

Real Historians series



"I think history is critical as it provides us with a way to make sense of current affairs. Everything that is currently occurring in the world has been influenced by, and is a direct result of that which preceded it. It is because of this that everyone should have an understanding of history as without this, how do we as people make progress?"

- Kate Wilson



Kate Wilson,
Senior Director of Humanities,
Outwood Grange Academies Trust

What was your education?

I completed my GCSEs at Hemsworth High School and stayed on to complete my A-Levels in 2002, studying Geography, History, English Literature and Psychology. I then went to the University of York where I achieved a 2:1 degree in History. After making the decision that I wanted to pursue a career in teaching, I returned to the University of York to complete my PGCE in History and continued my studies there, completing a Masters in Teaching Studies in 2010.

What is your occupation?

I currently work as the Senior Director of Humanities for Outwood Grange Academies Trust. In this role I have responsibility for the Geography and History provision in all secondary academies in the Trust. The role is challenging but incredibly rewarding, as I am able to work with colleagues in academies to develop and shape ambitious curricular for our students. This means that I spend time in my role researching current practice in History and Geography education. Currently, I am working on developing units of history which look at key events such as the industrial revolution from a disability perspective, in order to further diversify the curriculum we deliver.

What do you love about history?

That it permeates everything we do! Even the smallest details of our lives have been shaped and influenced by lives and events that came before us, and when you think about this, even for a short time, it is mind blowing! It sounds like a stupid statement but history is vast, and isn't a discipline where you will ever be done! I love the fact that the more you read about a topic, individual or event, the more your opinion is shaped and changed. Looking at the same event from different perspectives really brings something to life, and I can't think of any



other discipline which allows you to do this. It is a brilliant discipline if you love to question and challenge ideas, and this is something I absolutely love to do.

Why does history matter in the world?

I think history is critical as it provides us with a way to make sense of current affairs. Everything that is currently occurring in the world has been influenced by, and is a direct result of that which preceded it. It is because of this that everyone should have an understanding of history as without this, how do we as people make progress?

What piece of work are you most proud of and why

I am really proud of the work I have done in the past 12 months on disability history and trying to look at events from the disabled perspective. It isn't an area of history that I had much knowledge of, and during the past 12 months, I have done a lot of reading in this area and worked with some fantastic individuals such as Professor David Turner, to try and build a Scheme of Learning and curriculum which highlights the lives of those with disabilities. This is very much a work in progress, as whilst I have developed a Scheme of Learning and David has very kindly done some CPD events with myself and staff, we have only just scratched the surface of what we can do in the curriculum to cover this field of research.

What do you think is most important for students to learn about in class today?

For me, I think it is becoming ever more important to teach students about historical enquiry and the work of the historian. In a social media and internet age, students need to be given the critical thinking skills utilised by historians, so that they are able to develop informed opinions about events, and can accurately and effectively question and challenge. By showing students the work of a historian and the processes that they follow when developing historical arguments, students will be better equipped to deal with the amount of information that they will be exposed to in the modern world.

Do you think there are any individuals or periods in time that you think should be studied or given more time to?

I think the history of Ireland is an area that potentially should be given more attention than it perhaps receives currently. Certainly when I was at school, this was a topic we learned in some depth as part of GCSE, but given the history of the country, and the fact that it is so relevant to UK relations today, I think we could do more to make students aware of the conflicts and continued tensions that exist, and the origins of these issues.



Do you think it's important to diversify the history curriculum?

Absolutely! When I think back to my history education, I feel like I studied very stereotypical things, from Kings and Queens to working conditions in factories to the Suffragettes. It was only really when I went to university that I saw history from a more diverse perspective and studied histories that broadened the scope of my experience. Part of teaching should be preparing students for living in the world and giving students a sense of place. If we don't provide for our students, opportunities to study diverse groups and look at vastly differing cultures then we would be doing them a disservice. History needs to tell the story of all types and groups of people.

What would you say to students thinking about taking their history studies further?

I'd probably congratulate them on making an excellent choice! The opportunity to learn more history, in greater depth is a privilege, as it is with any subject. However, the opportunities and the career pathways that studying history unlocks are vast. If they wanted advice, I would very much try and persuade them to study units on their course that provide them with a contrast to what they already know. I know when I attended university, my instinct was to select modules that I liked the sound of based on what I had studied at A-Level, and what I had liked and disliked. Thankfully, I rarely got my first choice in modules, and as a result I studied a lot of early modern history which was totally new to me, and I really enjoyed the variation. It also gave me the chance to study industrial Britain again, which wasn't something I liked at A-Level but the module at university changed my mind!

The Berlin Wall along Bermauerstrasse October 1962. (c) Everett Collection





If you could go back in time, where would you take yourself and why?

I don't think anyone could give one answer to this question and be satisfied. I think I would want to go back to the morning of 13 August 1961 Berlin, to wake up to see the construction of barriers to divide the city. It would be fascinating to feel the emotion of waking up to this division, to go through the process in your mind of trying to grasp what this meant and how long this division would be in place. To just talk to the people of Berlin about the event and whether they initially saw this a serious issue, or whether they initially thought the division would simply be temporary. As much as you can read books, watch documentaries, visit museums, talk to the people of Berlin now to get their reflections, I don't think any of these things could fully capture the emotion of that moment.

Which historical site in the UK is your favourite and why?

A tough question given I haven't been to them all! I feel like I need to promote history local to me here, so I would have to say Pontefract Castle. A castle considered to be the strongest inland garrison in England by Oliver Cromwell, this site was the key to the north. When studying the history of the castle, it was involved in some of the most important events in British history, from the English civil war to the imprisonment and death of an English monarch.

To see where studying History could lead you take a look at other Real Historians in the series.