KAREN FOLEY: *The Arts Hub* was an online interactive event, and you're about to watch a session from that. But I wanted to explain to you how it all worked. You're about to see the video stream of the studio. But our audience participated online through chat and through interactive widgets. And those ideas were fed through into the studio from the social media desk. Of course because you're watching it on catch up, you won't be able to do those activities, but I do hope that you enjoy the discussion that follows.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hi, and welcome back to the Arts Hub. Right, we have been having a lot of laughs about our caption competition in the boat. We have some crackers here. So I'm going to read them out, OK? We've been doing these caption competitions for the chance to win a 10 pound voucher.

Now there are two here that we think are absolutely brilliant. Well actually they're all absolutely brilliant, but two had us in absolute hysterics. So, these are the captions that we've been given in addition to the ones that we've already heard today. OK, so Ben says, "Anyone else's feed froze?" Now we did find that hilarious because it has happened today. And it might have if you're watching *The Student Hub Live,* in which case you just press refresh.

Sharon has a great one with, "Where did the trees go?" Philip, we like this, "Come in and join my cloud computing." I see what you did there. I think the English lot be very impressed. And Amanda says, "And breathe. This is what it feels like to finish a module and get through to the other side."

So thank you very, very much for those. Ben and Amanda, we have selected you as joint winners, which means that you are going to be sent on Monday a 10 pound Amazon voucher. And we'd like to know what you spent it on. So if you could either send us your email address so that we can post it to you studenthub@open.ac.uk, or if you did this on Twitter, you can email us, personal message us even and let us know. And our handle is that @StudentHub. So please let us know that so that we can get those out to you. Well done on the caption competition.

OK, enough fun and games. We have a very serious conversation here. And I'm joined now in studio with Paul Lawrence and Nicola Watson. We are going to be talking about why is the

past important, a really, really key issue. And I think that everyone at home will be able to get involved with.

Now Paul, welcome. You are a historian with an interest in both change over long periods of time and also making links between the past and the present. And you do really interesting research specialising in criminal justice histories, so crime and police and punishment, from around 1972 to the present.

Whereas Nicola, you are a literature specialist with an interest in historical fiction. You'll work things about how the past has been imagined, so a very, very different take on things to Paul. And you're currently working on how dead authors-- dead authors, are we allowed-- authors who are no longer present. And their works are imagined in writers' house museums.

So two really, really different perspectives. And one of the things that we've been talking about a lot today is how interdisciplinary the arts are and how different subjects can really influence and impact on each other. So, why are we asking this question now about why is the past important, aside from that I'm here?

PAUL LAWRENCE: You're asking a historian why is the past important. I mean, in a way I would kind of turn the question around and say, why on earth would we think that the past isn't important? I mean, if we are thinking of ourselves and our personal history, maybe our family history, our community, one of the first things you think about is, how did I come to be here? What has happened to make me the person I am, to make my family as it is? So in one way, why wouldn't you think historically?

Equally I think it is quite important to kind of recall that at most points in the past, up until about the mid-20th century, the past was seen as a necessary way of thinking about the present. So if you take an example, during and immediately after the First World War, the magnificently named George Peabody Gooch was both a historian and a liberal MP. And he was asked by the prime minister to write a set of official documents justifying why had Britain entered the First World War. And so his work was extremely active in politics.

So the idea of why would you think about the past, it's a kind of, of course you would. So in a way I would turn around and say, well why wouldn't you?

NICOLA WATSON: Yeah. And I suppose I would respond and say that I have a feeling that just at the moment, we think of ourselves as sitting at a point of historical rupture, what with the referendum coming

up, for example. And there is this sense of very fast paced change, the sense of change and dispensation, a feeling around the internet revolution, these things, a sense of uncertainty. And that makes the past more past.

And it not only makes the past more vividly past, but it also complicates our sense of it because we start to value innovation and newness and novelty more because of the necessity of adapting to change. So it's not the first time in history that's happened. It happened around the French Revolution when suddenly, as it were, the old world, the ancient regime as it was called, vanished from underneath people's feet. You've got the same feeling.

What was it Wordsworth said? "Bliss was it to be in that dawn alive." But only I'd have to say if you were 21.

PAUL LAWRENCE: I'm saying a similar quote would be Marx and Engels on the Industrial Revolution. "All that's solid melts into air." There are kind of periods where you feel that everything that I knew is disappearing. And then kind of the place of the past becomes really interesting in that space.

NICOLA WATSON: The place and the value of the past, and the question of how much you're going to take from the past and what you're going to save of it, if you like.

KAREN FOLEY: You've mentioned the past, past, and the past, past, past, and this idea about what do we actually mean by the past. And is there a difference, I guess, between what we're saying about past and history?

PAUL LAWRENCE: I suppose as a historian, the distinction I would make is the past is everything that's happened ever. In a sense history, obviously I'm working in a growth area.

KAREN FOLEY: Oh my.

PAUL LAWRENCE: Well, there's more of it every day. But in a sense everything that leads up to the present day is the past. So we've just been running a conference today about prison education in the past and in the present. And in a way, thinking about the criminal justice system is an interesting example because if you were to set out to design a criminal justice system, there's no way you'd design the one we have now. It's kind of full of contradictions and complexity. And the only way to understand that is to think about its long history of this led to that, led to that.

But that's slightly different, in my view, to when I think of history, I think of the interpretation of the past that historians place on it. So there are things that the public maybe remembers or

thinks it remembers, and then there is the kind of knowledge that historians create.

So to give you an example of that, in the public memory, the Battle of Britain is an extremely important, foundational moment in the Second World War where Britain was saved from invasion. If you ask a historian of the Second World War, they might say well yes, that was important. But you really want to be thinking about the naval battle of Mers-el-Kebir where the British fleet sank a large part of the French fleet before it could fall into German hands. And actually that's what kind of saved Britain from invasion. So there is a kind of public version of the past and an official historical version I suppose.

KAREN FOLEY: What's the difference then between that why is the past important and why is history important?

NICOLA WATSON: I don't do history. At least a historian would not think that I did history. And the reason I don't do history, as it were, is that I'm interested in what we make of the past, how we imagine the past. So that's a third category. It's not quite popular memory. It's certainly not history. It's all about what uses we make of the past and the present.

So for example some years ago I wrote a book about Elizabeth the First, or rather about stories that people had been telling about Elizabeth the First. And she died, and noting how different Elizabeth the First becomes if, for example, we have a new queen called Elizabeth who comes to the throne, or if Mrs. Thatcher came to-- I was going to say the throne for a moment, but to power. Those historical moments change history backwards, change what Elizabeth the First is. So that's what I do. It's not quite what-- a historian believes in facts, and I tend to believe, as it were, in fiction.

PAUL LAWRENCE: Yes and no. I mean, to answer the question myself, rather than deflecting it to Nicky.

KAREN FOLEY: Why is history important? Well, Paul, tell us.

PAUL LAWRENCE: In a sense the past is the accumulation of things which have happened. And we can be reasonably certain that certain things have happened at certain times. History is the interpretation that you place on them, which tends to change with every generation.

If you look at, say, something foundational like the Industrial Revolution, in the kind of Edwardian period of the early 20th century, there was a strong idea that we were moving through in a progressive way. So the Industrial Revolution was forward looking.

Then in the 1940s and '50s, there were all these doubts about was it really a revolution or how revolutionary was it. So the questions which we ask of the past and the interpretations that we place on it continually change. And that's what history is, as opposed to the past.

KAREN FOLEY: Well I guess you're looking a little bit more at heritage and those sorts of ideas around things, so it's slightly different, isn't it?

NICOLA WATSON: Yes. I mean, in a way, we intersect around what's called historiography, which is the history of histories, if you like. But yes, I work on things like heritage, or you might say on literary history. Because literary history is a rather odd thing. It's the history of what happens to texts, how they were produced in history, but then how they've been consumed subsequently.

So that becomes the history of an old thing, but in a continuous succession of presence. So how is it that *Hamlet* has been many, many things, to the point where recently I went to a display of *Hamlets* in-- or a performance you could say of *Hamlets*-- in Birmingham University where they had 400 different versions of *Hamlet* going on simultaneously. It was called a post-dramatic Hamlet. But you get a sense there of what can be done with texts, old texts, but always in the present. And that's what I'm always interested in what the past-- how you do the past, but in the present.

KAREN FOLEY: So it's almost recycling a lot of things and thinking well, you know, there are these various ideas, even ideas like your criminal justice system, for example, as well. We surely would know how to do it better if we fundamentally kept making the same mistakes over the years, not just in terms of criminal justice. But you know, humanity does have these cycles, doesn't it, in terms of things that we do, mistakes we make. And yet we study the past. And we can look at that academically in terms of things that maybe have happened. But this idea about the present and maybe the future is quite interesting in terms of what we can do with some of that knowledge, that why is it so important to be studying these things for the development, I guess, of humankind.

PAUL LAWRENCE: Well I think one of the things that-- I mean, I was talking to people over lunch about this. And one of the phrases that someone used is, we study the past, we study history in order to make the present strange. So the kind of world around us seems entirely familiar and entirely natural. It's hard to kind of conceive of it being very different.

Whereas the further back you look, or looking at different areas of history, you see that people

viewed the world very differently, have very different conceptions. And you realise that the world that we have is just so contingent and could have been completely different. So in thinking about the past, you're not just thinking about the past. You're thinking about the present. You're finding new ways to interrogate, well, what's innovative and different in the present.

KAREN FOLEY: But also our ideas of history change very much in terms of when we're at. And so you'd mentioned before that history is not just about the facts. So how reliable, then, would you say history is in terms of whose perception it is and at what time and in what context?

PAUL LAWRENCE: I would say-- and again, without going into too much detail. And Nicky will kind of correct me on this. In the kind of-- as a very raw pen sketch, in the 19th century, historians were sure. They kind of wrote down their facts. They were largely to do with political history and diplomatic history. They charted the history of what had happened and what was going to happen, kind of continued in the interwar period up to the Second World War.

After the Second World War, we started to think, well maybe there's more to history than just a succession of kind of great men, politicians, kings and queens. So you have a rise of kind of social history, looking at ordinary people. Following that in the kind of 1980s, you have what's called the cultural turn, and then followed by the linguistic term. So in the kind of 1980s, there's a real sense in history that, maybe we don't really know anything? Maybe everything is just about interpretation. Maybe we can never find out anything real about the past.

I think, for myself, we've now moved beyond that. It kind of never had that much effect on the historical profession anyway. So I think we feel that each generation of historians will find its own interpretation in the past. But we are moving forward. We are learning more about the past. It's not just what you make it. There are certain things you can know for sure and some things you can only interpret.

NICOLA WATSON: So if I could come in, it's not just that one makes the present strange, but also it means that you can make the future strange too. I mean, that's to say the future could be different to the present because the present has been different to the past or is partially accidental. I mean, there are utopian versions of this, but there are just ordinary practical versions.

So for example, I've been working on the redevelopment of Shakespeare's house in Stratford-on-Avon in New Place. What does Shakespeare's garden look like in 2016? Well it turns out to involve a silver ship and a garden with a desk in it. And that's because Shakespeare for the

future is imagined as a place of creativity, or is literally a space for communal creativity. So that's how the past is used to make the future.

KAREN FOLEY: Let's say what the chat is on the social media desk.

RACHEL: We're back on potatoes aren't we?

KAREN FOLEY: Typical.

RACHEL: We do have a few comments. Owens made a really good point earlier. He said, "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child, for what is the worth of human life unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?" So he says quote there. So it's Cicero, isn't it? So don't get my pronunciation wrong and start on that. We'll go into that tomorrow guys and you can have a good laugh at that one.

And he also said, "I think the tools developed in the study of history, especially source analysis, are extremely useful in our modern lives. The ability to critically analyse a news article, for example, can help you pull the facts from the opinions."

HJ: I think that's very interesting. I've been thinking about this because I read it the other day, that when it comes to memory, we don't remember the original event, we remember the last time we remembered it. So perhaps that's the same with history as well. And the times that we past remember it are each influenced by what was happening around us.

RACHEL: Isn't there a MOOC on that?

HJ: There might be actually. We'll have to look this up and we'll have to send it your way. But I was just thinking about that. So if we can find the MOOC on it and find out more, I think that would be fantastic.

KAREN FOLEY: Brilliant. And of course going to that subject or sources, I mean, photographs can really skew one's view of things, this whole idea of times, I guess, when things are better remembered than others. Are there halcyon periods, I guess, in literature that you would say have had more of an impact in terms of that memorising or remembering of things, where that subjectivity has really, maybe clouded what's been going on in terms of the past?

NICOLA WATSON: Well I think for example one of the things that is being remembered at the moment, and has been for perhaps the last 15 years or so, is Austen's England, which has become this place

that many people would like to spend time in. It was invented actually rather late, somewhere around 1900, perhaps even in the First World War, where there are stories of people in the trenches reading Jane Austen as a way of imagining themselves back into England.

She herself was a sharp edged contemporary novelist writing about wartime England. So she was not in herself nostalgic. But she's become historical fiction, if you like.

So I don't know whether anybody remembers the Olympic opening ceremony. But actually the sisters from *Pride and Prejudice* showed up there as a description of England before the Industrial Revolution. And I think it's interesting that every year, an awful lot of people want to put on bonnets and in deep britches and walk around Bath being in a different England.

PAUL LAWRENCE: Have you been following me on a holiday?

[LAUGHTER]

NICOLA WATSON: You'd look great in a Darcy outfit, Paul.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, photographs please. So I wonder if we can get a little bit more specific. And unfortunately Paul I'm going to pick on you as the historian here, because I wanted to talk about some specific examples about ways in which the past can be important. I mentioned earlier that people were repeating things over time. But there are various aspects in terms of both continuity and discontinuity in terms of how we remember the past. And I wondered if you could tell us about some of the things that were continuous?

PAUL LAWRENCE: Well I think what's interesting is there is this Santanyana quote, "Those who can't remember the past are doomed to repeat it." I think historians wouldn't say that we are precisely repeating or that exactly similar things happen, but more that by analysing the past and thinking about the complexity of change in the past, you understand more about what is novel about the present, what is happening now which is new, and what has always been happening.

So to take one example of a surprising continuity, if you look back to the 1720s, you have what's called the South Sea bubble, which is essentially a speculation bubble where people start investing in all manner of companies that start advertising themselves. So there's a company that says we're going to make square cannons to make square cannonballs. Some people invest in it. There's another company that lists itself that says, this is a company for the

undertaking of advantageous purposes for which no one will know what they are. And people invest in that.

So it's a huge kind of speculative bubble which then bursts. And hundreds of ordinary people, thousands of ordinary people go bankrupt. People are committing suicide. The postmaster-general drinks poison because he's lost so much money.

If you do a kind of close analysis of that to what happened in the dotcom bubble in the early 2000s, it's a similar kind of cycle of confidence, speculation, and then bust. So it's a kind of continuity that makes you think actually some of the things that we worry about now are cyclical, and kind of similar things happen. So you have that.

But then equally you can find moments of radical discontinuity, so things that make you think wow, something that I thought was always like that is actually very different. So if you take something like childhood, you might think that there's always been a sense that children are different to adults.

Actual fact, if you look back not that far, if you look at the early 19th century, it's still quite common for children to be executed for crimes. So the last child to be hung is a chap called John Amy Bird Bell, kind of a curious name. He goes for a walk in the woods. He's about 12, 13, goes for a walk in the woods with a friend. The friend is stabbed and dies. And John Amy Bird Bell is convicted and hung. He's the last one.

But the idea that children should be treated separately from adults in the criminal justice system is a new thing. So the whole construction of what a child is, is actually something quite new, which makes you think again about things that you think are natural and indwelling are actually constructed.

NICOLA WATSON: Yeah, I suppose in a very short form the literary version of that is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies.* Well, I mean, I don't whether anybody's seen the film. It's really quite good. The book is really quite bad. But the idea is you crash together the Austenian romcom really with the zombie movie, really in service of feminism. I'm not certain that it ends up being in service of feminism, but it's a perfect example, as it were, of continuity and discontinuity. It gets its flavour from putting the two together.

KAREN FOLEY: I wonder just before we end if, Paul, you could mention something about Dirac's explanation, which is deeply unfashionable now apparently, so this idea that one could understand the

present directly by looking at the past. Why is that such an unfashionable idea? I would've thought that made quite a lot of sense?

PAUL LAWRENCE: Well I think again partly because of the kind of impact of the cultural and linguistic terms. The idea that you would completely understand something in the present by looking to the past is kind of, I think, fairly unfashionable, largely because people who are in charge of things, people who work in the Home Office or the civil service-- the idea that you would form some policy or present day intervention based on the past is kind of anathema to them.

But you know, I think there are things that you can find and trace back. So one of the pieces of work I've just been doing has been looking at this 1824 Vagrancy Act. Now this is kind of a long time ago. This is still enforced today, bits of it. You can still be arrested for vagrancy under this 1824 act. The bit I was looking at was the bit that allows the police to arrest people on suspicion.

And what happens in the 1980s, the early 1980s-- I do remember them. I was kind of outing myself there as an elderly historian. This is what becomes the sus laws. So the riots in Brixton and Toxteth, which are precipitated by the police, this excessive use of stop and search powers, all date back to this piece of legislation. And I would argue if you want to understand police culture and the way the police view their role and kind of who they can and can't arrest and what their powers are, one of the things you need to understand is this really long history of essentially being able to arrest whoever they want whenever they want to.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful, thank you. Well Nicky and Paul, this has been-- Nicola even-- this has been a really fantastic conversation that we could talk about for hours. But unfortunately we don't have time to. So I'd like to thank you for coming along and starting what will hopefully continue to be a really interesting discussion. And we've had some excellent sessions on literature and history indeed even as well. So thank you for coming along and talking to us today.

Thank you for all your chat about potatoes and Prosecco and various things that I'm really craving right now. I have had an amazing day. I hope you have too, I really do. *The Student Hub Live* events are all about connecting students together in a community. Thank you for sharing all of your ideas, for participating in the chat, for doing our caption competition. And don't forget to let us know if you've won one of those fabulous prizes. We'll be posting those to you on Monday. But we do need your address to be able to do so. So please do email us.

Also tomorrow, starting at 11:00, we have a fantastic lineup. I am most looking forward to the

philosophy boxing match, which I spoke about earlier when we were doing the quiz. But we have a really, really good lineup. We're going to start with the student discussion. We need to know about things that matter to you, any questions you might not know, you might want to ask. We're going to talk about tutor support, tutorials, et cetera, and all of those things that really are important to air.

We're going to be doing lots of other things. We've got a philosophy boxing match that we're going to be talking to many other people. We're having a classical studies picnic. So there's going to be lots of fun and excitement. And you can see all of us on the programme. We're going right through to a Saturday night evening, doing our quiz again, which will be a lot of fun as it was tonight, and also having various discussions after that as well.

So thank you for watching. Do let us know what you thought. You can do that by checking out the Feedback button, which is on the home page of the website. It's very, very quick and simple, but it means a lot to us to know how you've experienced the event. And you may well have some suggestions about things that you'd like to see in future ones.

You can also select the Count Me In button and give us your email address so that when we have events like this-- because they are getting more and more frequent-- we can let you know about them so you can make sure you can tune in.

HJ and Rachel, I'd like to thank you very, very much indeed. Would you like to say anything before I let you go?

RACHEL: Nah. We've got biscuits.

KAREN FOLEY: Well you can come back tomorrow.

HJ: Well we're definitely excited for coming back tomorrow. We've had so much fun chatting to everyone.

RACHEL: It's gone so quickly again, hasn't it? We've got some new faces coming. We've got Owen. we've never seen Owen. Sylvia's come back and Davin's come back. We've got Lucy. We've had a lot of people that have popped in today and have been generating a lot of chat. Obviously Ben's here. Ben's always here. Sorry Ben. Karen as well. Not you Karen. There's another Karen, couple of Karens now. There's a bit of competition going on.

KAREN FOLEY: Good, we like lots of Karen. Well thank you everybody for coming. Do log in tomorrow. We've

got a really good programme.

As you know, the catch up is going to be available. And we've been watching some of that today. And we're getting it up as soon as we possibly can, so you can check that out.

We are going home now. We're going to close the live stream very soon. We're going to go home and get ready for tomorrow. So we will see you at 11 o'clock tomorrow. Thank you for everything. It's been a brilliant, brilliant day. And we will see you tomorrow on the 11th of June. Bye for now.

[MUSIC PLAYING]