

GRADUATE PROFILE:



ALAN

HISTORY

WHAT SUBJECTS DID YOU STUDY PRIOR TO ARRIVING IN DURHAM?

Prior to going to St. Chad's College I had studied A level History, English Lit. and Latin at the then Elland Grammar School in West Yorkshire.

WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF STUDYING AT DURHAM?

This question could lead to a much longer response than you require! Being the first member of my family to go to university, there was initially a steep learning curve. I remember the outstanding lectures on the medieval period from Prof. Offler but even more, in retrospect the small tutorial groups, 3 or 4 of us, with the different members of staff, beginning with Prof. Rosemary Cramp (then at the start of her distinguished career) who was very generous in her assessment after my first term! Perhaps one of the highlights was acting as secretary of the university Historical Society. This involved inviting and entertaining some of the eminent historians of that time. I particularly remember the visit of Sir Stephen Runciman.

WHAT WAS THE TOPIC OF YOUR DISSERTATION?

My dissertation had a long title. 'The relations between the Archbishops of York and the Chapters of the Collegiate Churches of St. John at Beverley & St. Wilfrid at Ripon'. It was largely based on material in the Surtees' Society volumes.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING NOW AND HOW DID YOUR DEGREE HELP PREPARE YOU?

I have been retired from my stipendiary ministry as Bishop of Blackburn since 2003, though I continued to be active in both ecclesiastical and civic life in Cheshire until 2010. Now I help with services in Chichester Cathedral and local parishes as an Honorary Assistant Bishop in this diocese. I went from Durham to theological college in Oxford where I read for a second BA in theology, making the Reformation my special subject, largely as a result of my studies in Durham. The value of reading history on my future career lies in learning the ability to collect and analyse material, facts, ideas, opinions, and then come to a mind and make a decision as to how to go forward. Secondly, because we studied history chronologically from the Romans to the 19th Century it gave me the ability to reflect over the longer period, not least when things did seem to be going well. I like to see of it as swings of the pendulum as time passes. I have continued through reading, when time has permitted, to keep alive my interest in the Tudor period and the Reformation. This helped when we made a link between Blackburn and the German Protestant Church in Braunschweig. Knowledge of the Confession of Augsburg was essential! For a short period I taught some history lessons at the Tiffin School in Kingston upon Thames when I acted as Chaplain and Head of RE there. In my later ministry as Director of Education for Durham Diocese and as Bishop of Blackburn I had much to do with the governance of HE institutions both in my local areas and nationally.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS TO HISTORY AT DURHAM?

I am perhaps too advanced in years to proffer advice to would be students, other than to say Durham provides a wonderful setting for the study of history, and not simply for its glorious medieval buildings, its collegiate system but also the area's industrial past and contemporary challenges.

COULD YOU OFFER ANY COMMENTS ON RELIGIOUS AND THEOLOGICAL LIFE IN DURHAM?

In answer to this final question it can only be said that things were rather different in the late 1950s. Not un-typically of that period I felt the call to be ordained as a school boy. My rector decided I should apply for Chad's which was then partly a theological college so we were all potential ordinands, though not all were ordained. History was my best subject so that led to my choice of degree course, which I have never regretted. In those days the cathedral was very grand (and not just its architecture). It was made very clear that you entered by the Dean and Chapter's mere goodwill - but things gradually changed for the better. All I can say is that my sense of calling was affirmed by the years in Durham for which I still have a great affection so much so that when the time comes I hope my ashes will be buried in Brancepeth churchyard.