

## Ben Wood – History – Clare Cambridge

The first interview was with Dr Elizabeth Foyster and another, I think a post-graduate or something, and based on a text which I was given an hour before the interview. The text was an article about the “Women of WWII” memorial in London, and reported on the fact that the memorial was meant to be for the women who *fought* in WWII, and that the fact that it was broadened out to include all women actually devalues the remembrance achievement of those who fought. They argued that there should have been two separate memorials. The writer also had issues with the representation of the women in the monument as empty garments of clothing. In the hour I wrote *lots* of notes on the text all over it so that I would remember what I had thought about it.

The interview was conducted in her spacious and quite modern office and we sat on sofas and comfy chairs. They first of all asked general questions about the article, what it was about etc. but then the conversation broadened out to really talk about representation of history and also the difference between academic and public history. On this topic they asked me about my views on televisual history dramas, and whether I thought there was such thing as a “National Trust History”, and what it might be. We also talked more fully about the purpose of monuments to history, whether they are useful, whether they just represent a view at the time, and whether their meaning can change over time. They asked me to talk about monuments I had seen in this context, so I talked about visiting Berlin and seeing the holocaust memorial and contrasting that with the Jewish museum. She then went for the killer question, saying that I may want some time to think about it: “How would you go about writing the history of the sense touch?” I talked about the meaning of the question to buy some time and so she gave me some pointers so we talked about etiquette and medical history. The interview finished with a short discussion on a couple of things I had mentioned on my personal statement, but all related to history. For example, I had put about my involvement in interviewing veterans of WWII for the *People’s War* project, so we talked about the utility of this sort of knowledge in history. Just before the end I was asked if I wanted to ask any questions.

My second and last interview was with Dr Andrew Preston and another possible post-graduate. This was based mainly around my essays that I had submitted, which were on the Terror of the French Revolution and Lenin’s role in the Russian Revolution. He asked quite specific and probing questions on each, for example asking why the terror got to the state it had done by 1794, and at what point I thought Louis XVI had reached the point of no return. He then asked me to compare the revolutions, in their causes, processes and results. I was then asked whether I thought that all revolutions came about because of weak leadership, and in my answer I brought in Cuba and Castro’s revolution, which I had done some reading on and had mentioned in my personal statement. He asked me why I thought the French and Russian revolutions went through certain stages, including a middle stage of violence, yet Castro’s revolution didn’t go through this stage. The interview finished a couple of minutes late, so he asked me if there were any quick questions I wanted to ask. I said I would just let the next person in, to which he replied that that was good because people often think that they *have* to ask something, which in his opinion is a bad thing.

Overall the experience was not as daunting as I had first thought, and the interviewers were very nice. My advice would be to make sure you make loads of notes of your ideas during the reading time of the text, and make sure that you re-read and possibly even make notes of your views on books that you have read, especially those on your personal statement. Be relaxed and don’t be afraid to say what you think, there is often not a wrong answer, just that they want to see how you think.