



## Postgraduate/Distance Learning Assignment coversheet & feedback form

THIS SHEET MUST BE THE FIRST PAGE OF THE ASSIGNMENT YOU ARE SUBMITTING (DO NOT SEND AS A SEPARATE FILE)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |         |                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>For completion by the student:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |         |                                         |
| Katharine Ewins                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |         |                                         |
| Module code:<br>HPHI7009                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 1811277 | Educational<br>support needs:<br>Yes/No |
| Module title:<br>History and<br>Historians                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |         |                                         |
| Module tutor: Harriett Webster                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |         |                                         |
| Assignment due date: 8 Jan 2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |         |                                         |
| If your module has multiple submissions please indicate which piece of work this is.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |         |                                         |
| 1 <sup>st</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |         |                                         |
| <p>I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism.<br/>Signed .....</p> <p><b>Email submission: if you are submitting this form via email, please tick this box</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> </p> <p><b>(as a substitute for your signature) to confirm that you agree to the above declaration.</b></p> |         |                                         |

**Assignment Mark**

1<sup>st</sup> Marker's Provisional mark

2<sup>nd</sup> Marker's/Moderator's provisional mark

External Examiner's mark (if relevant)

**Final Mark**

**NB.** All marks are provisional until confirmed by the Final Examination Board.

**For completion by Marker 1 :**

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

**For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:**

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

**External Examiner's comments (if relevant)**

External Examiner's Signature:

Date:

John Taylor, *English Historical Literature in the Fourteenth Century*, (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1987) Pp. xii, 349 ISBN: 9780198200659

John Taylor's publication is recommended by Chris Given-Wilson in his 2004 publication *Chronicles, The Writing of History in Medieval England*, suggesting it complements Antonia Gransden's two volumes, *Historical Writing in England c.550 - c.1305 and c1305 to the Early Sixteenth Century*. They are worthy companions; Gransden covers a wider time span and as she states she has taken a 'pragmatic, not theoretical... survey on the texts themselves correlated with secondary sources,...'. Taylor's interest has been honed down to the fourteenth century and he has a more forensic approach to his analysis than that of Professor Gransden. The title was chosen with great care and thought, reminiscent of the man. Taylor was a Reader of Medieval History at University of Leeds and his obituary in 2009 shows his interest in the emergence of political writings in the fourteenth century. The use of the word literature was important, although not a medieval term it has a current and diverse meaning. Taylor is making a distinction between record keeping and treaties to which he does refer, but his main focus is on the literature. That of the chronicles, the letters, political poems and the ballads that illuminate the fourteenth century in England. His inquiry examines the background of the writers of the chronicles themselves, he looks at the audience the literature is written for and in doing so reviews the problems encountered in the process.

Taylor introduces his rationale and outlines the scope of his study pointing out that the literature he will be discussing has its origins before the 1300s and extends beyond the 1400s particularly in the case of the chronicles. Also the range will include works originating in France, in the French language as well as Latin and English bearing in mind that the story of fourteen century England is implicitly linked to France at this time both in place and language. The fourteenth century is now seen as a transitional period still

producing the chivalric work of Froissart and Jean le Bel but the medieval yoke of feudalism is being challenged and parliament structures are being developed. The Peasant's Revolt and the Schism on the Church as well as the Black Death and royal scandals all bring about new forms of literature.

At first sight it appears that the majority of the work focuses on chronicles with a couple of chapters on Parliamentary descriptions, political poems and letter collections but there are distinctions made between the very different types of chronicles that were produced during this period. Taylor discusses the characteristics of the work carried out at St Albans and Westminster in the south and of the production of the *Anonimale Chronicle* and others at St Mary's in York. Seven of the thirteen chapters are dedicated to the nature and form of the chronicle as well as four of the five appendices supporting Taylor's view of their importance at this time. That is not to say he has not applied the same analysis to chivalrous history writing, political descriptions, poems and ballads, and letters, he has, as well as including a chapter on the lost or missing literature.

Before Taylor attempts to look at the individual texts he discusses the nature of the works and to whom they would be addressed and the wider audience that showed interest in the translated versions which increased their circulation. He makes clear that there is no set format and some may be considered to be more history writing. The question to ask is of its purpose. Taylor draws the conclusion that 'chronicles were valued for their record of events, no less than for the quality of the narrative. They were consulted by governments for their historical evidence'. (p. 58) Chronicles were written overwhelming by ecclesiastics. The Benedictines had the facilities and libraries but the Austin Canons, Cistercian and Mendicants were able to produce of their own texts. There were also the secular clerks who were in a better position to document political events. The content or nuance of the text also depended upon the place and patron involved.

It is difficult to choose any one part of the book to focus on but the best to illustrate his work is in chapter 6 'The French *Brut* and Its continuations'. Originally written in French prose and based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, written shortly after the Norman Conquest and a document of questionable provenance. The *Brut* becomes Taylor writes '...for the majority of its readers the main statement of British history.' '...some two hundred manuscripts in ...French, in English and Latin...' survive and in the continuations that followed the original composition its influence on society and literature cannot be underestimated. The chapter compares and contrasts the earlier chronicler's works on the ancient history of Britain, Wace being one of them in his *Roman de Rou*, but it is the number of continuations that abound are the subject of discussion here. the long continuation of the Prose Brut (1307-1333), relevant to the fourteenth century, is the subject of Appendix I and goes in to even greater detail.

Taylor writes with great knowledge of his texts and it is very clear to the reader that his study of his subject is unbiased but evaluating each of the area of literature he is focused upon meticulously. It is a more comprehensive study of the period than has be done to the date of the publication and opens up more areas to consider for further investigation. This is a book to be recommended for students of Medieval History as in Nancy Partner's assessment of the work as '...it is a scrupulous account of various records assessed for their value as sources for a history definitely outside any text.' The book can be relied on to give an unbiased assessment and point to further ways to explore the nature and reliability of the texts by drawing on Taylor's expertise in his field of fourteenth century.