

Rosemary Horrox Medieval World Essay Competition 2025

Fitzwilliam College is pleased to release the questions for the Medieval World Essay competition. This competition is for students in Year 12 (or equivalent) and is aimed at getting them to discuss any elements of the medieval world that interest them, whether that is, for example, Viking raids, the Icelandic Sagas, Pre-conquest Britain, Medieval English Literature, or Medieval Society and History. The Middle Ages is conceived in geographical and chronological terms as the period between c.400 and c.1500 in Britain, Europe and the wider world.

Questions:

1. Medieval, *adjective*: 'Exhibiting the severity or illiberality ascribed to a former age; cruel, barbarous' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). To what extent is the colloquial modern use of the term 'medieval' historically justified?
2. Medieval government: rule by force or consent?
3. To what extent was migration a catalyst for historical change in the Middle Ages?
4. 'An intellectual and cultural backwater'. Discuss this characterisation of medieval Europe in relation to other regions of the world.
5. To what extent is it valid to use medieval literature as a historical source?
6. What is the best way for medieval historians to address the bias in the sources towards rich, powerful men?

The questions have been set by those teaching Anglo Saxon Norse & Celtic and History at Fitzwilliam, and can be answered from any perspective, for any period within the broad time period 400-1500 A.D., and any geographical area in Britain, Europe or the wider world. See below for more information on how the Medieval world is incorporated into each of these subjects.

Competition Rules

This essay competition is for students in their penultimate year of education - Year 12 (Eng + Wales), S5 (Scotland), Y13 (NI).

Applicants will be required to enter their details online using the form linked on the essay competitions webpage, and to upload one PDF copy of their essay, formatted using the template provided, electronically **or** post a hard copy of the formatted essay to:

Schools Liaison Officer
Fitzwilliam College
Cambridge
CB3 0DG

by **6pm on Friday 28th of February 2025**. If the PDF file is too large to submit to the online form, please email your submission to essaycompetitions@fitz.cam.ac.uk. Further submission information can be found on the essay competition website: <https://www.fitz.cam.ac.uk/event/fitzwilliam-college-competitions>

Your submission must be entirely your own work. When submitting your essay, you will need to provide contact information for one of your teachers and if necessary, we may contact them to verify that your submission is entirely your own work. Students are only permitted to enter one competition and may only submit one entry to their chosen competition. There is a strict limit of five submissions per school for each essay competition. If more than five students from the same school enter the same competition, a teacher from that school will be contacted and asked to select the five entries; failure to do so will result in all submissions from the school to that competition being disqualified.

Essays should be between 2000 and 2500 words long and contain a list of works consulted and cited at the end. This bibliography is excluded from the word limit, but any footnotes are included. Please provide a word count at the end of the essay. If you include any diagrams or tables in the essay, they each count as 100 words. Guidance on referencing is available on the website. Applicants must ensure that pages are numbered and that their full name is on each page.

Alongside your essay you must provide a completed research log. Your research log will detail how you approached and thought about the question and will give the markers an understanding of why you chose to answer the question in the way that you did.

Your essay and research log should be submitted together using the template linked on our website. Any submissions not using the template provided will not be counted in the competition.

Prizes:

The prize fund (per competition) is £300 with a first prize of £200 and highly commended applicants being awarded a £25 book voucher. A prizegiving ceremony will be held in April 2025

How to study the medieval world at Cambridge:**ASNC**

The Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic degree allows you to study the medieval world from the perspective of Northern Europe, and the interactions of these peoples with each other and areas as far flung as Russia, the Mediterranean and Middle East. You can study the Viking raids, the colonisation of Iceland, early medieval Wales, the pre-conquest English kingdoms, the Picts, Ireland and Scandinavia. Students also have the chance to study material culture first-hand, in papers such as palaeography (the study of manuscripts). You can try your hand at learning Old Norse and read and study the Icelandic Sagas in the original. Other language options with exciting literature to study are Insular Latin, Old Irish, Medieval Welsh and Old English, or you can focus more on historical and archaeological study of these areas. Some students focus on languages, others might try out some language in their first year and then opt for historical options for the rest of their degree. The ASNC tripos is designed to be interdisciplinary, so is perfect for those who would like to immerse themselves deeply in all aspects of early medieval culture.

History

The Medieval World essay competition reminds prospective historians that the history of Britain and Europe cannot be separated from the history of Eurasia and the rest of the world. The world in the Middle Ages, as today, was a networked and interconnected one. The History course at Cambridge allows undergraduates to study a wide range of places and themes. From Global History courses between 1400 and 1914 to the social and political history of late medieval Britain, undergraduates interested in the Medieval world can focus on both big and small issues: magic and witchcraft in Medieval Germany; the impact of King Henry II on England's legal reforms; the consequences of the Mongol migration on Europe. The Cambridge history curriculum encompasses all aspects of the Medieval world.

For further information about the competition please contact:

essaycompetitions@fitz.cam.ac.uk.

For questions about the ASNC or History courses, please contact:

admissions@fitz.cam.ac.uk.