

## Introduction

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The inspiration for this special supplement of *eSharp* is the fifth anniversary of the postgraduate society, *Historical Perspectives*, in 2008. In 2003, groups of postgraduates studying history at the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde realised that there was little opportunity, at that time in Scotland, to meet other postgraduates, both to share their research and for friendship. Some of the final-year postgraduates commented that their time as students had been quite lonely as they found it difficult to meet new people with similar interests, despite the existence of a sizeable postgraduate community in Glasgow. The need for an organisation to allow postgraduates to meet and to share their ideas was pressing and recognised simultaneously at the two Glasgow institutions. Motivated to set up a postgraduate society, students from both universities met to discuss what to do and the result was *Historical Perspectives*.

Initial discussions amongst the society's members highlighted that many of us shared the same concerns, most notably on the subject of presenting our research to the academic community. Some of the issues facing those who present academic papers surfaced: am I speaking too quickly; will my ideas be understood; how does a twenty-minute conversation with my bedroom mirror equate to twenty-minutes in front of an audience? The solution was to provide a fortnightly seminar series that offered postgraduates the opportunity to present twenty-minute papers, followed by questions, in a non-threatening and supportive environment. As a society for history postgraduates, we asked that papers had a 'historical perspective', but

otherwise people from any field or discipline were welcome. Each seminar was followed by a trip to a local pub to allow further discussion, to network and to foster friendships. The seminar series was immediately successful and is still going strong. Over the years, we have had research on a wide variety of topics, from interwar feminism to neonatal resuscitation to the maritime industry. Subjects have dated from the medieval to the modern and have demonstrated the diversity of the field, including postgraduates from environmental, medical, economic, social, gender, and science history.

The success of the seminar series inspired the society to broaden our audience and make links from postgraduates throughout Scotland and latterly throughout the whole of the United Kingdom (and beyond). We decided that an annual conference would allow us the opportunity to engage with a broader range of research and to foster links with other universities. We held our first conference, aimed at Scottish postgraduates, in May 2004, with the title 'Conflict and Change'. It involved thirty students from the Universities of Glasgow, Strathclyde, Caledonian, Edinburgh, St. Andrews and Aberdeen. Topics ranged from political conflict in inter-war Glasgow to the 'King of Scourie' and the Clashmore crofters to the development of armour in medieval Scotland. It allowed ample opportunity to socialise over the two-days with tea-breaks and a conference dinner. The event was concluded by a fascinating tour of the 'City of the Dead' by a Glasgow postgraduate, who researches the history of the Glasgow Necropolis.

The conference continued to grow in size and accomplishment. The next year we opened attendance to students from any UK institution and, having received AHRC funding, added a workshop element to offer vital skills. The conference, entitled ‘The Silence of the Sources: From Sources to Discourses’, explored methodologies and the creation of historical narrative. The two workshops built on this theme, discussing the use of visual sources as evidence and the practice of oral history. In the following years, our conferences, ‘Interpreting Relationships of Power’ and ‘Perception, Depiction and Description: Writing History’, were great successes averaging between fifty and seventy people from throughout the United Kingdom and featuring a wide-range of topics. We have also been very fortunate in securing funding from a number of prestigious bodies in support of our initiatives, including the Economic History Society, AHRC, the Roberts Fund, the Economic and the Social History Society of Scotland, as well as the Universities of Dundee, Glasgow and Strathclyde. The feedback to the conference has always been very positive. One speaker noted, ‘it was a great atmosphere for delivering my first paper, formal, yet not terrifying!’, while another commented ‘I thought that the panels were very well balanced and that they were conducted in a friendly, yet demanding environment.’ When asked if we could improve for next year, one delegate replied, ‘no, it was brilliant!’

In 2008, our fifth annual conference ‘Communities and Networks: the Collective, the Individual and History’, will be held at the University of Glasgow on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May. Papers that look at the idea of community, networks and/or individuals from a historical perspective are invited. Topics might include, but are not

limited to, how ideas of community help our understanding of history, how networks or individuals influence the political process, the place of the individual in society, and how networks operate. The conference will feature a roundtable on the topic of communities, networks and individuals and skills-based workshops. We hope that it will build on the success of our previous events.

One of the main benefits of the annual conference was the opportunity to make links with postgraduates from other universities, particularly within Scotland. As a result of these new friendships, the *Historical Perspectives'* committee gained representatives from the Universities of Edinburgh, Stirling and Dundee. This allowed *Historical Perspectives'* seminar series to go on tour in early 2007, holding seminars at the above universities. Their success ensures that this experiment will hopefully be repeated in the future. Postgraduates at Dundee have also been closely involved in the organisation of the conference in the last few years, securing us funding from that institution. The need for postgraduate organisations, such as *Historical Perspectives*, is reflected in the involvement of postgraduates from across Scotland in our organisation and these are links we hope to consolidate in the future.

As we reach our fifth anniversary and with the future looking bright, *Historical Perspectives* wishes to celebrate our past success and commemorate it with help from another Glasgow-based postgraduate organisation, *eSharp*. This special supplement has no particular theme other than to reflect the diversity of scholarship represented at *Historical Perspectives'* events over the last five years. The postgraduates, whose work is published here, have all given

papers at our events and their articles reflect some of what you may have encountered if you have joined us as a speaker or delegate. We hope you enjoy them! If you would like to know more about *Historical Perspectives* or want to get involved, please check out our website: [www.histper.co.uk](http://www.histper.co.uk). Further information on our upcoming conference and seminar series is available there.

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