

## **Case Study: Exploring the Trial of Charles I**

**Archives:** Canterbury Cathedral Archives, The National Archives

**HEI:** Canterbury Christ Church University

**Dates:** January 2014

**Sources:** Dr Sara Wolfson (Canterbury Christ Church University); Dr Simon Healy, History of Parliament

**Keywords:** teaching, pedagogy, role-play

History has conventionally been taught via lectures and seminars at lower undergraduate levels, with third year special subjects often adopting a more workshop-based approach to dealing with primary sources in particular. At Canterbury Christ Church University, historians have experimented with the use of workshops rather than traditional lectures across all levels of undergraduate study. In this workshop about the trial of Charles, I used archival material from The National Archives as a way to engage students directly with primary materials.

Students on a first-year historiographical module, Snapshots in Time, recreated Charles I's trial of January 1649 with the help of an external expert, Dr Simon Healy, from History of Parliament. The core reading for the task was divided up amongst the students, who then separated into prosecution and defence teams. Role-play, historical investigation, teamwork, and various interactive approaches were used in order to encourage students to engage creatively with the material. For example, Students listened to an audio extract from a report of the trial of Charles I on The National Archives [website](#) (Catalogue ref: TNA SP 16/517). One key aim of the module was to highlight the fact that historical debates around the trial of Charles I are still very much alive today.

On reflecting on the experience of participating in the workshops, one first year student emphasised the holistic benefits of this form of teaching: 'This approach has inspired me, and certainly others I have noticed, with confidence to articulate and develop my thinking on a given topic'.

Working directly with archival material in an interactive manner helped to frame the individual student experience in order to increase engagement at the same time as maintaining academic rigour that will prepare students for historical research at higher levels.



Image credit: Sara Wolfson

Through role play and analysis, students explore the original sources relating to the trial of King Charles I.

**Resources:**

Higher Education Academy congratulates Dr Sara Wolfson, the Times Higher Education's 'Most Innovative Teacher of the Year' in 2016:

<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/about/news/hea-congratulates-dr-sara-wolfson-times-higher-education-s-'most-innovative-teacher-year'>

Sara Wolfson and her students talk about her recent win at the Times Higher Education awards: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=IS98TCcc7ak>

**References:**

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