

Interview Report: Emily Parton, History, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

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I arrived at Sidney the night before so I was in place for the morning. My first part of the interview process was a 1hr exam, which happened at 12.00pm. You had to answer 1 of 5 broad historical questions, I chose '*Is the study of History the study of causation or the art of description?*' I didn't think the essay was so bad, I think the best advice is to take your time, don't panic and just attempt to get a vague structure going. Plan it quickly before you dive in, a few bullet points made all the difference for me!

Next I had to go and collect my materials for my first interview 20mins before it began. Mine was almost directly after the exam so there was very little time between the exam and collecting the materials. You can either go and sit in the prep room (which this year was the TV room) or do as I did, go and find the interview room and sit outside. The benefit of this is that you're there promptly and if you get lost you can get help without running late! The only downside is that you can hear the vague mumble of the interview happening before you so that's something to bear in mind. To be honest I didn't find this too off putting as I was so focussed on my passages.

You'll probably get two short passages to discuss at interview, and it's definitely worth having a look at what the people who are interviewing you specialise in as the passages will probably be based on their interests. My two passages were about Charlemagne and liberalism in Europe. The important thing to remember is that they don't expect you to know anything specific about the period, if you do that's fantastic but don't panic if you don't. The best things to look for are parallels with periods you may have studied and often simply looking for the really obvious: Who wrote it? When? Why? All the things you normally do in history lessons and exams.

When I got into the interview room there were two interviewers, I had Prof Rosamund McKitterick and Dr Eugenio Biagini. Both were lovely, it was a very relaxed atmosphere and they were very much looking to find out what you knew, not where the holes in your knowledge are. Certainly at Sidney the impression I got was that interviews were meant to be enjoyable (as far as they can be when you're obviously extremely nervous!) and that it's not a problem if you say you don't know something. The discussion of my passages was very laid back, they asked about why the pieces were written, where they might have been written, and what my immediate thoughts about the pieces were. Overall I really enjoyed the first interview and it boosted my confidence for my second.

My second, and final, interview was held with the two Directors of Study for History at Sidney, Dr Bernhard Fulda and Dr Alice Rio. This interview was more general, and was loosely based around what I had written in my personal statement, submitted written work (in my case my Personal Study for History) and my SAQ (the Cambridge "second UCAS form", it asks for some more specific information based on the Cambridge course and your future aspirations etc) so it's definitely worth having a look back over them before your interview. The first question I was asked was how I thought my first interview went, which was quite a gentle introduction and settled me in nicely. I was then asked about my Personal Study by Dr Fulda which I enjoyed as I was able to discuss and develop ideas that the word count hadn't allowed for. Then I was asked about my SAQ, as I had mentioned some Part 2 papers I was interested in doing. They then questioned me about how far I felt History needed to be relevant, as the papers I was interested in doing were based on Middle Eastern history, and also as I had said in my Personal Statement that: