

## Timely Histories of African & Caribbean People in Britain, Wartime Resistance, the Plague and Globalisation Among Shortlist for 2023 Wolfson History Prize

- **Six Books Shortlisted for £50k Wolfson History Prize Revealed**
  - **Mary Beard and Sudhir Hazareesingh Join Judging Panel**
    - **Winner to be Announced on 13 November**

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The six books shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize, the UK's most prestigious history writing prize, are announced today, celebrating the best historical non-fiction books from the past year.



Bringing new stories from history to light, and challenging readers to rethink accepted historical narratives, the topical Wolfson History Prize shortlist explores themes that are pertinent to current world events.

Spanning centuries and continents, political and personal histories, the Wolfson History Prize 2023 shortlist takes readers from the plague-ridden streets of fourteenth-century Europe to the densely populated alleyways of Dickensian London, travels to the court of eighteenth-century China and the underground resistance movements of Nazi-occupied Europe, and journeys through the history of African and Caribbean people in Britain, via the history of the book itself.

**Celebrating books that combine excellent research with readability, the books shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize 2023 are:**

- ***African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History* by Hakim Adi (Allen Lane)**
- ***The World the Plague Made: The Black Death and the Rise of Europe* by James Belich (Princeton University Press)**
- ***The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* by Henrietta Harrison (Princeton University Press)**
- ***Resistance: The Underground War in Europe 1939-1945* by Halik Kochanski (Allen Lane)**
- ***Vagabonds: Life on the Streets of Nineteenth Century London* by Oskar Jensen (Duckworth Books)**
- ***Portable Magic: A History of Books and their Readers* by Emma Smith (Allen Lane)**

A major new history that transforms understandings of Britain's past, ***African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History* by Hakim Adi** charts a course through British history with an unobscured view of the actions of African and Caribbean people. Starting with the Libyan legionaries who patrolled Hadrian's Wall and the 'Black Tudors' who served in the land's most eminent households, the book spans the long history of African and Caribbean people in Britain, while highlighting their many vital contributions to our collective achievements like universal suffrage, victory over fascism and the NHS.

An exciting history of books and their power over us, ***Portable Magic: A History of Books and their Readers* by Emma Smith** explores the unexpected and unseen consequences of our love affair with books. *Portable Magic* dismantles the myth that print began with Gutenberg, reveals how our reading habits have been shaped by American soldiers, and proposes a new definition of a 'classic'. It illuminates the ways in which our relationship with books is more reciprocal - and more turbulent - than we tend to imagine.

***Resistance: The Underground War in Europe, 1939-45* by Halik Kochanski** is a sweeping, original history of occupation and resistance in war-torn Europe. It is the first English-language history of resistance to study the whole of Europe, from the Balkans to Norway, uncovering powerful, human stories of resisters who have often been overlooked, such as Jewish and female fighters. *Resistance* delves into the diverse strategies employed by ordinary people as they challenged occupying forces, revealing their remarkable achievements and the formidable challenges they faced amid oppression.

A *History Today* Book of the Year, ***The Perils of Interpreting* by Henrietta Harrison** is an impressive new history of China's relations with the West, told through the lives of two language interpreters in the eighteenth century. Uncovering the lives of two overlooked figures at the Qing court, *The Perils of Interpreting* offers an empathic argument for cross-cultural understanding in a connected world.

A *Spectator* and *Prospect* Book of the Year, ***The World the Plague Made: The Black Death and the Rise of Europe* by James Belich** sheds new light on one of history's greatest paradoxes: that the human tragedy of the plague brought about cultural and economic renewal on a scale never before witnessed. *The World the Plague Made* is a panoramic history of the global expansion of Europe, and how this was intertwined with other peoples throughout the world.

A compelling, moving and unexpected portrait of London's poor from BBC New Generation Thinker **Oskar Jensen, *Vagabonds: Life on the Streets of Nineteenth-century London*** brings the Dickensian city vividly to life. From beggars and thieves to musicians and missionaries, porters and hawkers to sex workers and street criers, Jensen unites original research, first-hand accounts and testimonies to tell their stories in their own words.

Celebrated historians **Mary Beard** and **Sudhir Hazareesingh** joined the judging panel this year, working alongside fellow judges Richard Evans, Carole Hillenbrand, Diarmaid MacCulloch, and chair David Cannadine to narrow down the very best history writing in the UK from the past year to a shortlist of six books, from which one winner will be selected.

**David Cannadine, Chair of the Wolfson History Prize judges said:** *'This year's shortlist demonstrates the enduring power of history writing to shed light on the past, and also to bring new perspectives, empathy and nuance to our understanding of the present. The six titles cover a wide range of themes, from inequality to war and occupation and the effect of previous pandemics. Each book is commended because it is beautifully crafted, grounded in meticulous research and full of fascinating stories of people and places.'*

**Paul Ramsbottom, Chief Executive of the Wolfson Foundation** said: *'The Wolfson Foundation supports education and research across a wide range of sectors. For over 50 years the Wolfson History Prize has been part of this mission, championing books that are carefully researched and well written.'*

*'A common theme in this year's shortlist is an exploration of how people and societies in the past have confronted fundamental, global issues: books with a distinct resonance for today's challenges and preoccupations. We are delighted to share the 2023 shortlist, and celebrate books that bring new evidence, subjects and opinions alive for a wide audience.'*

Shining a light on books that combine excellence in research with readability for a general audience, the Wolfson History Prize is now in its 51st year. The most valuable history writing prize in the UK, awarding a total of £75,000, the winner receives £50,000, and each of the five shortlisted authors receives £5,000.

The overall winner of the Wolfson History Prize 2023 will be revealed at a ceremony in central London on **Monday 13 November 2023**.

#### **Judges' comments on the 2023 shortlist**

- ***African and Caribbean People in Britain: A History* by Hakim Adi**  
*'A comprehensive history of African and Caribbean people in Britain and the vital role they played in the struggle for equality. An epic narrative and a timely book.'*
- ***The World the Plague Made: The Black Death and the Rise of Europe* by James Belich**  
*'Ambitious and meticulously researched. This book has an extraordinary range and argues that the plague created the conditions that led to modern Europe. A pertinent read in the wake of a more recent pandemic.'*
- ***The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* by Henrietta Harrison**  
*'Global history impressively combined with engaging biography. This is the fascinating story of how the British Empire and Qing China saw each other in the 18th century, told through the lives of two interpreters.'*
- ***Vagabonds: Life on the Streets of Nineteenth Century London* by Oskar Jensen**  
*'Evocative, personal and moving. This book uses first-hand accounts to evoke the streets of 19th-century London. Richly woven with the voices of the city's poorest and most resilient residents.'*
- ***Resistance: The Underground War in Europe 1939-1945* by Halik Kochanski**  
*'Unveiling lesser-known acts of defiance, this is a remarkable history of pan-European resistance to the Nazis. Through diverse sources and captivating storytelling, it presents a compelling exploration of this critical era.'*
- ***Portable Magic: A History of Books and their Readers* by Emma Smith**  
*'Anyone who loves books will enjoy this one. Witty and wise, it delves into the magic of books and the stories across time of the people who read and write them.'*

Over the past 51 years, the annual Wolfson History Prize has championed the finest history writing by authors and historians including Simon Schama, William Dalrymple, Amanda Vickery and Clare Jackson. Previous winners of the Wolfson History Prize include Antony Beevor for *Stalingrad*, Antonia

Fraser for *The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England* and Mary Fulbrook for *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice*. The 2022 prize was won by Clare Jackson for *Devil-Land: England Under Siege, 1588-1688*.

The Wolfson History Prize is run and awarded by the Wolfson Foundation, an independent charity with a focus on research and education.

- Ends -

For more information on the Wolfson History Prize, please contact:

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### Notes to Editors

#### About the Shortlisted Authors

**Hakim Adi** was the first historian of African heritage to become a professor of history in Britain when he was appointed Professor of the History of Africa and the African Diaspora at the University of Chichester, a position which he held from 2015 – 23. In 2018 he launched the world's first online MRes in the History of Africa and the African Diaspora which trained many students and produced seven students who are currently engaged in PhD research.

**James Belich** is the Beit Professor of Imperial and Commonwealth History at the University of Oxford and cofounder of the Oxford Centre for Global History. His books include *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939*.

**Henrietta Harrison** is Professor of modern Chinese studies at the University of Oxford and the Stanley Ho Tutorial Fellow in Chinese History at Pembroke College. Her books include *The Man Awakened from Dreams* and *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. She lives in Oxford, England.

**Oskar Jensen** is a Fellow of Newcastle University, a New Generation Thinker and a former Leverhulme Early Career Fellow. He has written for the *New Statesman*, and frequently appears on BBC Radio 3 and 4. *Vagabonds* is his first trade non-fiction book.

**Halik Kochanski** is a British historian. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and member of the British Commission for Military History, she has taught history at several universities and is the author of *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War*.

**Emma Smith** was born and brought up in Leeds, went unexpectedly to university in Oxford, and never really left. She is now Professor of Shakespeare Studies at Hertford College, Oxford, the author of *Portable Magic* and the *Sunday Times* bestseller *This is Shakespeare*. She enjoys silent films, birdwatching, and fast cars.

#### About the Wolfson History Prize Judges

**Mary Beard** is one of Britain's best-known Classicists – Cambridge Professor and Fellow of Newnham College. She has written numerous books including the Wolfson History Prize-winning *Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town*, the best-selling *SPQR A History of Ancient Rome*, the thought-provoking

*Women & Power, Twelve Caesars – Images of Power from the Ancient World to the Modern and Emperor of Rome: Ruling the Ancient Roman World*, published in September 2023.

Made an OBE in 2013 for services to Classical scholarship, Mary was further made a Dame in 2018. Other accolades and roles include Royal Academy Professor of Ancient Literature, Fellow of the British Academy, recipient of the J.Paul Getty Medal and Trustee of the British Museum.

**David Cannadine** (Chair of the judges) is an historian who has written on modern Britain, the United States, the British Empire and the wider world, and is a trustee of the Wolfson Foundation. He is Dodge Professor of History, Emeritus at Princeton University, a Visiting Professor of History at the University of Oxford, the editor of the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, and served as President of the British Academy from 2017 to 2021. He was Director and Professor of History at the Institute of Historical Research from 1998 to 2003. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the Society of Antiquaries, and the Royal Historical Society. In 2009 he was awarded a knighthood for services to scholarship. His publications include *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800-1906* (2017), *Margaret Thatcher: A Life And Legacy* (2017), *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond our Differences* (2012), *Mellon: An American Life* (2006), *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (2001), *Class in Britain* (1998), and *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1990).

**Richard Evans** is Regius Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of numerous books on modern German and European History, including *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years 1830-1910*, which won the Wolfson History Prize in 1989. His recent books include *The Pursuit of Power: Europe 1815-1914*, a volume in the Penguin History of Europe; *Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History*, published in February 2019 by Little, Brown; and, most recently, *The Hitler Conspiracies: The Third Reich and the Paranoid Imagination*, published by Penguin in October 2020. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and was knighted in 2012 for services to scholarship. His next book, *Hitler's People*, is published by Penguin in March 2024.

**Sudhir Hazareesingh** was born in Mauritius. He has been a Fellow and Tutor in Politics at Balliol College, Oxford, since 1990. He has written extensively about French intellectual and cultural history; among his books are *The Legend of Napoleon*, *In the Shadow of the General and How the French Think*. He won the Prix du Mémorial d' Ajaccio and the Prix de la Fondation Napoléon for the first of these, a Prix d'Histoire du Sénat for the second, and the Grand Prix du Livre d'Idées for the third. He won the Wolfson History Prize in 2021 for *Black Spartacus: The Epic life of Toussaint Louverture*.

**Carole Hillenbrand** has been Professor Emerita of Islamic History at the University of Edinburgh since 2008 and Professorial Fellow (Islamic History), at the University of St Andrews since 2013. She studied Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge, Arabic and Turkish at the University of Oxford, wrote a PhD on Islamic history at the University of Edinburgh and has held Visiting Fellowships in America and Holland. She was elected an Honorary Life Fellow at Somerville College, Oxford in 2010 and a Corresponding Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America in 2012. She was awarded the King Faisal International Prize in Islamic Studies in 2005 and the British Academy/ Nayef Al Rodhan Prize for Transcultural Understanding in 2016. She is a Fellow of the British Academy, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the Royal Historical Society. In 2009 she was awarded an OBE for services to Higher Education and in 2018 was awarded a CBE for services to the understanding of Islamic history.

**Diarmaid MacCulloch** is a Fellow of Saint Cross College and of Campion Hall and Professor Emeritus of the History of the Church at the University of Oxford. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, the Royal Historical Society and of the Society of Antiquaries of London; he co-edited the Journal of Ecclesiastical History for twenty years. He was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1987 and in 2012 was knighted for services to scholarship. His chosen research field has been Tudor England (including a biography of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and a study of the Reformation under Edward VI); he has also written on the wider history of the European Reformation and on world Christianity

generally. His *History of Christianity: the first three thousand years* (winner of the 2010 Hessel-Tiltman Prize and the 2010 Cundill History Prize, Montreal) was followed by the BBC series *A History of Christianity* (given the Radio Times Readers' Award, May 2010). He won the Wolfson History Prize in 2004 for *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*.

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