A Fortnight in Oxford 2016
Seminar

The Dying of the Sun: English Politics, Society, and WWI, 1906-1924

Course Description

This course explores English politics and society during the turbulent and often traumatic years of the early twentieth century. It was an era which began in the sunshine of Edwardian glory, yet ended in the dark shadows cast by international war: an era where industrial might struggled in the face of economic distress, and where imperial power crumbled in the face of colonial challenge. Above all an era of national uncertainty, as the once mighty state was left struggling to find, or even understand, its place in the new modern world.

Through the course a number of key themes will be addressed, both domestic and international. These will include the many political challenges faced by society and government alike, from the defiant reforms of New Liberalism, to the franchise struggles of Suffragettes and Labour. Above all we will focus on the one key event which did so much to shake England to its core - the outbreak of World War One. Not only did that conflict bring tremendous challenges in its own right, both political and social, it also exposed the state to wider threats that were previously unthinkable, from the loss of Ireland to the impact of Russian revolution. Finally we will end with a discussion of the state of England in the wake of war, asking how society had been transformed by conflict- and whether it was ready to face the daunting challenges to come.

Topics:

1. Introduction & Overview
2. Rule Britannia? England and the legacy of the Victorian Era
3. The People’s Champion? Lloyd George and the New Liberal Challenge
4. The Fight for the Franchise - the Suffragette Movement and the rise of the Labour Party
5. Dark clouds gathering - Anglo-German rivalry and the Origins of WWI
6. All Quiet on the Home Front? The domestic effects of war
7. Troubles in Ireland - the 1916 Easter Rising
8. ‘Red Scare’ The impact of Russian Revolution
9. ‘Talk Hard, Play Soft’? The End of War & the Peace Talks
10. New Opportunities... and Challenges - the English world in 1924

Background Reading List:


Tutor Biography:

Kate Watson has taught for the Department for Continuing Education, and other university programmes for almost twenty years. She has lectured and published on a wide range of topics, focused on the development of modern British and European History.