessons learned in the classroom. Among the major themes that we will follow are: the impact of repeated invasions upon the early history of Britain; the character of the feudal monarchy and the origins of Parliament; the conflict of church and state in the middle ages; the Black Death and the challenge of political instability in the fifteenth century; the Tudor monarchy and the Protestant Reformation; the debate over the nature of monarchy in the seventeenth century; and the crisis of the English “civil war.” We will make use of a variety of readings to aid our discussion of each episode.

Although I will cover some material in class lectures, we will spend the bulk of class time in discussion of the various readings. On several occasions we will watch videos or take class excursions to sites that illustrate themes we are discussing during the week. The readings (especially the documents packet) are meant to give you a fuller sense of what people felt and thought at different moments in time. Our discussion of them will offer you an opportunity to learn how historians use printed sources to reconstruct major events in the past. Students **must** come to class prepared to talk about the day’s assignment. Class discussion will count for 20% of the final grade. On three occasions during the term, we will have an in-class debate over a major issue dividing people in a particular period: the privileges of the Church vs. the Crown at the time of Beckett; loyalty to the Church of Rome vs. Protestant reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; the rights of Parliament vs. those of the Crown in 1640. Each student will write a two-page position paper on one side or the other of the question, to be handed in the day of the debate. Each paper is worth 10% of the grade. Students will also write a three page paper on a topic related to The Paston Letters (20%). The final exam, an essay test with study questions distributed in advance, will be worth 30% of the course grade.

## B. Texts

J. Gillingham & R. Griffiths, Medieval Britain, A Very Short Introduction

Beowulf, trans. Michael Alexander

The Paston Letters, ed. Norman Davis

Shakespeare, Richard II

a document collection of original sources

Additional reading: The Oxford History of Britain, ed. K. Morgan

## C. Course Outline & Excursions

- Week I      Roman Britain      Doc. I  
meet at British Museum, Roman Britain gallery
- Week II      The Anglo-Saxon invasions and the Viking challenge      Beowulf; Doc. II  
Excursion: Tower of London
- Week III      The place of the Church in Medieval Britain      Doc. III  
Excursion: Canterbury  
Debate: Who was right about the relationship between the Crown and the Church, Beckett or Henry II?
- Week IV      Feudalism, Magna Carta, and the origins of Parliament      Doc. IV  
Excursion: Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey
- Week V      Calamity and conflict – the Black Death and the 100 Year’s War  
The Paston Letters; Doc. V  
Excursion: Weald and Downland Museum  
PAPER DUE
- Week VI      Henry VIII and the English Reformation      Doc. VI  
Excursion: Hampton Court  
Debate: What was the nature of the difference between Protestants and Catholics in Tudor England?
- Week VII      Foreign threats and internal challenges in the time of Elizabeth  
Richard II, Doc. VII  
Excursion: Cambridge
- Week VIII      The vision of monarchy under the Stuart kings  
Doc. VIII  
Excursion: National Portrait Gallery  
Debate: What were the different views of government held by the supporters of Charles I and the followers of Parliament?
- Week IX      Civil war and the execution of a king      Doc. IX