

A Brief Introduction to Business History for the Non-Historian

A workshop organised by the Centre for Business History in Scotland

2 July 2008, 1:30-4:30 pm

Venue: Lilybank House, Room 201 (Seminar Room)

Overview

Many practitioners in the business community as well as scholars in management science, accounting, finance, and other business school subjects are intrigued by stories of development of particular firms, industries, or organisational or technical innovations. After all, such historical accounts can help foster corporate and organisational identity, serve as case studies for developing facility in making sound business decisions, and/or underpin detailed investigation and elaboration of such concepts as path dependence, evolutionary economics, and competing technologies.

Usually written in everyday language and often without an explicit theoretical basis, business history is generally easy to read even for the non-historian. But this ease of understanding can be deceptive, especially if you try to apply an historical approach to your own research or to develop a carefully researched case study. How is business history done? What are its sources, and how are they located and deployed? What are the underlying theoretical bases of the field? How has it developed, and towards which directions is it moving?

This workshop, designed for the non-historian, will address such questions. It cannot, and is not intended, to turn participants into professional business historians in the course of an afternoon. But it will provide a range of information and hands-on experience to allow participants to understand something about the process of historical research and writing and the ways in which it may be of use to them in their work in the business community and/or in their scholarly research.

Format

The general format will involve short introductions to the following topics by Ray Stokes and other business historians in the Centre for Business History in Scotland, interactive discussion of issues associated with the topics, and hands-on analysis of documents and other historical sources. Some very limited reading will be provided to participants ahead of time to help stimulate discussion. The amount of time devoted to each topic will depend to a large degree on the interests of participants, and other topics might also be addressed, depending on interest. There is a possibility of additional workshops at later dates to develop any of these topics further. The topics are:

- What is business history?
- Sources for business history and how to find them
- How to deal with documents: a brief introduction to source criticism
- Writing history as historical research

Registration

The workshop is free and open to all in the business community or to academic non-historians interested in business-related research. It does, though, require pre-registration to ensure adequate provision of materials and to allow for catering (water, juice, tea, coffee, and biscuits will be available throughout the afternoon). Please note your interest with Mrs Christine Leslie, Centre for Business History in Scotland, University of Glasgow, Lilybank House, Bute Gardens, Glasgow G12 8RT, by post, by telephone (0141 330 6890), or by email (C.Leslie@socsci.gla.ac.uk).