Private men and public intellectuals: UK historians and changing perceptions of interwar Germany


Abstract

UK historians’ work in the interwar era demonstrates their particular significance in shaping the UK’s relationship with Germany. UK interwar historians served in roles that touched upon high politics, and in occupations that gave them unique access to the public space. The thesis explores why UK historians studied Germany, and with what impact on public perceptions. It also assesses how their engagement with Germany contributed to their reputations as public intellectuals. The thesis argues that UK interwar historians were an influential collection of individuals, whose writings on Germany helped consolidate a shifting public space. It examines UK historians’ capacity to analyse, prescribe and advocate.

UK historians emerged in the interwar period as an identifiable body of public intellectuals. Several factors fostered the development of this collective. These factors were strongly influenced by analyses that reflected UK historians’ understandings of interwar Germany, and included perceptions of Germanness, Germany’s democracy, Germany’s power and the Nazi Party. Ultimately, the thesis examines UK interwar historians’ commitment to analysing Germany, albeit with diverse opinions. Historians’ evolution as public intellectuals was key in this phenomenon.