

## **‘Picturesque and dramatic’ or ‘dull recitals of threadbare fare’: Good Practice in History Teaching in elementary schools in England, 1872-1905.**

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This article draws on late nineteenth and early twentieth century teaching manuals, reports of Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI), history textbooks (‘readers’), other administrators’ and teachers’ accounts, policy documents and pupils’ reminiscences to refute common and generalised assessments of the period (often by those who have not looked closely at these specific sources) that the teaching of history was a negative and boring experience, limited mainly and simply to reading comprehension of lengthy pages devoid of timelines, maps and other visuals. The article concentrates on the experience of English elementary schools and draws comparisons between past and present teaching approaches. The dates are circumscribed by the introduction of history as an *optional* class subject for English elementary schools in 1872, and 1905, the year of the *Handbooks of Suggestions* issued by the British government’s Board of Education, to define the rationale for teaching history, which was newly designated as compulsory. The study is opportune at a time of great flux in history teaching in England, with the cancellation of the 2011 curriculum, which would have marginalised the subject, and renewed debate precipitated by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove’s insistence on ‘facts’ and traditional teaching. The English Inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), have criticised the current underdevelopment of chronological understanding, the ‘episodic knowledge of history’ and unclear ‘sense of time’, with many pupils ‘expected to listen to the teacher for too long’ (Ofsted 2011, pp.11, 20), a criticism which has been mythologised as the typical Victorian lesson.

There is little existing comment on good practice in the History classroom of the Victorian era. David Sylvester encapsulates the traditionally held view that pupils were taught by mere memorisation of historical facts, with the teacher ‘didactically active’ and the pupils passive; history was a ‘received subject’ (Sylvester 1996, p.11). Existing literature focusses predominantly on Victorian textbooks to ascertain lesson content and cultural indoctrination. Peter Gosden for example, in *How They were Taught*, shows, from a brief analysis of the catechism form utilised by textbook writers in 1870, that considerable emphasis was placed on factual learning (Gosden 1969, pp.50-51). More recent writers (for example Ahier 1988; Castle 1996; Horn 1988; Chancellor 1970; Marsden 1989) have concentrated on the subject matter of lessons, which is seen largely as emphasising concepts of Empire and citizenship. Stephen Heathorn, for example, shows the messages of citizenship, gender, and national identity (Heathorn 2000), while Peter Yeandle portrays the imperialist sense of identity, the formation of ‘law abiding, patriotic citizens, who would add fresh honours to the story of the English people’ (Yeandle 2006, p.23). However, almost twenty years ago, Patrick Brindle cautioned against accepting the content of the textbook as ‘the same as the content of the lesson’ and that colour

and interest was left to the improvisational skills of the teachers' (Brindle 1996, pp.11, 14). John T. Smith shows that the subject was largely ignored in schools until 1884, and afterwards was studied largely as a literacy exercise, because one of the three designated reading books required of all children from Standard III (the third class in the elementary school) had to be a history reader (Smith 2009). However he makes no attempt to address the issue of history teaching *method* (known in some countries as 'history didactics'.) The present paper does not cover the well trodden ground; it does not seek to discern the hidden messages delivered in history lessons, but rather the methods recommended to make the subject accessible to children. In their recent survey of twentieth century history teaching, D.Cannadine, J.Keating, N.Sheldon repeat the traditional view of Edwardian history as 'cram'. While their book concentrates on secondary education, it does have reference to some examples of elementary schooling. Intriguingly, the authors refer to the 1913 survey of 8000 elementary school pupils into the popularity of different subjects. History emerged as the third most popular subject, showing it to be a subject, according to the survey's compiler, E.O.Lewis, that 'appeals greatly' to all young pupils (Cannadine 2011, p.55).The contradiction was not explained by Cannadine, and suggests that there have been some misconceptions of history teaching in the later Victorian period.

The source materials used in the present research differ from those of previous works. The reports of HMI, who visited schools annually to award attendance and examination grants, have never been used in this context, nor have the dozens of teaching manuals that appeared towards the end of the century. Caitlin Wylie has recently used these to show the use of the blackboard, predominantly for writing and nature study (Wylie 2012). She makes a plea that, although 'largely neglected' by historians, manuals should be used to help to construct 'a more comprehensive image of past schooling' as 'they 'reveal the best practices of the time' (Wylie 2012, p.272). They 'described the idealised goals and priorities that teachers were aiming for' (Wylie 2012, p.258). They were written by authors from diverse backgrounds, including teachers and teacher trainers, and do give some indication of contemporary perceptions of good practice in lessons, although, as Wylie cautions, 'they do not indicate *actual* practices'. While they were not official documents, in that they were not published by the Board of Education, their popularity is evident from the large number published at the turn of the twentieth century, with many of the history manuals used in the present study enjoying multiple editions. That of Garlick (1896) had six editions in eight years, Welton (1906) remained in print until 1924 and that of Landon (1906) was published for a quarter of a century, from 1893 to 1918. Wylie asserts that they 'must have appeared practical, achievable and thus useful to people who then decided to buy them' (Wylie 2012, p.272).

There is evidence to support the dull nature of history lessons in the 1870s with HMI typifying the method used as largely cram; HMI H.G.Alington at the beginning of the period under study

examined half pages of ‘similarly worded matter produced by child after child’, which showed memorisation enforced by teachers (PP 1874, p.41) and S.J.G.Fraser found the greatest challenge for the teacher was to make children present work in their own words, rather than the usual slavish repetition of text books. In 1878 J.R.Blakiston actually discouraged teachers from taking up history as a class subject, because of the persistent habit of teaching ‘little more than a string of dates, pedigrees and battles’ (PP 1879, p.477). Even in 1893, Coward condemned lessons as ‘dull recitals of threadbare fare’ (PP 1894, p.40). However, some of the extant evidence challenges this bleak picture of history teaching, at least from the 1890s, indicating a more stimulating classroom environment in some schools. Frederick J. Gould recalls teaching his first history lessons in a Buckinghamshire village school in 1871, where the head did not interfere with his enthusiastic ‘zeal in giving first place to stories, biographical and legendary; in copying chevaliers, monks and ladies (out of Knight’s *Pictorial History*) on to large sheets of paper for blackboard display’ (Gould 1928, pp234-5). He was inspired by Green’s *Short History of the English People* which began to show ‘the vividness and picturesqueness of past life’. Arthur Goffin, a Board School pupil in the 1880s, recalled his teacher, who ‘had always something beyond the textbook for us, and he drove his lessons home by unforgettable – at least to me – anecdotes and stories’ (Rose 2001, p.162). John Allaway, twenty years later, remembered his teacher ignoring the set curricula and ‘vividly’ teaching history, geography and English together as one subject, moving around the class, asking questions and ‘giving advice and encouragement’ (Rose 2001, p.159).<sup>1</sup>

There was by this time a profusion of teaching manuals, which give a flavour of what was perceived as good practice in the subject. There was a recognition, as shown by W.M.Childs, vice-principal of Reading College, that, from the beginning, ‘the indispensable thing is to be interesting .... to expurgate the dull...We have to convince a child that History is worth his attention’ (Childs 1901, pp.4,8,9). For younger children the subject was invariably recommended to be ‘the picture and story stage’, as coined by Joseph Landon, vice-principal of Saltley Training College in 1893, to capture children’s inherent interest and curiosity (Landon 1908, p.399). A.H.Garlick, headmaster of Woolwich Pupil Teacher Centre, felt story had value in encouraging ‘constructive imagination’ (Garlick 1896, p.267). H.L.Withers, Professor of Education in Owens College, Manchester, and Childs advocated oral teaching centred around ‘large, brightly-coloured pictures’ (Withers 1904, p.188), blackboard illustrations, dolls in historic costume, songs, mime and drama (Childs 1901, pp.

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<sup>1</sup> Rose (2001, p.165) quotes the oral reminiscences of several pupils who liked repetition. One, born in 1883, comments, ‘There was much repetition... but we didn’t notice the drudgery of it all. Children, young children particularly, love habit formation and they like what would be regarded as drudgery by those older. They love to follow, adults love to lead.’ Another, born in 1878, recalled, ‘The continuous chanting of so many facts was a hopeless mumbo jumbo to me at first... but gradually light dawned and I began to see what it was all about and enjoyed finding out more.’ A woman born in 1890 claimed that she did not find it drudgery and that there was a pride in achievement, ‘we all worked to get the word of praise that would follow our best work.’

4,8,9). W.H.Woodward, Principal of the University Training College in Liverpool, maintained that, with the youngest children, the retention of facts and dates was ‘only a minor service’ and it was of far greater importance ‘to have stimulated interest in the historic past, and to have developed a power of seeing its incidents in clear-cut mental pictures’ (Maitland 1901, p.72). Joseph Cowham saw the value of pupils ‘picturing the past by an effort of *imagination*’, which was seen as ‘all but unlimited’ during their early years (Cowham 1894, pp.342-3). The 1905 *Suggestions* reiterated the charm of the ‘interesting and true story’ (PP1905, p.63), with bright pictures creating ‘a living interest in history’. Similarly James Welton, the Professor of Education at Leeds University at the turn of the century, suggested that even four years into schooling, history teaching should be essentially ‘the vivid narration’ with all else subsidiary to the oral lesson (Welton 1906, pp.233,237).

Cowham exemplified a model lesson of the 1890s at this youngest stage, which concentrated on the story of a historical character, told orally, followed by a reading lesson, with the liberal use of maps, diagrams, pictures and sketches on the blackboard. The teacher was graphic, ‘picturing out’ and avoiding ‘lecturing.’ Contrasts between conditions of life *then* and *now* were made throughout the lesson, along with consequences of actions (Cowham 1894, p.345). In a 1902 book which had numerous editions over the next 20 years, Professor Henry Bourne describes a lesson he had observed which began with a biographical story told in very simple language, but ‘feelingly, with the glow of enthusiasm and the chest-tone of conviction.’ The teacher made each pupil identify himself with the hero of the story. The map was frequently referred to, and sections of poetry were added. The topic was illustrated with contemporary examples in the knowledge of the pupils. The children then repeated the story, with leading questions from the teacher on cause and effect, and the moral value of certain actions. Pupils were then asked to state similar and contrasting stories. Only after this would children write. The success of the format was seen in the perceived fertility of the composition ‘because the pupils had something to write about’ (Bourne 1902, p.49).

The idea of proceeding from the known to the unknown was encouraged by Wells and many others, ‘to work back from the present to the past’, in order to make the present ‘full of meaning to pupils by showing them its origin in the past’ (Wells 1892, p.26). In introducing a topic to the youngest children he recommended beginning with the groups with which the children are familiar – the family, the school, and the parish. Garlick in the 1890s called such a practice as the ‘living method’ of history teaching (Garlick 1896, p.272). Landon also stressed that teachers should proceed from known to unknown, showing the illustration of the past by the present within the child’s comprehension. This gives ‘reality to the past’. He reflected this theme with the use of the ‘comparative method’, where one period might ‘throw light upon a second’ comparing causes of similar events in different periods. He concluded ‘without the ever active spirit of comparison ... the past is separated from us by an impassable gulf; it has little reality and interest for us.’ (Landon 1908,

pp.396,403). J.W.Allen, Professor of Modern History at Bedford College similarly, some years later, saw the need to begin with the history of the locality - the village or town where the child lived (Allen 1909, p.201). Alternatively, Woodward saw the children's imagination aroused by contrasts with daily experience, rather than similarities ' , although it had always to be inside the range of a child's sympathies (Maitland 1901, p.72).

The use of pictures is a feature in the manuals of method even for older pupils. HMI Coward expressed his approval in 1891 of the increasing use of historical pictures he witnessed in schools, which made lessons 'more interesting and deeper impressions of the facts of history [would] be made on the minds of the children'(PP 1892, p.357). John Adamson, Professor of Education at King's College London, stressed the importance of portraits and pictures to 'make the past live again'. Woodward explained that in history especially 'a great deal can be taught by sight. The younger boys will receive a more definite, clear, and lasting impression from what they see, than either from what they read or from what they hear' (Maitland 1901, p.82). The visual made history more real and 'consequently more interesting.' Welton described many different forms - portraits, scenery, buildings, fortifications, armour, weapons, roads, bridges, railway engines, costumes and pastimes (Welton 1906, p.269). While deprecating those which were 'glaringly inaccurate' in dress, the greatest consideration was that they 'arrest attention and excite curiosity, and this stimulating power must not be sacrificed either for archaeological precision or for artistic effect' (Welton 1906, p.236). Even beyond Standard III, Withers saw illustrations to be indispensable, and Welton felt larger pictures, such as Marshall's *Historical Albums* and lantern slides had greater value than the pictures in textbooks. The teacher who could draw illustrations quickly on the board 'before the eyes of the class' was particularly praised in the manuals (Adamson 1907, p.273). J. Wells, fellow of Wadham College in 1892, did not approve of such work as *The Comic History of England*, which he found in school libraries and which he thought was too flippant (Wells 1892, p.19). This 1848 work of Gilbert À Beckett was produced in many editions throughout the period and had 20 hand coloured engravings and 200 woodcuts by John Leech, many cartoonlike, for example the caricature of an ancient Briton or the shipwreck of King Harold (A'Beckett 1894, pp.7,52). The authors claimed that they wished to blend amusement with instruction, promising 'not to sacrifice the substance to the seasoning' but aiming to create something that 'though light, may not be found devoid of nutriment.' The book does show reliable accounts of the historical events. The authors' *Comic History of Rome* of 1852 asserted their aim to instruct accurately, with 'as much amusement as possible.'

Even the common Readers from the 1880s were filled with illustrations. Arnold Forster's *Things Old and New for Standard III*, for example, had pictures on 44 of its 157 pages with a chronological timeline on a double page spread at the end in the form of a scroll (Arnold-Forster 1896). Similarly, *Blackwood's 2<sup>nd</sup> Reader for Standard V* of 1883 had 62 out of 213 pages with pictures, including a

dramatic portrayal of the murder of Becket; text was conveniently split into short paragraphs and there was a list of difficult words at the end of sections (Blackwood 1883). Publisher Nelson and Sons produced a number of popular readers in the early 1880s, which were reprinted for the rest of the century. Their *Simple History of England in Reading Lessons* of 1881 had 58 illustrations in its 135 text pages, some full page, with others, such as that depicting a siege of a medieval castle, engagingly breaking up the text (Nelson 1881 a). The *Royal History Reader, II*, of the same year contained poetry readings, extracts from Shakespeare and social history to show the life of the people and the volume's 181 pages of text included 37 pictures and maps (Nelson 1881b). The *Stories of English History Simply Told*, for Standard III, had 22 illustrations on its 125 pages (Nelson 1882). In the combined volume of Church's *Stories from English History*, of 1895, pictures appeared on 87 of 679 pages, including a full page front piece of a Viking ship. The aim of Gill's *Regina Historical Reader V, Tudor Period*, first published in the same year, was to be a 'reading book' and this necessitated that dates were largely omitted. Nonetheless it had 47 pictures within its 185 pages of text (Gill 1890). Longman's *Ship Literary Reader* of 1896, had a selection of poetry and prose readings on historical events, and even this volume had 38 illustrations on its 275 pages of text (Longman 1896). *Granville's Reader* (Granville 1882) had fewer pictures, 34 in its 210 pages, though some were full page. Visual material was easily available to enhance teachers' lessons. Oral reminiscences of history by pupils are rare, but in his PhD research of 1998, Brindle found one later pupil, Robert Dawes, commenting:

I can remember one picture of a head on a pike -- we loved it, we loved to see this one. And then another one where, somewhere in Scotland, a chap was being pushed over the top of a parapet. And, of course, there was the one where, was it? -- Who got? -- Which Saxon got stabbed in the back? I forget who it was. There it was, the dagger going in -- just loved it! (Brindle 1996, p.14)

The over-use of dull and repetitive textbooks was a predominant feature of the criticisms of lessons by late Victorian writers, with HMI Sir Joshua Fitch, as early as 1881, recommending the vivid and picturesque, which kindled a strong interest in the subject, rather than the 'dry-bones of the text-book' (Fitch 1881, p.381). Withers did not want books used at all until Standard III (Withers 1904, p.189) and Welton stressed that they had to be 'fitted into a course of oral teaching' with pre-prepared blackboard summaries (Welton 1906, p.268). The teacher was enjoined to 'enlarge, organise and vivify the material.' David Salmon, Principal of Swansea Training College, emphasised that printed words did not 'appeal to the children with the same force as spoken' and thus no book could be the efficient substitute for the 'living teacher' (Salmon 1898, p.216). L.J.Roberts in 1899 commented that 'books should be merely supplementary to bright graphic oral teaching, with a free use of ... pictures, diagrams and charts' (PP 1898, p.204). There was recognition on the part of publishers that Readers

should be entertaining for children. The Preface to Nelson's *A Simple History of England* of 1881 claimed 'as much picturesqueness has been thrown into the narrative as the limited space would allow' (Nelson 1881a, preface). The 1882 *Stories from English History Simply Told*, boasted 'a lively and attractive style' and simple language, with 'great prominence is given to personal adventure' (Nelson 1882, preface). H.O. Arnold-Forster's 1896 Reader, *Things New and Old* disparaged the planting into young minds of chronological lists of facts, dates of kings, and forgotten battles. He aimed to make connections between the past and present to arouse the children's interest, feeling that the romance and imagination inspired by history should lighten and brighten 'the somewhat dull lives' of the majority of children (Arnold-Forster 1896, p.6).

Other visual aids were recommended in all manuals, with Wells regarding maps as 'the surest way to bring reality into the subject' (Wells 1892, p.33). For Welton, history without geography was 'largely unintelligible' and geography without history was 'devoid of human interest' (Welton 1906, p.273). Bourne called geography 'the two eyes of history' (Bourne 1902, p.137). There is an encouragement for the teacher to draw maps in outline on the blackboard. There was wide recognition of the value of time-charts, divided into centuries, either as a class instrument or as a personal tool for the child (Welton 1906, p.273). Adamson saw such 'graphic representation' as the only way for pupils to grasp the relative lengths of various periods and the 'synchronism and sequence of events' (Adamson 1907, pp.276,259). Home-made timelines were regarded as more effective than published charts, as they 'grow under the eyes of the class' (Adamson 1907, p.275). For Withers they put 'life and interest into the otherwise dreary subject of dates', even for pupils in Standard V (Withers 1904, p.192). Colour was stressed by Adamson, to show different eras and Mary Sheldon recommended sheets each 'boldly and strikingly headed by its own century', fastened together by the pupil 'like a long folding map, so as to give the eye a continuous representation of the time considered' (Sheldon n.d., p.4). Similarly, on the 'vexed question of dates', Adamson condemned the old idea that 'the learning of dates was the chief function of school history' as 'mental lumber', but he had witnessed teachers exercising ingenuity in making rhymes and puzzles (Adamson 1907, p.277). Giving dates was discouraged by the 1905 *Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers* 'for the abstract idea of time cannot be grasped by young children, and the mere repetition of dates is a barren exercise.' Even in the older classes it still recommended only the most important dates to be committed to memory (PP 1905, p.62). Interestingly, dates are not mentioned in the current level descriptions in England until level 4, (the expected level for an eleven year old).

Reflecting many modern theories, the manual writers recommended visits. Joseph Wells mentioned first in 1889 that teachers should make pupils 'interested in those bits of old England which are always round them'. Buildings, such as churches were seen to add 'life and picturesqueness' to teaching (Wells 1892, pp.16,34). J.W.Allen saw that even if the village church was a new one, there

would be ‘old churches, old houses, within walking distance’ (Allen 1909, p.198). Arnold-Forster recommended the children simply standing on the Edgware Road and imagining Watling Street ‘whose stony pavements actually rang to the tramp of the Tenth Legion’, putting ‘a bridge across 1,500 years of time’ and being ‘one step nearer to understanding the meaning of the continuity of our history’ (Arnold-Forster 1896, p.5). Withers saw visits quickening an interest ‘which no amount of mere talking or reading can possibly produce’ (Withers 1904, p.194), and for him, they were an excellent basis for historical drawings, a reflection of the modern suggestion that the visit should facilitate ‘looking through the end of a pencil’ (Fines 1997, p.233). Then, as now, museum visits were followed up with ‘a vivid description’, for example of life in a monastery or castle, which ‘knits together and revises all that has been learnt’ (Welton 1906, p.271). Then, as now, there were cautions against the ‘indiscriminate looking at many objects’ in a museum’.

Harriet Finlay Johnson, teaching elementary schools in Sussex in the 1890s, pioneered the ‘dramatic’ method. (She published her ideas after her retirement in 1910). Her aim was to get children to learn for themselves, writing and enacting their own plays about historical events and personalities. She identified the need for activity, recognising that it was not in keeping with child nature to sit constantly ‘as a passive bucket to be pumped into’. She emphasised that an axiom in school method had always been to, ‘first arouse the desire to know’ and when her pupils began to dramatize their lessons, they ‘at once developed a keen desire to know many things which hitherto had been matters of pure indifference to them.’ Moreover, her children showed ‘by instinct how to get ideas into their companions' minds’, coming, as they did, almost always from the same neighbourhood, and ‘limited to the same vocabulary’; they could therefore find, in their improvised school plays, ‘the correct terms of expression to convey the necessary intelligence to their hearers.’ (Finlay-Johnson 1912, pp.15,18,27). Another tutor had seen the Feudal system being acted out by dividing the class into king and barons (Archer, 1916, p.106). A.J.Church included extensive dialogues in his *Stories from English History* of 1894, for example in the story of the murder of Thomas Becket (Church 1894, p.159). This was in simple language and accessible for the children, and one can only speculate that an enterprising teacher would use this in the classroom situation. There was also much dialogue in the earlier pages, with the first ‘book’ of 48 pages made up of imagined dialogues with an old grandfather, telling the stories of Julius Caesar, Caractacus, and Boadicea (Church 1894, pp.45,49). The emphasis on kinaesthetic learning has echoes in Adamson’s plea in 1907 for children to do something ‘physically’ to kindle curiosity (Adamson 1907, p.270). In 1893 Landon observed the use of a clay model battlefield, with strips of coloured paper to represent troops, which left ‘a lasting impression upon the mind of the child’ (Landon, 1908, 403) and Archer believed cardboard modelling was essential (Archer 1916, p.95). J.J.Findlay, Professor of Education at Manchester University, stressed the importance of music (Findlay 1905, p.203) and Garlick, in the 1890s, recommended the ballad for its ‘intrinsic charm’ (Garlick 1896, p.270).



There were some reservations in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century manuals. Archer (1916, p.85) cautioned against the means overshadowing the history, turning the classes into modelling and drawing lessons, impromptu dramatisations, visits and excursions, and failing in the object of creating historical ideas. Wells in 1892 remained wary of the use of the historical novel, with children reading the tale and skipping the history and he also warned of ‘the danger of producing a sense of unreality in children’s minds, by too early raising of critical difficulties.’ He claimed, ‘children do not understand half lights; if we end a story that has impressed them by telling them that the most impressive part of it is more than doubtful, they are likely to... throw their history behind the fire’ (Wells 1892, pp.37,21). So they should not be introduced too early to historical doubt. The study of documentary evidence was to be left, according to Withers, to Standard VII, which the majority of children would not reach before leaving school (Withers 1904, p.195).

The material above does have resonance with what is regarded as good practice in contemporary English classrooms. The centrality of story-telling for younger children is shown in many current manuals, with John Fines recommending stories told orally as ‘inventions, creations, productions of the moment’, justified by ‘our curious nature... learning about other people is fascinating, distracting, deeply pleasurable’ (Fines 1997, pp.182,184). Rosie Turner-Bissett claims story to be ‘fundamental to human nature’ (Turner-Bissett 2005, p.85). Even though it appears to be ‘all teacher action and no child participation’, the child exercises the faculty of imagination, and ‘wonder is not passive and mindless’ (Fines 1997, p.185). There is a consensus on the motivational value of story. Linda Lestik (1989, p.114) agrees that a grounding in story, with its emphasis on human response to historical events, is the beginning of historical understanding and a precursor to any critical analysis of history. However, Keith Barton and others have cautioned against over-reliance on the use of stories. He claims that the uncritical presentation of stories about the past has serious drawbacks, because they usually omit any mention of the evidence upon which they are based’ (Barton 1997, p.424). Bruce VanSledright and Jere Brophy accept that history’s reliance on narrative plays nicely into children’s experience with storytelling, but claim that children’s narrative ability can be understood as valuable and problematic simultaneously; while they possess interest about motives in human interactions and demonstrate preliminary understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, children lack ‘an experiential knowledge base’ (beyond their own personal history) which hampers them developing accurate historical constructions and understandings (VanSledright and Brophy 1992, pp.851, 855, 841). They conclude that children lack ‘a wide range of knowledge that can anchor their constructions’ and they ‘try to make sense of whatever bits and pieces of history they may know’ with the danger that ‘attention to only the mythic and romantic layers may encourage children to equate history ... with the fanciful, imaginary stories they find so appealing in fictional literature’ (VanSledright and Brophy 1992, p.855). Fines and Nichols’ agree that the pupils’ own life

experiences are ‘necessarily less developed, their historical knowledge less advanced’ and yet they are also seen to have a great advantage, because ‘children can bring to a familiar historical event a sense of excitement and wonder which we, as adults, have long since forgotten’ (Fines and Nichol 1997, p.215). Clearly, the use of story in the history classroom is a continuing subject of debate.

Recent pedagogical research has centred on concepts of historical thinking, such as use of evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, and historical empathy. The English National Curriculum for Primary schools, implemented in 1991, has six key concepts which include chronological understanding, historical representation, and historical enquiry. Coltham and Fines argued in 1971 that skills are ‘essential to progress in the study of history’; for them, it is not enough to be able to reproduce facts, the equation for learning has to be knowledge and ‘a mastery of the skills and abilities required to handle it’ (Coltham & Fines 1971, p.23,5). Twenty years later, Peter Lee emphasised the importance of using history to develop skills such as evaluation because ‘without an understanding of what makes an account historical, there is nothing to distinguish such an ability from the ability to recount sagas, legends, myths or poems’ (Lee 1994, p.45). Indeed these ideas continue to influence thinking. Terry Haydn has written recently that the idea that history teachers should think about what learners would ‘get out of their history lessons’ is now ‘the new orthodoxy’; these ideas are ‘still relevant in terms of reminding history educators of the central importance of thinking carefully about why it is helpful to pupils to learn about the past and about particular aspects of the past... the process of thinking in both broad and precise terms about aims and objectives is as important and relevant as ever’ (Haydn 2010, pp.40,42). Interestingly, Michael Gove has precipitated renewed debate, which is outside the confines of this paper, with his keynote speech of 2010 questioning current approaches and claiming ‘it is critical that we ensure that every child has a proper spine of knowledge... Without that spine, history cannot stand up and take its place properly in the national curriculum’ (Cruse 2011, pp.14-15).

The use of the visual, and indeed the use of VAK (Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic), has become something of a mantra in UK Primary teaching. The UK Department for Education and Skills itself recommended the visual in learning in its publications. The guidance on Learning styles and Writing of 2002 strongly supported the use of VAK (DFES 2002) asserting that the visual is ‘increasingly significant in students’ experience’ and outlining a number of models to use to stimulate different approaches to visual learning. Its guidance of 2004 asserted: ‘In educational debate there is sometimes a tendency to emphasise the verbal and to neglect the visual dimension of human capabilities.’ This is criticised as ‘success in many subjects may require a greater emphasis on spatial thinking than is perhaps recognised... [and] pupils who are better thinkers spatially than they are linguistically may be disadvantaged’ (DFES 2004, p.21). History writers similarly support the use of visual stimuli. Turner-Bisset (2005, p.59) claims that ‘communicating through images is a natural

human instinct, from the cave drawings of early peoples to modern glossy magazines' and she points out that the iconic representation is one of Bruner's three ways of mentally representing the world. Pat Hoodles maintains that when children think of a historical period, they often recall visual images and they help the child to 'begin to build up a concept of period and a sense of time' (Hoodles 2008, p.54). Timelines are still seen as 'a major medium for isolating and handling chronology', as 'a powerful way of bringing home the relationship between events', and 'a clear visual idea of the passage of time, and how things function in sequence' (Fines and Nichol 1997, p.16).

The manuals of the early twentieth century also show other reflections of modern practice. There is enormous resonance with modern theories of drama being a motivating technique, making the past more relevant to children (Fines and Nichol 1997, pp.193-6) and as 'a medium par excellence for teaching history' providing a rich experience, the opportunity to construct imaginary worlds from different times and cultures and enabling 'speculation, modification and transformation of our understanding through examining different people's perspectives, alternative possibilities and the consequences of our actions' (Turner-Bissett 2005, p.102). The nineteenth century encouragement of music in the history classroom has modern echoes in Turner-Bissett's stress on the importance of music as 'a fundamental aspect of every human culture'. As with her predecessors of the nineteenth century, she recommends the British traditional folk-song as the main form for use in the Primary curriculum, because it was 'composed by ordinary people for an audience of ordinary people' (Turner-Bissett 2005, pp.123,125).

The 2011 Ofsted report commends current, outstanding teachers who 'fired' pupils' imaginations, bringing the programmes of study to life for pupils (Ofsted 2011, pp.17,30). The Victorian manuals similarly stress the importance of the teachers, and their power of 'graphic description'. For Landon in 1893, unless the teacher showed enthusiasm, and was 'gifted with the power of picturing out scenes and events', there would be an absence of 'that picturesqueness and power of vivifying the truths brought forward, which are so necessary to anything like an adequate presentment of history to children' (Landon 1908, p.394). Welton, saw having 'a well-prepared and stimulating teacher 'in history as more important than in other subjects' in order to make it real 'to the imagination both of himself and of his pupils' (Welton 1906, p.222). The disinterest of pupils was seen to be invariably the fault of the teacher, as all children liked to hear stories of other human beings. Adamson called on the teacher to engage pupils with 'laughter, admiration, pity, wonder or horror' (Adamson 1907, p.269). Woodward stressed the importance of the teacher to provide, 'voice, manner, fertility of illustration, unconscious emphasis, instinctive knowledge of the child's familiarity with action and with moral qualities... imaginative insight into the subject', to create 'clear and precise word pictures' (Maitland 1901, p.71). Landon even calls for teachers to present their lessons with 'dramatic force... as if he had been an eyewitness'. The lesson had to be 'to him a living reality, not a mere recitation of

dead facts' (Landon 1908, pp.400, 403). Such inspirational teachers must have been witnessed by these trainers. However, just as Ofsted found in 2011, there was a fundamental weakness with teachers' history knowledge, which led to 'a lack of confidence about the subject' (Ofsted 2011, p.32). Wells in 1892 claimed that elementary teachers were often 'only one week or one term ahead' of their pupils, and instead of having knowledge at their 'fingers' ends', so that illustrations and questions come with ease, 'I have known most conscientious men, who dreaded their history lesson above all other lessons in the week, and taught it very poorly too' (Wells 1892, p.22). HMI in 1894 explained that the subject was 'of such comparatively late introduction' into schools, that the older teachers had 'forgotten the little of it they acquired at college' and were forced to rely on the school reading books for their own instruction (PP 1894, pp.40, 221).

### **Summary**

The 1905 *Suggestions* admitted that the subject was particularly 'beset with difficulties', because of its wide scope, the controversial nature of some of the topics and the 'doubt in which many past events are involved'. In the elementary school, the problem was aggravated by the need to make the subject interesting and intelligible to children who left at an early age, yet avoid superficiality (PP 1905, pp.61-62). However, the above analysis shows that there did exist in the late Victorian period clear conceptions of how to make history accessible to children, many of which reflect current best practice in the subject. They also show that many leading educationalists, and probably the teachers who read them, were aware of the *need* to make the subject accessible to children. Indeed the manuals and reports used in this paper would prove a fruitful source of information on the practice in other subjects (particularly geography about which HMI also had much to say). The pupils themselves have left very little evidence of their experience, but, as shown above, late Victorian and Edwardian era history lessons were not invariably dull recitals of threadbare fare. Some pupils were enabled to develop picturesque understandings of the past of benefit to their lives beyond the classroom.

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