

Dr John A. McEwan
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HIST 3930: From Parchment to Pixel: London History in the Digital World
MWF, 9:00– 9:50 am. Credit Hours: 3

Course Description

Digital technology is transforming how historians work and think. In this course, students will explore how digital methods affect how historians collect and analyse information, and how they convey their discoveries to their fellow scholars and the general public. Students will learn how to gather and analyse evidence using digital tools and methods that may include data-mining techniques such as network analysis and topic-modelling. Students will both write research papers based on their discoveries and develop interactive digital presentations to engage a public audience. This course is for students who want to think about the future of their discipline. No 'programming' skills are required.

Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate an ability to gather, analyse, synthesize and contextualize historical evidence using digital methods.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and limitations of digital technology, as applied to historical research.
3. Express an understanding of historical problems, in written and oral forms, within an academic context and for a public audience.
4. Work independently and collaboratively, and take part in group discussions.

Recommended Texts

Hanawalt, B.A. *Growing up in Medieval London: the experience of childhood in history* (New York, 1993).

Meyers, A.R. *London in the Age of Chaucer* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1972)

ASSESSMENT

Grading Scheme

Research essay: Nov. 5 th	25 points
Project	40 points
1. Proposal Presentation (5), Oct 17th	
2. Proposal Draft (10), Oct. 19th	
3. Project Presentation (5), Dec 5, 7th	
4. Project (20), Dec. 7th	
Reflective essay, Dec. 10th	15 points
Participation	20 points
<i>Total Possible</i>	100 points

All assignments will be graded using letter grades (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, F).

Project Overview

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343 -1400) offers us a gently satirical portrait of late medieval society. Inspired by this work of fiction, students in HIST 3930 will work on a digital project that will take the form of an educational text-based interactive game, set in London during Chaucer's lifetime. The central character of each student's game will be a fictional character (a person who never lived), who will face a series of historically plausible life-defining choices. These choices might include whether to pursue higher education or an apprenticeship, whether to adopt a mercantile or religious vocation, and whether to remain or flee from the city in times of plague and urban unrest. The 'reader' or 'player' of the game should emerge from the experience of the game with a better sense not only of what the city itself was like, but also of the values, ideas and beliefs of the people who lived there. To design and build their games, students will employ user-friendly software (www.twinery.org). The game development process will have several stages. Students will first develop a proposal for a game (10% of the final grade), prepare a formal research essay that will articulate the empirical and intellectual foundation for their game (30%), build a prototype to present to their peers (25%), and finally prepare a reflective and evaluative statement that sets out the principles underlying its design and considers its audience impact (15%).

COURSE OUTLINE

Wk1 -- Aug 27 **Introduction**

Monday

Play one of the following:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2014/jan/refugee-choices-interactive>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601>

Further reading: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/06/syrian-journey-bbc-game-refugee-crisis>

Wednesday

Read: Uricchio, William. "Simulation, history, and computer games", *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, ed. J. Raessens and J. Goldstein (Cambridge, 2005), 327-338.

Play one of the following and come prepared to discuss your experience:

www.mesopotamia.co.uk/trade/story/sto_set.html

www.philome.la/gamingthepast/path-of-honors-1-12-18

<https://www.choiceofgames.com/road-to-canterbury>

www.theappendix.net/special/the-fever/

<https://ehistory.osu.edu/exhibitions/americandream/index>

www.tulane.edu/~sumter/

Friday

TWINE I: Introduction

Read: <http://www.playthepast.org/?p=5739>

Wk2 – Sep 3

London and its Suburbs

Monday

Labour Day

Wednesday

Keene, Derek. 'Medieval London and its region', *London Journal*, 14 (1989), pp. 99-111.

Rosser, A. G. 'The essence of medieval urban communities: the vill of Westminster 1200-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 34 (1984), pp. 91-112.

Friday

TWINE Exercise I

Read: Tout, T.F. *A Mediæval Burglary [of the treasury of the King's Wardrobe in Westminster Abbey, in 1303]* (Manchester, 1915).

Pretend you are a medieval detective and come prepared with a sketch of events.

Wk3 – Sep 10

Government of London

Monday

Read: Myers, *London in the Age of Chaucer*, ch. II (The Government of London)

Wednesday

Data Exercise I: TRANSKRIBUS

Friday

TWINE Exercise II

Read: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*.

Prepare a TWINE based on a biography of a Londoner based on the Oxford English Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB). How do the people mentioned in the prologue compare with those in the ODNB?

Wk4 – Sep 17

Civic Society

Monday

Read: Myers, *London in the Age of Chaucer*, ch. III (The Society of London)

Further reading: Veale, Elspeth. 'The "Great Twelve": mystery and fraternity in thirteenth-century London', *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), 237-263.

James, Margery K. 'A London merchant of the fourteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 8 (1956), 364-76.

Myers, A.R. 'The wealth of Richard Lyons', *In essays in medieval history presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. T. A. Sandquist and M. R. Powicke (Toronto, 1969), pp. 301-329.

Barron, C. M. 'Searching for the "small people" of medieval London', *Local Historian* 38 (2008).

Wednesday

Data Exercise II

Friday

TWINE Exercise III

David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., 'The questioning of John Rykener, a male cross-dressing prostitute, 1395', at:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1395rykener.html>

Wk5 – Sep 24

Disease and Death

Monday

Hawkins, Duncan. 'The Black Death and the New London cemeteries of 1348', *Antiquity*, 64 (1990), 637-642.

Wednesday

Data Exercise III

Friday

TWINE Exercise IV

Research someone who died or was affected by the plague and sketch out a TWINE.

Wk6 – October 1 **Women**

Monday

Read: Barron, C.M. 'The "golden age" of women in medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989).

Further Reading: Barron, C.M. "Introduction: the widow's world in later Medieval London", *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. C. Barron and A. Sutton (London, 1994), pp. xiii-xxxiv.

Wood, R. "Poor widows, c.1393-1415", *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500*, ed. C. Barron and A. Sutton. (London, 1994), pp. 55-69.

Bennett, J.M. "Women and Men in the Brewers' Guild of London, ca. 1420", *The Salt of Common Life: Individuality and Choice in the Medieval Town, Countryside, and Church. Essays Presented to J. Ambrose Raftis*, ed. E.B. DeWindt (Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1995), pp. 181-232.

Wednesday

Data Exercise IV

Friday

TWINE Exercise V

Prepare a twine with two branches: one which suggests that women were treated favourably in London and one which suggests that they faced challenges.

Wk7 – October 8 **London and the Crown**

Monday

Barron, C.M. 1981. *Revolt in London, 11th to 15th June 1381*. London: Museum of London.

Wednesday

McKisack, M. 'London and the succession to the Crown during the Middle Ages', *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederic Maurice Powicke*, ed. R. W. Hunt, W.A. Pantin and R.W. Southern (Oxford, 1948), pp. 76-89.

Barron, C.M. 'The quarrel of Richard II with London, 1392-7', *The Reign of Richard II: Essays in Honour of May McKisack*, ed. F.R.H. Du Boulay and C.M. Barron. (London, 1971), pp. 173-201.

Friday

TWINE Exercise VI: Create a sample twine for an episode in the Peasant's Revolt that exposes two competing versions of events.

Wk8 – October 15

Monday

Work on project proposals

Wednesday

Present proposals

Friday

Revise proposals and submit by noon

Wk9 – Oct. 29 **The Church**

Monday

Read one of the following:

Thomson, J. A. F. 'Piety and Charity in Late Medieval London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 16 (1965), pp. 178-195.

Brigden, Susan. 'Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London', *Past and Present*, 103 (1984), pp. 67-112.

McHardy, Alison K. 'The churchmen of Chaucer's London: the seculars', *Medieval Prosopography*, 16 (1995), pp. 57-87.

Wednesday

Data Exercise IV

Friday

TWINE II: Images and variables

Wk10 – Nov. 5 **Childhood**

Monday

Research Paper Due (see assignment at end of syllabus)

Hanawalt, *Growing up in Medieval London* (Oxford, 1993), ch. 1,2,3,4.

Wednesday

Hanawalt, *Growing up*, ch. 5,6,7.

Friday

TWINE III: Random Numbers

Wk11 – Nov. 12 **Adolescence**

Monday and Wednesday

Hanawalt, *Growing up*, ch. 8,9,10,11.

Friday

TWINE IV: Logic

Wk12 – Nov. 19

Monday

Workday

Wednesday and Friday

Thanksgiving

Wk13 – Nov. 26 **Work on Project**

Monday

Wednesday

Friday

Wk14 – December 3 Presentations

Monday Testing

Wednesday Presentation

Friday Presentation, Submit project

Wk15 – December 10

Monday Submit reflective essay

Research Essay (due November 5th)

3000-3500 words

Introduction

Richard Whittington was an important merchant and a political leader in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century London. However, according to a popular legend that is first recorded in the reign of Elizabeth I, but which then became a fixture in English popular culture, Richard Whittington, went from rags to riches with the help of a cat:

Some hundred miles from London town
There dwelt a country lad,
His parents they were dead and gone,
Which made him very sad.

To London then he bent his way,
Where, he had oft been told,
The streets so broad, so fine, and gay,
Were paved with shining gold.

Arrived in town – no gold he found –
His feet were tired and sore ;
He sat himself upon the ground,
Close to a Merchant's door.

[...]

One day he saw a woman pass,
A cat she had to sell ;
A Penny was the price she ask'd
Which suited him quite well¹

In this version of the story, Richard, with the help of his cat, becomes a successful merchant and rises to become mayor of London. The historical Richard Whittington, as opposed to the man of the legend, was neither an orphan nor penniless when he moved to London. Nonetheless, could the extraordinary social and economic mobility depicted in the legend have some foundation in historical reality?

Essay Question:

Life in fourteenth century London offered people opportunities and challenges, but how much social mobility was there in London and to what extent was your position and social role determined at birth? Although you may refer to other groups within civic society, focus on the group you put forwards in your proposal. To what extent did life in London offer people the capacity to change, for better or worse, their fortune? In your essay, cite no less than twelve secondary sources, which may include up to four from the course reading list, and at least two separate primary sources. The research essay should assume the standard format, with an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion. Please format your essay using the standard history department guidelines. All essays must include footnotes and a full bibliography.

¹ *The adventures of Whittington and his cat*. Albany, (N.Y: Steele and Durrie, 1847)