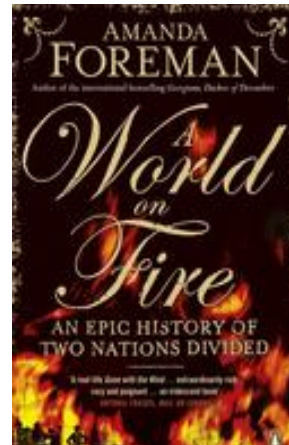




Amanda Foreman at Blackwell's

On 2 June, Oxford alumni were invited to bring guests for an evening at Blackwell's in Oxford. This historic shop was open exclusively for our group, and for me, the fact that we were able to wander around with a glass of wine in hand and speak to an author, is a lovely evening indeed. After half an hour of wandering and wine, Amanda Foreman spoke about her new book, *A World on Fire*. This tells the story of the American Civil War through British eyes.

Amanda Foreman completed her d.phil at Oxford (LMH) in 1998, and she was thrilled to be back speaking in Oxford for the first time since her viva! The genesis of '*World on Fire*' came from her research here—it was her initial interest in the slave trade and issues of race and colour that led her to Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, who became the focus of her research and the basis of her first book. Determined to return to her research on slavery, Amanda became interested in the American Civil War, in particular British attitudes towards it, and involvement in it.



In her talk at Blackwell's, Amanda took us on a journey through the Civil War through the lives of two British soldiers who left their jobs in Britain to volunteer for the Confederates. We looked at why the South was so much more popular than the North in the British Press; the cotton trade, the shipping route from Liverpool, and for many the uphill struggle of the Confederates was appealing. However, Amanda told us that the main reason was propaganda.

Whilst Southern Propagandists skilfully made the case that the Confederates were fighting for freedom, whereas the Unionists were fighting for Empire, the North lost a clear opportunity to talk about the issue of slavery. Amanda Foreman argued that the main reason for the Civil War was the right to own slaves, and yet this was not understood in Britain, due to skilled propagandists and biased foreign correspondents.

Amanda then took questions – and my favourite was, “what would have happened if Britain had recognised the Confederacy?” “We’d all be speaking German now”, says Amanda.

Beth Tibble
Alumni Events Manager