



Q&A

Prof. Peter Mandler
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What area of research do you focus on and why?

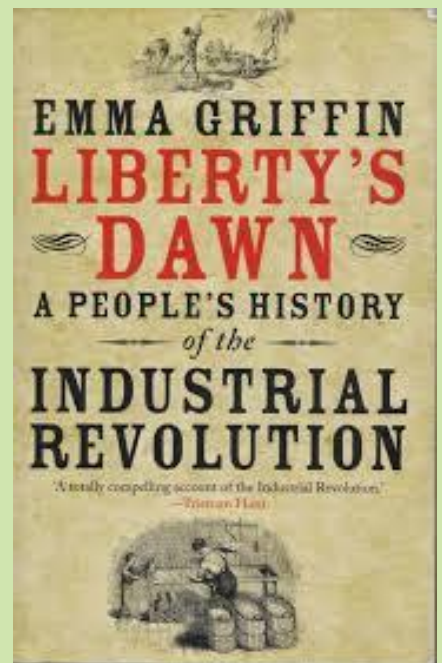
Though I grew up in America, I became a modern British historian because my family had ties to Britain and we came here often on holiday, where what I saw was just familiar enough to be comprehensible to a young person and just alien enough to be tantalizing. Since settling here, and becoming a professional, my area of research has moved crazily around the last 250 years and many different subjects. To some extent this was just personal curiosity, to some extent the shifting currents of the discipline. So I started out a political historian as most in my generation did but went on to explore social change, the history of ideas, gender, culture and (now) education.

What book in your field should everyone read?

Emma Griffin's *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (2013) is vivid, readable, based on an extraordinary collection of working-class autobiographies, and is full of surprises. It's not all dark satanic mills. It now has a sequel, *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy*.

Which book inspired you to study History?

If I'm honest, it wasn't one book but a whole host of children's books that my mother skilfully guided into my hands. I particularly loved R.J. Unstead's *Looking at History* – with its unusually rich illustrations of everyday life as well as glittery kings and queens. (I learned later how many of them were essentially fakes, but it hardly mattered to me as a child.) And then there were the inevitable Ladybird books. Probably the first grown-up history book I read, or at least the first one where I got a glimpse of how deeply analytical history could be, was Henri Pirenne's *Mohammed and Charlemagne*.





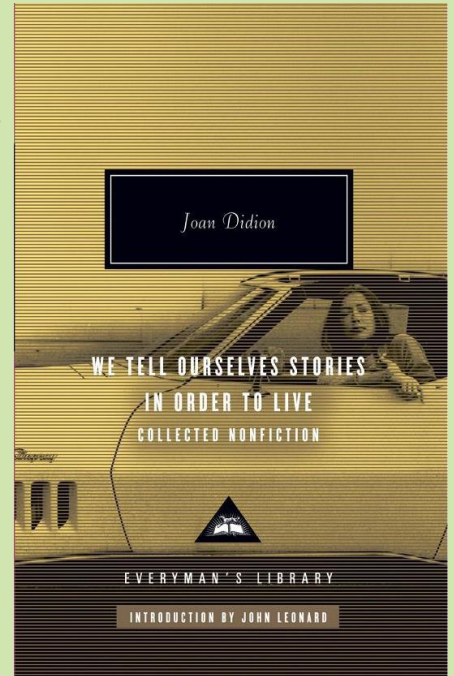
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What book are you currently reading?

I'm reading the collected non-fiction of Joan Didion, the American journalist and critic. I'm sure I read many of these pieces when they first came out in the 1970s and later, and I didn't like them as journalism, but I am not reading them both as an historian and as an older man and appreciating them better on both grounds. They are very evocative of California between 1965 and 1978 (when I was growing up there) and they also shed a lot of bright light on the social changes that we now call (somewhat misleadingly) the 'Sixties'.



Which historian has had the greatest influence on you?

I have never had a good answer to this question. It's partly that I move around so much in my reading as well as my research that while I am very easily influenced I am never influenced by the same person for very long. When I was young I was carried away by the narrative historian Barbara Tuchman but I have never tried to write like her. E.P. Thompson was an inspiration early in my career but I only obliquely tried to write like him. Boyd Hilton showed me how I might say something interesting about political history. Lately I have come to admire (belatedly) Olive Banks who wrote about education, family and feminism. But really I would prefer to put about two dozen names as 'first equal', which is no good to you.

What is the best museum you have ever been to?

Another tricky question. I first went to Portsmouth Historic Dockyard relatively late - with my children - but was bowled over by the very different ways in which the Tudor Mary Rose and the late Georgian H.M.S. Victory were brought to life. Recently I was lucky enough to visit the Valley of the Kings in Egypt and was glad to discover that my ability to be amazed by history hadn't dimmed. But that is to neglect the almost visceral impact of some museums on me when I was young: the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the British Museum, the Hofburg in Vienna, the Soane Museum in London.

We hope to welcome you to CamVC soon!



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