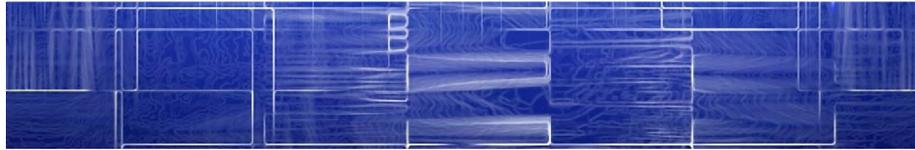


BLOGGING FOR HISTORIANS

A best practice Blog: Academic, Archival and Library History blogging



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1.1 What is a blog?

A blog is an easy way to publish a series of short articles, ordered by date, with the newest entry generally displayed at the top of the page. These 'articles' can be about whatever you want and can (in theory) be any length. Historians can write about their research, comment on the research of others, and/or focus on aspects of their work that might not be recorded in any other form.

The blog is in short a very simple website consisting of a series of webpages organised by date. Of course there are many additional tools and features that can be used to make blogs more complex but for most historians only a few of these need be worried about. It is the content that is by far the most important aspect of a blog.

Blogs require minimal IT knowledge to create and operate. To get started all you need is an e-mail address and some good ideas.

1.2 Who can blog?

Creating and writing blogs is easy. Anyone with a basic understanding of using computers can do it. The software is simple to use and intuitive, there is a lot of flexibility, and the content is entirely under your own control. Simply put, blogs are easy-to-create websites and the perfect place to discuss and talk about the things that are of interest to you.

1.3 Why should I blog?

This is an important question. It is one that you should consider carefully before embarking on a blog. There is no invalid reason to blog; the sky is the limit. However, blogging does involve some element of commitment – you'll be, in essence, signing up to write regular or semi-regular short articles that should hopefully interest someone other than you, and reflect well on your professional image. This requires a level of commitment if you are to be successful. Generally speaking if you are only concerned with promoting your work to others you will probably fail, as the additional work will quickly become tiresome and the content you put out lacklustre and unengaging. General advice suggests that you need to be genuinely engaged in what you are writing. If it's something that you want to write about you will find the process relatively easy.

In essence, blogs allow historians to 'publish' online aspects of their work, potentially in an unfinished form or even as notes or random ramblings, for the purpose of sharing these with others in their field and beyond. There are many reasons why a historian might wish to start up a blog. It might be as an adjunct to their own research, as part of a project, organisation or event that they are involved in, or as a place to promote or advertise the work that they are doing to their peers. There are probably many other reasons why you might wish to blog and it is likely that almost all of these reasons are valid.

Video: How Blogging applies to academic work (round table discussion by Canada's University Affairs).

1.4 What purpose should a blog serve?

There is no one answer to this. A blog can serve many purposes. The best thing to do is to look at what other historians, archivists and librarians are doing in their blogs and go from there. The types of 'History' blog can generally be listed as follows:

1. **Research blog** – talking about personal research.

Case study: [Historyonics](#)

2. **Point of view blog** – discussing various thoughts and experiences as a lecturer in a university, an archivist, a librarian, or a museum curator, for your own interest.

Case study: Perhaps one of the most famous of this type of blog is the classicist Mary Beard's [A Don's Life](#)

3. **Institution shared blog** – This is a blog that promotes a department, archive, library, or museum in some form or another. It is usually hosted by several/all staff members but managed by one or two people.

Case study: [History Matters](#); [British Library](#); [The National Archives blog](#) ; [IHR Digital blog](#)

4. **Scholarly shared blog** – this type of blog is a shared blog on a particular theme or topic shared between a small group of academics.

Case study: [The Russian History blog](#); [Voluntary Action History Society Blog](#)

5. **Events blog** – a blog designed to promote and talk about a particular event such as an upcoming/recent conference.

Case study: [Novel Approaches virtual conference](#); [History and Biography conference](#)

6. **Project blog** – a blog designed to promote and talk about a particular project. Organisations like Jisc generally require that each project they fund has a blog. However, it can be good practice to do this anyway, both as a means to keep others informed about and interested in the project as it progresses and as a means to publish content before the main outputs of the project are completed.

Case study: [ReScript Blog](#); [Digital Harlem](#); [Histore](#)

Researchers responsible for many of the blogs in the case studies listed above have been interviewed by *Blogging for Historians*. Check them out on our [interviews](#) page.

1.5 What are the benefits of blogging about my academic research?

There are many good reasons to blog. Rather than becoming an additional thing to do – a chore – it can be highly liberating in terms of writing about what you are interested in, without having to worry about peer-review. It can, indeed, become a great way to express the things that you do, but which wouldn't normally be published, in an easy to produce format. This is particularly useful to archivists and librarians who wouldn't normally have a formal way of talking to the public about the things that they find interesting or learn whilst working. For historians it can grant them a space to explore ideas, or just make use of written text that wouldn't otherwise be worth publishing. Below are just a few of the benefits of blogging about academic research:

- An informal place for research ideas, notes, and thoughts
- Promote your research to your peers
- Publish ideas and thoughts much faster than is possible through traditional publications
- Be able to comment on current events at the time they are happening and relate them to your own research area
- A method for telling the public what it is you do, and why it is interesting or important
- Get your research noticed beyond the confines of your institution and/or immediate peers

The LSE (London School of Economics and Political Science) Impact Blog talks fairly regularly about blogging practices, and whilst not specifically focused on History is a useful place to see what is being talked about in terms of blogs as good or bad

1.6 What are the risks of blogging about my academic research?

The risks are the same as whenever you talk to another historian about your research and ideas. They might not like what you are doing. They might disagree or even find factual or theoretical inaccuracies. This is a risk historians take whenever they open their mouth – it is also the purpose of having an academic discipline – to discuss, debate, and agree or disagree. Blogs are a form of publication – not peer-reviewed or formalised, but published nonetheless. Anyone can read what you have to say and they can also comment. One thing that blogs have going for them, however, is the fact that these are spaces for unpolished work, random thoughts, and – if you're going to get something wrong – a good place for someone to pick up on inaccuracies. Better on a blog post than in a thesis or journal article! That said there are a few risks that should be considered before blogging about academic research:

- **Stolen ideas** – there are two sides to this. By placing your ideas and evidence online for public and peer consumption you are potentially opening yourself up to someone stealing what you are doing. It's bad practice – it shouldn't happen – but it does every now and then. It is a constant fear for many postgraduates and early career researchers, although it appears in reality to be rarely realised. There is a positive side to this, however. By posting aspects of your research on a blog you have safe-guarded yourself with date-stamped proof. You have more evidence that this is your idea on a blog than you would in general conversation with other historians, or even possibly when presenting papers at lectures and conferences.
- **Copyright and royalty issues** – All historians come up against legal issues from time to time. If you want to talk about an image can you reproduce it publicly online? Is that allowed? The same is true of an article or book – be careful how much you reproduce on your blog. It is, after all, a form of publication and therefore you are in essence making available information and content to a worldwide audience. Before posting anything make sure that you are not breaking any laws.
- **Ethical issues/privacy** – Some historians will never need to worry about ethical issues and privacy laws, but others, especially modern historians, will need to consider these issues in their daily historical activities. This is equally true of the blog. Don't post up anything that could break privacy laws, and consider ethical issues – sometimes it might be better not to post something, if you think that it might be controversial or potentially harmful.
- **Spam** – Most blogs receive spam comments on a regular basis. These are usually adverts for something that has nothing to do with your blog, sometimes produced by people other times by robots. It is always best to monitor comments and, where possible, set the comments settings so that you have to approve comments first.
- **Trolls** – On the internet trolls are people who act offensively without cause and attack other people verbally for no reason other than to satisfy themselves. If

your blog becomes popular enough to receive comments and feedback you will almost certainly come across a troll at some point. Depending on the nature of the comment you might wish to respond but often the best advice is to ignore them and delete the comment. Chances are they are not offering sensible debate so what's the point in getting into a pointless argument?

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