HI7070 Choosing your past – the Historian and the Archive

Module type   Option (Identities and Cultures of Europe)

Term / hours   MT / 22

ECTS   10

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Module description

Archives are the foundation of historical research. They collect, preserve, arrange and provide access to the original records. For centuries scholars have analysed official records to write academic history but, in recent years, popular awareness of archives has grown significantly. Free resources such as the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland, and commercial genealogy or newspaper archives, have attracted new users. The variety of archives has also grown as companies, institutions and marginalized groups create their own archives to protect or project their own histories.

This archival turn, and expanded access through digitization, has transformed research into personal, social and communal histories of major events such as the Irish Revolution and the Great War. Archives play an increasingly important role in public perceptions of, and active engagement with, history. But how reliable is 'the archive'?

This module investigates the archive, using a Historian's lens to critically analyse its contents and function. Who was the archive created by and for? Who is it for today? Does the arrangement of archival records influence the history we write? Can we detect silenced voices by reading records 'against the grain'? Does digitization really democratize access to History?

Assessment

Structured review (1,000 words) on a selected archive or archival collection

Essay (3,500 – 5,000 words) on a relevant topic

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

LO1   Identify the dominant and marginalised voices in an archive

LO2   Develop an alternative method for arranging, cataloguing or interpreting a collection

LO3   Critically analyse the relationship between archival practices and historical research

LO4   Communicate ideas and arguments effectively in oral presentations and discussion, and in written work.