

GRADUATE PROFILE:



JOHN HAMER OBE

HISTORY

WHAT SUBJECTS DID YOU STUDY PRIOR TO ARRIVING IN DURHAM?

A Levels: History, French and English

WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF STUDYING AT DURHAM?

Durham in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a very much smaller university. There were fewer colleges with fewer students; the history department was a fraction of its current size; geographically the university was more contained. This made for an academic and social atmosphere which, insofar as I am able to judge, was more intimate and less pressured than today's. Although not, perhaps, to everybody's liking, I enjoyed this relatively small-scale environment.

On the occasions when I get back to Durham, I'm struck again by what an ideal setting the city, its world heritage site and the surrounding area are in which to study history. The armies of ancient Rome (as memorably portrayed by Eric Birley in the Old Fulling Mill), HS Offler's medieval historians, and Edward Hughes's nineteenth century mine owners and workers all seemed never very far away from North Bailey.

And, my future wife was studying history at the same time!

WHAT WAS THE TOPIC OF YOUR DISSERTATION?

The Lancashire gentry, 1540-1640

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

I left Durham in 1962 and after a short time teaching in Canada and a PGCE at Oxford my working life has largely revolved around history and heritage education. For some 20 years I taught history in a grammar school which turned into a sixth form college where I was Vice-Principal; did a lot of history examining at GCSE, O and A Levels; wrote some textbooks; studied for an MA (Philosophy of Education) at London; and in 1984 joined Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) as a secondary, history and assessment specialist. During my last five years in HMI I was the national lead for history, politics and museum education before, in 1997, becoming the education adviser to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Since retiring from the HLF I have worked, particularly in post-conflict areas such as Cyprus and the former Yugoslavia, as a consultant on history education for the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); chaired an education consultancy; been a trustee of Historic Royal Palaces (HRP); and chaired the Heritage Education Trust (HET) which gives annual awards to heritage sites for the quality of their educational provision.

So, my Durham history degree shaped what I have now done for over half a century, and continues - hopefully for some years to come - to shape many of my current activities.

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

I still recall, with some discomfiture, my first interview as a newly arrived undergraduate with my moral tutor (do they still exist?) He asked what I intended to do whilst at Durham. Anxious to appear enthusiastic I reeled off a list of possibilities. His response clearly indicated that he was not impressed. Your purpose in being here, he said, is primarily to work. And, of course, he was right - although I wasn't good at following his advice. It's easy to forget that maintaining the right balance in student life also needs working at.

Universities afford many ways by which to extend your horizons academically and intellectually. But this requires a willingness on your part to look beyond your comfort zone - in this case your historical comfort zone. Looking at what is available on the Department's website, there is a wealth of course options and study opportunities on offer. Be prepared to grab them.