Public History in Practice

Convenors: Julia Laite and Matt Cook

History is everywhere: from television programmes and newspapers columns; to government consultations; to community development projects. History and historians have had important roles to play in public debates, popular entertainment and tourism, and heritage at the level of both the nation and the neighbourhood. The practice and significance of ‘public history’ has grown significantly in recent years, as academic historians become more aware of audiences beyond the academy, of the role of history in politics, of the need for their academic work to have an ‘impact’ beyond the academy, and of the growing interest in public and media interest in heritage and popular history. This module aims to introduce students to key aspects and issues of the practice of public history. It will provide students with the necessary theoretical and practical skills to undertake critical assessments of public history projects and interventions, as well as to create their own. Its focus on public history in practice will provide students with a wide range of examples of different kinds and methods of public history, from museums and material culture, to public history in the media, to the role of history in policy making.

Sessions will include:

1. What is public history?
2. Public History and the Museum
3. Public History and the Archives
4. Public History and the Media
5. Public History Online
6. Public History and Policy
7. Public History and Material and Built Culture
8. Public History and Oral History
9. Public History and the Community
10. Project presentations and course summary

Introductory Reading:

Hilda Kean and Paul Martin. The Public History Reader (2013)


Jeremy Black, Contesting History: Narratives of Public History, Bloomsbury, 2014

Margaret Macmillan, The Uses and Abuses of History, Profile, 2009