

THE PURSUIT OF HISTORY: AIMS, METHODS AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF HISTORY. SIXTH EDITION.

By John Tosh
New York: Routledge, 2015.

Review by Erna Oliver

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First printed in 1984, this is the sixth edition, again with slight alterations and expansion of the content. The chapters are structured thematically. This book is intended as an introduction and overview to the study of history. It consists of twelve chapters, starting with the very important issue of historical awareness, which is the best chapter in the book. New to this edition is a chapter on public history. Information on digitized sources and historical controversies, transnational history and the nature of the archive are also included. Readers are informed about a companion website on the Routledge page with support material, example questions and primary sources, but I was not able to locate and open this specific link.

Although this book is intended as an introduction, novice readers could feel patronized if they are not able to read and think critically, especially regarding some of the marginal notes that serve as glosses to explain specific concepts or words or events mentioned in the content. Methods are explicitly listed in the subtitle, but methodology is the major weakness of the work. Although a number of chapters describe specific approaches to history, there is too little on the subject of implementing methodology in actual historical research and the craft of historical writing to be of substantial help to anyone. There are also technical issues like illogical numbering of sections that can confuse readers and should have been corrected by editors. It seems as if there is one recent publication added to each or most of the reference lists at the back of each chapter. I would have liked to see these lists expanded with numerous recent sources to justify this edition.

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On the other hand, this is a handy work that could be used as an introduction to history both in academic and popular circles. Most of the content can also be used to make students aware of the pitfalls of working with history; pitfalls that even historians like Tosh cannot always avoid. The book should be read critically and with an open mind to really see the value it can add to the general understanding of what history is all about and why it really matters.

John Tosh is a professor in history at the University of Roehampton in England and therefore most of the examples in this book are taken from English history. Tosh also wrote a number of other titles on history, including *Why History Matters* and *Historians on History*.