

## **Using historical archives, legal and regional history in the final year law dissertation: The Past Transforms the Future**

In their final year, law students must complete a 15,000-word dissertation. Each student develops a research question to explore, supervised by a member of staff. The module is specifically designed to rely upon secondary sources: statutes, case law and academic commentary. In this paper I discuss an alternative to the standard dissertation, which fulfils the module learning outcomes whilst offering an exciting opportunity for new research, and the potential to develop skills for employability.

The legal history, archival, research project option, developed with Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (**TWAM**), uses sources in the archives as a spark for the dissertation. The dissertation centres primary historical material for discussion in a legal, local, and historical context, and includes a short piece of reflection.

The module has run for 4 years (including during the challenge of covid lock down). Topics chosen have included nineteenth century mining legislation; policing of riots; infanticide; poverty and the workhouse; and convict transportation.

Although it is not essential for project students to have studied legal history in year 3, the legal history module prepares the ground. Legal history students learn to use archival resources and digitised primary materials. The projects can build on this study. There is some group supervision in addition to the individual supervision that is standard for final year dissertations.

My paper outlines the approach, the design of the module, the development of the idea, the benefits of the project to staff and students, feedback from those involved and the theoretical context.