Suggestions for Introductory Reading on the Middle Ages

This is a list of suggestions for new teachers who are unfamiliar with the Middle Ages. I'm assuming everyone nowadays checks out contents on Amazon and finds cheap copies there and on Abebooks so I haven't gone into too much detail. All the books listed are by respected academics.

1. A starter pack

J. Gillingham and R. A. Griffiths, *Medieval Britain: A Very Short introduction*, OUP, 2000, 192pp

An early title in OUP's Very Short series – a series I find patchy as the length can lead to authors cramming in so much I get lost in the thickets of detail. This, however, works very well – John Gillingham in particular is a fine writer – so this makes an ideal 'First Book on the Middle Ages'!

W.M. Ormrod (ed.), *The Kings and Queens of England*, Tempus, 2001, 288pp

This may sound like one of those cheap 'Kings and Queens' books stacked in remainder shops but it is far from that. The authors are some of the best historians you'll read - the medievalists are David Bates, Stephen Church, Mark Ormrod and A. J. Pollard. There's an essay of around 5 to 8 pages on each reign so this gives you a very clear outline of the period in just over 100 pages (it also covers Saxon and post-medieval monarchs).

The new Penguin Monarchs series is a step up in detail, introducing each reign in a book of about 100 pages.

Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520*, Yale UP, 2002, 403pp

This is a wonderful book on every level packed full of fascinating detail and summarising historiographical debates and developments. Professor Dyer is probably the most reknowned historian of medieval social life and writes with great clarity and sympathy for the people of the period. Newcomers to the period will get a strong sense of the considerable changes in everyday life and the resilience and intelligent thinking of the people of the time.

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D. Crouch, *Medieval Britain c1000-1500*, CUP, 2017, 378pp

This is a brilliant, up to date survey, written for first-year undergraduates and if you have a reasonable sense of the outline of events of the period then it makes an ideal follow-up to the books above. Chapters 1-2 and 11-13 provide a political overview - concentrating as they do on the bigger issues, they don't provide an event by event narrative but that can be gained elsewhere. One strength is the focus on the bigger themes. The central chapters 3-9 provide superb overviews of issues such as Monarchy, The Wealth of Britain, Life Experience etc. and wide-ranging as they are they are packed with interesting details about individual people – stories to pass on in class.

2. A second layer to deepen knowledge

I have a large sheet of paper covered with suggestions – there are so many good books but I'll exercise some restraint! These probably come under the heading of 'textbook'.

David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery, Britain 1066-1284*, Penguin, 2003, 616pp

M.T Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066-1272*, Blackwell, 4th ed, 2014, 364pp

Julia Crick and Elisabeth van Houts (eds.), *A Social History of England 900-1200*, CUP, 2011, 454pp

Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, CUP, 2006, 514pp

Michael Prestwich, *English Politics in the Thirteenth Century*, Macmillan, 1990, 177pp W.M.

Ormrod, *Political Life in England 1300-1450*, Macmillan 1995, 168pp.

A.J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399-1509*, Longman, 2000, 454pp.

A.J. Pollard, *The Wars of the Roses*, Palgrave Macmillan, 3rd ed, 2013, 180pp.

That list is not intended to disparage others – there's other helpful surveys such as the Short Oxford Histories of the British Isles edited by Barbara Harvey (early Middle Ages) and Ralph Griffiths (later Middle Ages), the New Oxford series which replace those huge black tomes I knew as a

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student – by Robert Bartlett, Michael Prestwich, G. L. Harriss and (still to come) John Watts. Blackwell's *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*, 2009, edited by S.H. Rigby, provides nearly 30 essays on the period c1100-1500 in its 665 pages.

3. Some favourites

If Section 2 contains books to 'use' these are books I've thoroughly enjoyed reading – though a couple of those in Section 2 could as well be here, particularly Horrox and Ormrod's Social History. One of the frustrations over the years is how many books I've dipped into and 'used' rather than reading properly - one of the great advantages of age is having the time to read whole books – it's amazingly satisfying. This list of favourites could be much longer – some have been around for quite a while but this is about books I enjoyed reading, not up to dateness! It's also a list skewed towards the 15th century and what suits me may well not suit you - but here goes in no particular order!

Richard Huscroft, *Tales from the Long Twelfth Century: The Rise and Fall of the Angevin Empire*, Yale UP, 2016 – each chapter tells the story of a different individual, at the same time building a bigger picture.

Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III: A Study in Service*, CUP, 1989 – still the best study of Richard III about whom far too much is published. (The best by far of recent 'popular' books on Richard is by David Horspool).

Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c12001520*, CUP, 1989

Barbara Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London*, OUP, 1993

Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England*, OUP, 1986

Maurice Keen, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages 1348-1500*, Penguin, 1990

Robert Gilchrist, *Medieval Life: Archaeology and the Life Course*, Boydell, 2012

Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval Towns and Cities*, Boydell, 2013.

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Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (eds.), *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England*, Manchester UP, 2005.

Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England*, Hambledon, 2004.

W.L Warren, *King John* – originally published in 1961, now in the Yale English Monarchs series. The first 'proper' history book I enjoyed reading – Professor Warren wrote for the public as well as historians. Of the many recent books on King John I'd pick out Stephen Church's 2015 book published by Macmillan.

(While on the Yale English Monarchs series my favourites are John Gillingham on Richard I, Mark Ormrod on Edward III and Chris Given-Wilson on Henry IV).

Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses*, CUP, 1997.

Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists: The History of a Dynasty*, Hambledon, 2007

J.L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445-1503*, OUP 2004.

J.L. Laynesmith, *Cecily Duchess of York*, Bloomsbury, 2017. I enjoyed this so much I rationed my reading so I didn't race through it – it was far too expensive to read quickly, even in Bloomsbury's Black Friday sale!

Colin Richmond's trilogy on the Paston family – though volume 2 makes a more accessible start, if you get to know the Pastons via Helen Castor's *Blood and Roses* first, as is probably essential.

And finally something very different that I got to know many years ago:

J. Gillingham and M. Falkus, *Historical Atlas of Britain*, 1981 though possibly earlier! This covers prehistory to the 20th century but the graphs and charts etc made me realise the value of visual representations of material alongside text – the summaries of many topics are really useful too.

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