

2019

The Past



Contributors' Guidelines

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The Past

Introduction

Our archive is inspired by two publications. The first is *The Smithsonian*, the house magazine of America's leading museum. The second is the annual Christmas double edition of *The Economist*, and particularly the extra features it is packed with. Consider this example from the latter about the history of a common fastener:

'It is a little bit of magic. A gesture up and a seam comes together. A gesture down and a garment comes apart. The zip was one of the later fruits of the Industrial Revolution, and one that was slow to ripen: The internal combustion engine, the turbine, and the light bulb spread across the world much faster. But the zip, too, has become ubiquitous – and in a much more intimate way. Those magic gestures have meaning.'

Note how tight the first three sentences are – not more than eight words each. Note how the author extends the 'fruit' metaphor with the word 'ripen'. Note how 'gesture' is repeated but 'seam' is not. This is a rhetorical technique. Note how the last dozen words hint at what is to come – this is known as the 'hook'.

We strongly recommend that you take a look at these publications for further inspiration. We also suggest you read these guidelines through before you start and again after you finish writing.



Process

Before approaching us

Think of at least one interesting story that you feel might fit in our archive. You will eventually need to write 3,000 to 5,000 words, but that can include digressions. You will also need to find at least 1 picture per 1,000 words, and ideally two. Make sure there is enough material before you propose the story.

Initial inquiry

Send us an email with one or more story ideas. The heading for each story should consist of a unique one-word 'slug' by which it will be known. Don't be too obvious. 'CivilWar', for example, is too vague. Even 'USCivilWar' could refer to several different stories. Below each heading give a brief (one or two sentences) description of the story.

List any possible sidebars (short stories linked to the main story) and their lengths. You may suggest a length for the whole package and a deadline.

Please tell us your highest qualification and which university awarded it.

We will also need your mobile phone number.

Expression of interest

We'll reply, probably within a week, either to accept or reject each idea. Rejections may include a brief explanation of why we're not interested or what you might do to make it work for us. You're welcome to resubmit an idea if you think you can modify the story to meet our requirements.

If we accept one of your pitches, we may suggest who you should talk to, what questions to ask, what angles to cover, and other points we'd like to see included. We'll also confirm a deadline and word count (or suggest new ones).

We'll also include a contract. A signed copy must be returned to us with your First Draft.

Short Outline

Do your initial research. You don't have to read everything at this point but you should identify sources. Draw up a short outline (please see example below) and send it to us.

Revised Short Outline

We will return the Short Outline to you, usually with suggestions. For example, we may move some of the points around or add new angles and digressions, or suggest that a particular point be spun off as a sidebar.

Long Outline

This is for your use. As you research your story, keep a running list of things you want to include and add them as sub-points to your Revised Short Outline. Keep track of your references.

First Draft

See detailed guidance below.

Once you've finished writing, put it aside and go for a walk or lunch etc. When you return, read it over from the beginning. Look for sentences you can shorten. Make sure everything is clear. Confirm facts. Check spellings and grammar.

Your first draft and the signed contract must be delivered to us by the agreed deadline along with images, tweets, a video script, and quiz questions. At this point we will also need a mugshot of you and a brief bio, unless you've written for us before. Think book jacket info rather than academic CV. This will appear on the Our Writers tab.

Images and Tweets

You will need at least one and ideally two pictures per thousand words. That way the reader will almost always have an image, or part of an image, in view. Images must be either copyright free (with a Creative Commons licence or similar) or with permission granted via a Request for Image form (which you can download from the Contributors page). You must supply the picture credit information (ie who owns the image) and may suggest captions. We will be tweeting your pictures and will need you to write a catchy, suggestive tweet for each one. Leave the last ten characters for a link to the story and a discount code.

Quiz questions, YouTube script, and Podcast invitations

Another part of our promotion will be a weekly quiz. We will need you to write five questions, each with four answers, the correct one in bold, from your story. The YouTube script should be a teaser not more than 300 words long. This is for the second phase of our promotion plan so it won't necessarily go out immediately. We will also be organising podcasts and you may be asked for an interview.

Confirmation of copyright transfer

If we accept your draft, you will receive confirmation. At this point copyright will be transferred to The Past Archive Ltd. This means that we have final say on the published version, although we expect to resolve the vast majority of issues in a collegial manner. In the unlikely event that we cannot reach agreement before publication, you may ask for your name to be removed from the piece, though you will continue to receive payments.

First Edit

The editor will send you a response, either written or as a .wav file. This will include both suggestions and questions. Mostly it will cover structural points (pointing out holes in the narrative or asking for paragraphs or sections to be moved, cut, or added). It may have suggestions on how to improve the copy, such as ‘use more examples’ or ‘more description of the characters’ etc.

Second Draft

The amount of work you’ll have to do for this depends on what the editor has asked for. Treat it as a learning experience. If you have disregarded any of the editor’s suggestions, leave a note explaining why. Your deadline for this will typically be one week after the First Edit is returned to you.

Second Edit

The editor and/or sub-editor, in consultation with the chief historian, will do a line-by-line edit of the story, correcting such things as grammar, spelling, and style. They may also check facts. This does not excuse you from these duties. Think of the editor as a fairly inept goalkeeper while you are the star defender. It is better if you catch and fix mistakes before filing your Second Draft.

Generally we will improve your copy, but there will be some instances where we may introduce a factual error or change the tone in a way you don’t like.

Therefore ...

Proofing

When you get the Second Edit of your story, read it carefully. It’s your responsibility to make sure it’s right. Make sure that the words

are spelled correctly and that the sentences carry your meaning. You're welcome to point out errors or suggest improvements. But try not to make the corrections longer than the wording in the Second Edit. We may call you to discuss. Conversely, if you're happy, send us an email and tell us.

You may receive a revised version of the story with agreed corrections. Once you've read through it again, send the editor an email confirming that you're happy with the final draft. If we don't hear from you, we'll eventually go ahead anyway.

Publication

Your story and pictures will be uploaded to the site. The tweets will be added to our rotating mix. Your questions will be included in the weekly quiz. For now, the script will be on hold but once we get that part of the business launched, and catch up with the backlog, you should expect to see your video up within a week or so. We aim to do a podcast each week related to one of the stories that came out that week.

Post-publication

Please monitor the readers' comments on your story and approve them where appropriate. Feel free to chat with your readers. Thank them for extra information they provide and answer questions where you can, but avoid fighting no matter how idiotic or abusive they are. If someone points out a mistake, bring it to our attention right away. We'll then discuss what to do. The choices range from defending what we published, through allowing the criticism to stand in the comments, to correcting the published text. This is an editorial decision. Please don't take it on yourself.

Please share the tweets for your stories. Better still, share the tweets from other writers, who will also be encouraged to share yours. We will give you your own discount code, which means you will be paid a bit extra for readers who buy through you. Also keep an eye open for any news that we can use to promote your story. If the grave of one of your characters gets found, for example, we could tweet about it with a link to your story. Similarly, if a TV company does a documentary related to your subject.

Stay in touch

We'd like to think of you as part of the team. We hope to organise various events for our readers and would love to see you at them.



J. Callery int.
Uncorking Old Sherry

Published March 10th 1865 by H. Hambley & Sons, Great Britain.

...the hon^{ble} Gent; tho' he does not very often address the House, yet when he does, he always thinks proper to pay off all arrears, & to
 a Bottle just uncork'd bursts all at once, into an explosion of Froth & Air;— then, whatever might for a length of time lie
 lurking & cork'd up in his mind, whatever he thinks of himself or hears in conversation, whatever he takes many
 days or weeks to sleep upon, the whole common-placebook of the interval is sure to burst out at once, stored with
 studied Jokes, Sarcasms, arguments, inveclives & every thing else, which his mind or memory are capable of embracing,
 whether they have any relation or not to the Subject under discussion.— See M^r Pitts' Speech on J^{on} Dufour's Bill, March 6th 1865.

First Draft

The first 500-words or so will appear before the paywall. This is your intro, the most important part of the story. Use this space to engage the reader. Keep your sentences as short as possible. Be descriptive. Engage the senses. Paint word pictures. Use rhetoric. Ask questions. Hint at what is to come later.

The intro should include a 'hook'. This is something surprising, unusual, or unexpected. It works best when placed at the start or end of a paragraph. (This is true of sentences and stories as well.)

You may also include a 'nut par'. This is a paragraph that explains what the story is about. It is particularly important if you have started on a tangent. For example, we have a story about the Gigantic Grenadiers regiment of the King of Prussia that starts off with Jonathan Swift's fictional account of Lemuel Gulliver's travels to the land of Brobdingnag, which was written around the same time. The nut ties them together.

Do not tell the readers what you're going to tell them. This is an academic convention that just slows down the story telling. Also, don't summarise what you've just told them. Assume they're intelligent enough to get you the first time.

Do not include a thesis statement and supporting argument. There is no need to delve into historiography. The reader doesn't care. You may draw conclusions at the end. And you may include a brief quote if an academic has said something really interesting and succinct.

Original research is acceptable, but don't put it at the top just because it's new. Put the most interesting thing at the top.

The Outline

Writing a long feature requires structure and it's best to decide on that before you begin. One thousand words is about 10 paragraphs, with an average of four sentences in each. So you're looking at 30 to 50 paragraphs in total. We're going to ask you to submit a short outline, with ten to fifteen points. We also suggest you write a more detailed outline with the sub-points you want to include. You'll find fictitious examples of both below.

Your outline can be arranged in many different ways. Probably the simplest is to start with the intro (the most interesting bit), then step back in time to give some background and then proceed chronologically. The overwhelming consideration is keeping the reader engaged. The story should flow. If a section is boring, try abridging or abandoning it.



Evening

Structure

The editor will be able to help you with structure if you're having problems.

Send in a Short Outline early in the process. The Long Outline is for your own use.

Short Outline example

Slug: FemDuel

- Intro, hook and nut: The last duel between women.
- The combatants: Lady A and Mrs B
- Background: a potted history of female duels, here and abroad.
- Chronological start: First meeting of Lady A and Mrs B
- The cause: introducing Capt D.
- The scandal: juicy details. Quotes from the tabloids.
- Confrontation: Gauntlet thrown.
- The duel in detail
- Police
- Trial and punishment
- The ladies' graves

Long Outline example

Slug: FemDuel

- Intro: The scene of the duel. Footprints in the snow, bitter cold, the meadow near the old stone bridge, two bundled-up figures walking away from each other. 'Turn,' shouts an official, 'Fire'. Pistols raised, the two women turn to face each other, with terror in their hearts.

(Note that the outcome of the shooting is left till later.)

Describe a bit more about the scene if you have more details.

- Nut: Last petticoat duel ever fought in Britain. Female dueling a rarity, but not unknown. Society scandalised etc.

- Describe Lady A. This should be a pen portrait or character sketch. Birth, education, marriage, status, areas of accomplishment, temperament, appearance, etc. Quote a contemporary description if one can be found or tell us about a portrait.

If a reasonably close relative is notable, mention them. Parents, husband, children.

- Describe Mrs B. As for Lady A.
- Background on women dueling. First account. Other notable female duels. Deaths. Woundings. Causes. Quote an expert on petticoat duels. Don't forget other countries.
- Set the stage for A and B's first encounter. A party at a country estate hosted by Countess C.
- Who was the Countess? Some prominent guests? What was in the news that day that they might have discussed? Details of food or entertainments if available.
- What do we know about the encounter? Did they get on? Are they mentioned by others in correspondence or diaries?

Good place to quote an academic who has researched this case.

- Other connections between their families. Points where their paths may have crossed. etc.
- Do their husbands get on?
- The cause of the feud. Introducing Capt D. Describe as with Lady A and Mrs B. Regiment, battle honours, medals. Mentioned in dispatches. Reputation.

Connect him to the two duelists. Riding in Hyde Park with Lady A. Cosy tête-à-têtes with Mrs B.

- Mounting tension? The scandal revealed? How long can this go on?
- The confrontation. Words exchanged. Apologies refused. Satisfaction demanded.
- Which brings us to the night before that day by the bridge. How and where did they spend it? Who were the Seconds. Where was Capt D? The husbands? Tell us about the pistols. Make, appearance, where they are now?
- A more detailed description of the duel. How did they arrive? Who said what? Who fired first? Who was hit first, and where? Was there a doctor at the scene? Tragic last words?
- The news breaks. Quote at least one paper. Public outrage. Protests.
- Police investigate. Who's in charge? What does he discover?

- Accusations and recriminations.
- Charges laid. Public division over what should happen.
- The trial. Set the stage. Judge. Courtroom.
- The prosecution opens. Quote court documents.
- Witnesses give testimony. (If you've used some of this in your description of the scene, don't repeat it.) If there's any dramatic or unexpected testimony, now's the time to mention it.
- The summation. Prosecution followed by the defence.
- The judge's comments. Statement by the defendant before she's taken to Tyburn.
- Questions in Parliament. Who's pushing this issue. What drives them?
- The consequences and fallout. Husbands, children, Capt D?
- A visit to the ladies' graves. (This could be higher up if you can weave it into the narrative.)



Style

Here are a few of the things we're looking for:

- Accuracy. Despite popular belief, journalism is not an excuse for sloppiness.
- The reader comes first. You're not here to impress a professor, coddle your sources, or show off your brilliance. The readers are your bosses. Make them happy.
- Use the active voice. For example: 'Jane threw the ball' as opposed to the passive, 'The ball was thrown by Jane'.
- Keep sentences short. If they stray over 30 words consider breaking them into two shorter sentences. Change the lengths of your sentences so they're not all the same. Similarly for paragraphs.
- Use concrete images rather than abstracts. Imagine the reader is sitting in front of you saying, 'Could you give me an example, please'.
- Paragraphs are a design unit. They serve to break up the page into manageable chunks for the reader. Most should be under 100 words. Some should be much shorter. A few may be a bit longer.
- Don't be too technical. Nothing turns readers off more than jargon. Assume that your readers have the language skills of non-history, A-level students. That's high by journalistic standards, about the same level as *The Economist*.
- Be sure to edit out any words that add nothing to the meaning of your sentence or ...
- Cut unnecessary words.
- Remember this formula: Power = meaning/words. If you can say the same thing with fewer words, it will be punchier.
- Avoid constructions that start with 'There was' or similar. For example: 'There was no one at the door' carries the same information as 'No one was at the door'. Any sentence can be written in the form 'There was ...' therefore none should be. (There are exceptions, such as the first line of the zipper story above.
- Use synonyms, if possible, for words you use a lot. However, don't try to be clever with 'he said' or 'she said'. Speech tags are invisible unless you draw attention to them.

- Do not repeat adjectives. If you describe someone as a ‘big knight’, don’t use that as a synonym for his name. Nor should you tell us later that he was a ‘huge knight’. The readers got it the first time.
- Use quotations like spices to add a touch of zing to your prose, not as a cut-and-paste shortcut to actually writing.
- Things that require attribution:
 - i) Direct quotes by a historian etc, to you. (in “ ”)
 - ii) Direct quotes from history (in “ ”)
 - iii) Reported speech (paraphrased from (i) or (ii) no “ ”)
 - iv) Original ideas put forward by a specific author (ie not generally accepted knowledge)
 - v) Major works on which you rely heavily
 - vi) Contentious opinions that you wish to distance yourself from.
- If you’re dealing with facts, even obscure ones, that are generally accepted, don’t feel you have to attribute them.
- The style for attribution in text can be one of the following:
 - ,’ said Columbia University’s Stephen Smith
 - ,’ according to Stephen Smith in his book *Title*
 - and later:
 - , Professor Smith said.
- We will not be using footnotes, but will need your sources for a bibliography at the end of the story.
- Try to keep quotes short unless they tell it better than you could.
- Give one absolute date and link it to a better known person or event. For example: ‘The Satsuma War was fought in 1863, the year of the Battle of Gettysburg’. After that, use: ‘two years later’ or ‘the next summer’ etc. The absolute date should be linked to a person or event. Never, ever start a sentence with a date. If the story jumps across a long period of time you may use a second or even a third anchor date but try not to.
- Read the first few words of your paragraphs. If you find a consecutive pair that start the same way, such as ‘The King was’, change one of them by restructuring the sentence, not just by using a synonym. ‘The monarch was’ is still a repetition.

- Good verbs are more important than adjectives.
- Short, Anglo-Saxon words are better than long, Latinate words.
- Give each character's full name (if known) on first reference, then use the surname only (or title and first name if that's appropriate), unless you have more than one character by that surname.
- When dealing with matters that are the subject of scholarly dispute you have several choices:
 - i) Give the consensus view, tagged with a phrase like 'most historians think that'. If the minority view is interesting in its own right, it can be given with another tag along the lines of 'but others think that'.
 - ii) If it's merely a boring variation on the consensus view, ignore it.
 - iii) If there's a genuine fight going on, don't shy away from it. But do not feel you have to cover every nuance. If two camps disagree on a dozen points, just mention the top one or two.
- Include details. Details are what make stories come alive. Do you know what was painted on that ship's sails? Do you know what her dress looked like? Did he have false teeth? What were they made of?
- If you don't know the details, but can extrapolate from general information about the time and place, it is acceptable to do so as long as you make clear that you're doing it. For example: 'We don't know what he was wearing that day, but the typical attire for a man of his station included a headdress made with peacock feathers.' Later you can return to recorded fact with something like 'What we do know is...'
- Where possible, spin-off interesting stories that can be told separately into 'side-bars'. These should be short, perhaps a few hundred words long, but should come with an illustration.
- Keep asking yourself, Is the reader getting bored yet?
- Use standard British spellings.
- Our style is to be a bit casual. It is acceptable to use contractions, for instance, but avoid (or explain) slang or obscure words.
- When you introduce a new character, paint a pen portrait of them. This could include interesting biographical information (but not their birthday, unless it corresponds with some other relevant interesting

event), a description of how they looked or behaved, possibly borrowed from (and attributed to) a contemporary observer. Did they have scars? A limp? Tattoos? A squint or tic? A heavy accent? Did they smoke a pipe? Did they gamble or chase women?

- When describing action scenes, such as a battle, keep your sentences short and to the point.
- If it helps, you may include present day references or comparisons.
- Try to avoid words that end with 'ing'.
- If your story feels as if it is a list of 'points' that could be presented on PowerPoint, then it lacks flow. Read some of the recommended sources and see how they do it, then try again.

Some of these rules can be bent, or even broken, but be prepared to defend your position to the editor.

These guidelines will be posted on our website where we can update them periodically. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask.



Bibliography

- As we are writing for a non-academic audience, please do not include footnotes or endnotes in your story.
- However, we do expect a bibliography. This should be a comprehensive list of all the sources used in the writing of your story.
- We would prefer you to separate this list out into four sections.
 - i) Interviews (where applicable): You may wish to interview selected experts for your story. These should be listed in a separate section of your bibliography. Please record the name and title of the person you spoke to and the institution they belong to.
 - ii) Primary Sources (where applicable): We do not expect you to always have primary sources but where you have used them please list them separately
 - iii) Secondary Sources: Any printed book or article should be listed separately.
 - iv) Web Resources: Please include a list of the url addresses of websites used, and where possible the date they were accessed.
- We do not expect a specific style of bibliography as long as it is consistent.
- If you require a style, the Chicago Style is recommended.
- We do not expect you to include exhaustive detail about the sources you are using so long as they are easily identifiable. For instance, the date of publication is sufficient (without needing place of publication or publishing house)
- An example of an appropriate bibliographical reference: Knights, Mark, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain* (2006).
- In the end we will allow you to use your discretion and to include as much or as little information as you feel appropriate.