

INSTITUTE OF  
HISTORICAL RESEARCH



INSIDE  
THIS ISSUE:

A History of  
Historical  
Fiction 2

Why this  
conference? 3

Lectures 3

Book Re-  
views 3

IHR Projects 4

Programme  
Highlights 4

# Novel Approaches

A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

21-25 NOVEMBER 2011

## Welcome

Thank you for registering for the *Institute of Historical Research* virtual conference *Novel Approaches: from academic history to historical fiction*. We believe we have put together a really varied, interesting and fun programme for you consisting of audio podcasts, articles, and book reviews amongst much else.

The programme begins on Monday at 10am with a brief introduction before rapidly moving on to our first book review (a look at the many faces of Thomas Cromwell), followed swiftly by a conversation between historian David Loades and novelist Hilary Mantel. Later in the day we'll announce our competition and hear from Alison Weir. Finally Kaye Jones

will discuss, in a second book review, the dark side of Victorian London.

Day two (Tuesday) will look at the popularity of historical fiction. Day three



(Wednesday) will examine the differences and similarities between the two professions, whilst day four (Thursday) will ask the thorny question: does the success of historical fiction benefit or threaten academic history? That final question

in particular would seem ripe for debate and discussion! Day five (Friday) will end with a discussion amongst our speakers and an announcement concerning our competition winners. This and much more is in store! However, before all of that kicks off we thought we'd put together this small newsletter for you.

We hope you enjoy it!

## Latest News: Hilary Mantel to write a Wolf Hall sequel

The BBC have broken the news that Hilary Mantel plans to write a sequel to her highly successful *Wolf Hall* novel. The sequel, entitled *Bring Up the Bodies* will continue the story of Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister, and will focus on the downfall of Anne Boleyn.



For more details about Hilary Mantel see our short conference biography: <http://ihrconference.wordpress.com/conference-speakers/>

# A History of Historical Fiction



A drawing of Edward Waverley from Sir Walter Scott's novel

“Scott introduces us to his knowledge and learning of this period in Scottish history through Edward's character”

Sir Walter Scott



*As a prelude to our virtual conference on Novel Approaches the IHR Digital blog is playing host to a short series of posts investigating the history of historical fiction. Here is one such post on the topic of Sir Walter Scott's Waverley—The first historical novel?*

The Jacobite rising of 1745 was one of the last in a series of rebellions aimed at returning the descendants of the House of Stuart to the throne. Although for a while Charles Edward Stuart, with the aid of various Highland armies and a few others including English and French soldiers, won various victories he was eventually defeated for good at the Battle of Culloden held near Inverness. This battle proved decisive, with around 1,500 to 2,000 Jacobites killed or wounded, and eventually led to the weakening of Gaelic culture and the attack on the Scottish clan system. This, then, is the stage upon which Sir Walter Scott set the first historical novel.

The main protagonist of the novel, Edward Waverley, was presumptive heir to the estate of his elderly uncle Sir Everard. The tale follows Edward as he joins the regiment of dragoons and finds himself embroiled in the Jacobite rising of 1745. At first he supports the Hanoverian army but, after falling in love with Flora MacIvor, a Highlands

woman dedicated to the Jacobite cause, transfers his allegiance to Prince Charles.

In the novel Edward Waverley himself is described by Scott as ‘warm in his feelings, wild and romantic in his ideas and in his taste of reading, with a strong disposition towards poetry’ (Scott, p. 56). With just a little knowledge of Walter Scott, one gets the feeling that in Waverley, Scott is basing the persona on his own predispositions. Indeed, we view the Highlands through Edward's eyes, and, at first, as a visitor and via a lens of youthful romance and daydreams. Scott introduces us to his knowledge and learning of this period in Scottish history through Edward's character. We gain a clear picture of both Highlands and old Lowland cultures of Scotland as well as contemporary political debates and, fortunes of all involved parties. Through Edward's changing allegiances, Scott is able to critique the conflict between Jacobite and Hanoverian from both sides.

So this is where our history of the historical novel begins, with a tale of the Jacobite risings of the eighteenth century. Or does it? It is both interesting and telling that Richard Maxwell's *The Historical Novel in Europe, 1650-1950*, published in 2009, takes as its title and content the chronological range of historical novels back to the seventeenth century. Maxwell categorically

states his belief that ‘there is no necessity to follow Georg Lukács in this *preference*’ (Maxwell, p. 2). ‘Preference’ is a revealing word to use here; Maxwell believes that literary scholarship in the twentieth century has been somewhat blinded by Lukács' preferences and his desire not to look too far behind Walter Scott. It would also seem that the breaking apart of literary scholarship in terms of periodisation (as indeed has often been the case in History also) has made it difficult for scholars to note the restrictions in their own research. Of course, I'm far from claiming to be an expert in literary theory (or of its own history) but from the arguments I have read this realisation seems to be a relatively new and profitable one.

If, then, Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* is not the origin of the historical fiction “genre” as has often been claimed then where should a history of historical fiction begin? I'll be investigating that topic next week so please do keep an eye out.

For more prelude blog posts looking at the history of historical fiction please visit our [IHR Digital blog](http://ihr-history.blogspot.com/) at <http://ihr-history.blogspot.com/>

# Why this conference?



The relationship between academic history and historical fiction is a subject of great interest to historians. Major academic conferences, for example the American Historical Association gathering last

January and the Leeds Medieval Congress this July, have included papers and sessions on the subject, and they are proving among the most lively and well attended. There are numerous examples of historians who have successfully moved into the sphere of fiction, and conversely of authors whose fiction is underpinned by rigorous research. The large and growing public interest in history in Britain takes in both historical fact and historical fiction. And it is clear that many historians were at least in

part inspired to pursue historical research by novels that they had read, or indeed are currently either planning to write or are writing their own works of fiction.



'Novel approaches' seeks to explore this phenomenon. It brings together a wide range of speakers, including academic and public historians, authors and publishers.

*"history is not primarily about the past. It is about human nature. What makes it historical is that it examines human nature through the prism of a different age."*  
- Ian Mortimer

## Lectures



During the conference we will be recording the papers presented by our speakers, including novelists, historians, and publishers. We will make these available as podcast recordings throughout the week of the virtual conference. You will also be able to join the discussion and share your thoughts on the issues that our speakers raise.

For more details about IHR podcasts have a look at [History SPOT](#).

## Book Reviews



From the people who bring you [Reviews in History](#) we have a collection of fascinating books reviews comparing novels to the research that underlies them. All reviews are written by experts in their fields and attempt to provide a new perspective on the works that they study.

As far as we know no one has attempted to do anything like this before with a book review so the results should be interesting!



## Institute of Historical Research

The Institute of Historical Research (IHR)

Senate House

Malet Street

London

WC1E 7HU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7862 8740

Fax: +44 (0)20 7862 8745

Email: [ihr.webmaster@sas.ac.uk](mailto:ihr.webmaster@sas.ac.uk)

A Selection of IHR Projects (*click on the image*)

## History SPOT

Seminar Podcasts and Online Training from the IHR

## Reviews in History

Covering books and electronic resources across all fields of history



BRITISH HISTORY ONLINE



## Making History

The changing face of the profession in Britain



VCH Explore

Explore England's Past

[www.history.ac.uk](http://www.history.ac.uk)

# Programme Highlights

## Monday 21 November

The virtual conference begins at 10am and is quickly followed by a series of opinion pieces, book reviews and lectures.

## Tuesday 22 November

Today's topic is the popularity of historical fiction. We'll also bring you opinions, articles and book reviews.

## Wednesday 23 November

What are the differences and similarities between historical fiction and academic history? Today we investigate. Plus various other content including an interesting article by Ian Mortimer.

## Thursday 24 November

Historians seem to love and hate historical fiction in equal measure. Today we ask does the success of historical fiction benefit or threaten academic history?

## Friday 25 November

The end of our virtual conference. More lectures, and book reviews plus the announcement of our competition winners.

For the full programme see the virtual conference website: <http://ihrconference.wordpress.com/conference-programme/>. You can also download a copy as a pdf!