Final Report — Historical Association's Key Stage 2-3 History Transition Project

Main Findings:

1. Primary pupils love primary history when it is both challenging and engaging.

Dr. Tim Lomas cited the following as examples of primary history that demotivated pupils he spoke to about the subject:

> "Copying, simple comprehension, filling in worksheets, unstructured investigations (i.e. go and find out all you know about), simplistic questions - often closed and covering too much."

The effect of these unchallenging approaches on pupils' learning can be summed up in what Dr. Lomas describes as the 'so what?' factor.

The danger is that pupils are:
* bored by the teaching
* see no relevance in the content.

The clusters of teachers accepted the need to give primary pupils a more challenging diet. For example, at Godmanchester Primary School pupils produced their own commentary to accompany original victorian film extracts. At Great & Little Shelford Primary School, they designed their own 1953 Coronation mugs with linked images from the reign of Elizabeth 1. At Buckden Primary School, they considered why Queen Boudicca's reputation had shifted over time. The clusters also heeded Dr. Lomas's advice that primary history should be a combination of a "soap opera and a detective story". The choice of content for each scheme of work was drawn from a unit of work prescribed by the National Curriculum Orders for History and that had already been taught in the particular school to Year 6 classes. Each cluster then built on the prior learning of the content already taught to create a new scheme of work which extended the unit further with a deliberate focus on interpretations of history. Thus at Buckden primary school, pupils built on their prior learning of Britain from 1930 to study interpretations of evacuation to the countryside during the Second World War. This concentration on a relatively narrow piece of content met one of the criteria listed by Dr. Lomas for motivating pupils in Key Stage 2 history — "engagement in depth work."

Rather than "covering" a dry mass of historical detail, clusters also selected stories from the past that were likely to engage pupils' interest. At Milton primary school,

pupils were drawn into portrayals of poor Victorian children through an episode from *The Life of Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. Such stories fit another of Dr. Lomas's criteria for motivating pupils — "Looking at people and what they did." At Cottenham Primary School, pupils discovered that Alexander the Great may have been implicated in the murder of his father, killed his enemies in battle and had a reputation for drinking. All of these details are what Dr. Lomas describes as "sensational but human content." Throughout the schemes of work, pupils were immersed in original source material and later interpretations of past events, such as feature films, television documentaries, newsreels, paintings and photographs. They were motivated by what Dr. Lomas calls "active and challenging work with sources." As he also noted: 'Children frequently comment on the importance of attractive resources."

2. Planning Primary History around tightly structured enquiry questions improves the quality of teaching and learning

Dr. Michael Riley defined historical enquiry as:

> "A planning device for knitting together a sequence of lessons, so that all the learning activities — teacher exposition, narrative, source-work, role-play, plenary — all move toward the resolution of an interesting historical problem by means of substantial motivating activity at the end."

The concept of planning history teaching and learning in this way was new to most primary colleagues involved in the project. Much time and effort was devoted in cluster groups to devising "rigorous and engaging" enquiry questions that would inform the set learning objectives. Groups were encouraged not to just devise a heading for a piece of content, i.e. "Britain at the time of the 1953 Coronation" but to combine a focus on interpretations with a suitably challenging and engaging enquiry question. The Sawston cluster group became interested in the way that British people looked back to the reign of Elizabeth 1 for inspiration in the rather drab austerity of post-war Britain. They wrestled for an enquiry question that could do this. Suggestions included:

* 'Why did British people in 1953 look back uncritically on the reign of Elizabeth I?' (too long and too adult)
* 'How similar were Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II?' (no direct focus on interpretations)
* 'Why did British people in 1953 only remember the good bits of Elizabeth I's reign?' (interesting but clumsily worded)

The finally agreed question: 'Why did some British people in the 1950s describe themselves as New Elizabethans?' neatly summarised the complexity of the issue in an accessible way, while also giving some structure to the actual tasking. In order to answer the enquiry question, pupils would clearly need to be taught about conditions in 1950's Britain, about interpretations of Elizabeth I's reign and, lastly, conclude why some British people in the 1950s identified themselves so strongly with the earlier period.

The cluster groups then devised steps for the tasking within the enquiry with a key question for each step that created a sequence of learning "for maximum motivation" and "a substantial motivating enquiry question at the end." For example, the Cottenham cluster created a powerful enquiry question: "Why do historians and film-makers say different things about Alexander the Great?" The stepped key questions indicated to pupils the direction the enquiry was taking as it built up to a culminating task.

Who was Alexander the Great? —	This introduced pupils to the concept of differing interpretations of Alexander and the main events of his life.
What does Oliver Stone's film say about Alexander the Great? —	This allowed pupils to fully explore a film interpretation of Alexander.
What do historians say about Alexander the Great? —	This allowed pupils to analyse an historian's interpretation of Alexander.
So, why do historians and film makers say different things about Alexander the Great? —	Through engaging teaching, pupils used the two differing interpretations of Alexander to explore reasons for the differences in opinion.

Ideally, the *end* product of an enquiry should help pupils to answer the question set at the start.

3. Pupils are motivated by intrigue and mystery

There is an increasing trend for teachers to always place the learning objective on the board at the beginning of a lesson. While this practice is often appropriate, it is not always so. At Buckden Primary School, pupils were first asked what they thought

the characteristics of a hero would be in a British leader resisting the romans. They then viewed a clip from a recent British television interpretation of Boudicca (called *Warrior Queen*) without being told who this was. It showed the female rebel leader inspiring her troops. She did not fit some of the characteristics the pupils had suggested earlier, for example, she was not male. Pupils were intrigued by this contradiction and hooked into the enquiry by wanting to find out more about how someone who was apparently unsuitable as a rebel leader, ended up being one. Had the teacher introduced the enquiry question, "Was Boudicca Britain's first hero?", too soon, the element of surprise might have been lost. Even worse would have been the clumsy showing of a learning objective, such as "To find out about Queen Boudicca", at the beginning of the first lesson. It would have ruined the element of surprise altogether.

According to Dr. Michael Riley, an engaging starter activity should *hook* pupils into the enquiry. The role of a strong starter should be to act as what the late Dr. Rob Philips called "initial stimulus material". The starter may well be related to the focus of the enquiry but is often more effective as learning where the relationship to the actual content is oblique to pupils. This means that although the starter activity will be clearly related to the content of the enquiry, it may not be obvious to pupils what the connection is with the content until later in the sequence of learning. The initial stimulus acticity of the Boudicca enquiry asked pupils for possible characteristics of a British hero resisting the romans. While this was clearly related to the later consideration of Queen Boudicca, the starter actually made no reference to her. Of course, pupils should be aware of learning objectives and lead questions by the end of a lesson, but subtlety can be used about when deciding to reveal them. This maintains an element of suspense and mystery.

4. Teaching with a focus on Interpretations of History encourages higher order thinking

Dr. Michael Riley defined interpretations of History in a school context as being:

> "When the the *main focus* of children's work is on *how* people in later times have *reconstructed* and *presented* the past."

Such a definition demands sophisticated analysis of interpretations of history by pupils and an understanding of how and why they were constructed. The schemes of work produced by the cluster groups attempted to explicitly tease out those issues by the selection of material and the scope of the enquiries set. For example, "Did the 60s really swing?" set pupils the task of analysing a nostalgic website homepage for its intended purpose and analyse with reference to its font-types, illustrations, language, use of colours, etc. "How useful are living museums for telling us about Victorian

Britain?" culminated in a discursive writing frame where pupils weighed up the pros and cons in answer to the enquiry question. "Why do filmmakers and historians say different things about Alexander the Great?" required pupils to devise wording for the DVD cover of Oliver Stone's film *Alexander,* exploring the relationship between an interpretation and the available evidence from which it is drawn. These questions and tasks encourage higher order thinking because pupils are requested to do much more than what Dr. Lomas defined as "simple comprehension, filling in worksheets, unstructured investigations i.e. go and find out all you know about, and simplistic questions — often closed." The enquiry sub-questions themselves are largely open-ended but many nuanced answers to them are possible. For example, a subquestion from the enquiry "How do we remember John Lennon?" asks "How and why is John Lennon remembered differently?" These types of question indicate to pupils that so much of history is contested and the very apparent difficulty in reaching a 'right' answer becomes an important stimulus for pupils' learning. The approach across the schemes of work encouraged many of the characteristics of higher order thinking proposed by Resnick in 1987.

✳ Is not routine — the solution is not fully known in advance.

✳ Tends to be complex — a solution is not obvious from a single viewpoint.

✳ There can be several solutions to a problem not just one.

✳ Involves considered judgement and interpretation.

✳ Can involve the application of different criteria to the same problem that may conflict with each other.

✳ Involves uncertainty — not everything about the task at hand is known.

✳ Involves improving meaning — finding structure in apparent disaster.

✳ Requires effort — considerable mental work is needed for the kinds of elaborations and judgements required.

✳ Involves self-regulation / reflection on the thinking process.

In addition, pupils were encouraged to track and consider how their historical thinking changed as they were introduced to further evidential information and interpretations. The tasking for "How cruel were the victorians?" borrowed directly from Andrew Wrenn's Year 7 enquiry: "Joan of Arc - Saint, Witch or Warrior?". Pupils were asked to record their own views of the alleged cruelty of victorian crime and punishment as they were introduced to fresh evidence about the period that helped to overturn their initial impressions about it. Considering how and why their own views changed over the length of the enquiry was a form of metacognition where pupils "turned around on their own learning" in the words of Jerome Bruner. This process of metacognition is also a form of higher order thinking.

5. Primary History Dovetails Well With The Use of ICT and the Application of Literacy

Dr. Terry Haydn asserted that history has an important role in "challenging the popular perception that the internet is the fount of all truth and wisdom." The enquiry "Did the 60s really swing?" chose to create a typical homepage as a screenshot of the type of nostalgic website that trades on the view of the sixties as a time of lost innocence for baby boomers born in the late fifties and early sixties. Pupils had to identify its various features, font-type, use of colour, etc., in order to consider its purpose and audience. Dr Haydn also commented that the use of ICT in the teaching of history demanded a critical approach to evidence and should encourage the ability to recognise forms of manipulation and persuasion. The use of technology does not need to be complex to achieve this end. In "What can living museums tell us about Victorian Britain?" a poster consisting of montages of images advertising the Black Country Museum in Birmingham was placed inside a layers of inference diagram on an interactive whiteboard. The teacher was able to encourage pupil interrogation of the interpretation, inviting pupil comments which were then written around the image displayed on the board. Dr. Haydn also stressed that the use of ICT in history should form what Ben Walsh has called "a powerful learning package". In "Why did some British people in 1953 call themselves the New Elizabethans?" pupils had to place, and link, images from the 1953 Coronation and the original Elizabethan period on individually designed Coronation mugs in the ICT suite. The use of ICT is a means to enhance historical understanding. The historical context should not merely form a backdrop to a primarily ICT lead activity.

Lastly, the schemes of work sought to identify the "golden nuggets" Dr. Haydn talked about in the effective use of ICT in history lessons, which pupils are most likely to remember. In "Why do filmmakers and historians say different things about Alexander the Great?" groups of pupils created tableaux from the life of Alexander, communicated from differing viewpoints, e.g. that of a filmmaker, a critical arab historian, etc.

The groups had a choice of backdrops to pose against and the tableaux were photographed with a digital camera. As when, at different points in the schemes of work, pupils had the opportunity to position sorting cards on a living graph on an interactive whiteboard, or use the ICT suite to help present the significant outcome to an enquiry, the use of ICT was in itself fairly straightforward. It has the maximum effect on pupils' historical learning when it packs a punch and acts as a motivational tool. This has the most chance of happening when history objectives are in the driving seat of the planning.

In her training session, on the application of literacy in history, Christine Counsell referred to literary genres or text-types, e.g. analytical, persuasive and discursive, which good historical writing can cross. Aspects of these genres are to be found in the types of writing tasks set across schemes of work, whether it is weighing up if there was a myth that British children were welcomed to the countryside during World War Two, or writing a persuasive letter to a TV production company arguing for a fresh portrayal of poor, Victorian children. Christine also stressed the importance of pupils understanding the contextual knowledge of events before they attempted writing. Much of this understanding was built up across the schemes of work through the use of devices such as living graphs and card sorts. In "Was Boudicca Britain's first hero?" pupils positioned the events from the Roman occupation of Britannia along a chronological horizontal axis of a living graph while judging their level of threat to Roman control against a vertical axis. In turn, this aided pupils in judging the significance of Boudicca's revolt within its own period, before analysing how her reputation had shifted across time.

The role of speaking and listening activities in encouraging cognitive conflict among pupils was also very important in building historical knowledge prior to writing. In "Why do filmmakers and historians say different things about Alexander the Great?" pupils participated in a news conference in the presence of an historian and filmmaker before writing up why they differed in their portrayal of the Greek conqueror. In "Why did some British people in 1953 call themselves New Elizabethans?" pupils had to sort and re-sort cards summarising the events of the reign of Elizabeth I under different headings. Such activities prompted repeated re-readings and discussion about the same events, deepening the pupils' understanding of them. It also encouraged pupils to view historical knowledge itself as shifting with many possible answers to the same questions about the past. As Christine Counsell commented:

> "History teaching is about cultivating readiness.
> It is training children for uncertainty.'

History can reinforce and enrich whole school approaches to literacy in rigorous and engaging ways. However, as with ICT, this is best achieved when literary practices are translated into the structure of knowledge within school history itself. History serves literacy best when it is allowed to be itself.

6. The performance of Year 6 (and Year 5) pupils can often exceed teacher expectations. However, planning for challenging outcomes also requires carefully scaffolded tasks and appropriate support.

Both primary and secondary teachers involved in this project were impressed with what Year 6 pupils achieved (and year 5 pupils sometimes studying with them). Expectations of primary colleagues were raised by seeing the classes they normally taught often achieving more than than usual. A teaching assistant at Buckden Primary School observed: **"It's like they've gone up a year."** The emphasis on bringing best practice in Key Stage 3 history to bear on Key Stage 2 history planning clearly bore fruit. However, the impact was two way. Secondary teachers of history were challenged by the quality of work and enthusiasm of primary pupils. It set them thinking about the appropriate level of challenge set for pupils at Key Stage 3. As one secondary colleague commented: **"It makes you think, if Year 6 pupils can do this, what am I doing with my Year 8s?"**.

However, it is not enough in itself to set more challenging tasks for Year 6 history classes. If this is done without carefully thought through scaffolding and appropriate support, the only group to benefit will be the gifted and talented in the class. The use of writing frames, card sorts, living graphs, role play, discussion, open-ended questioning, layers of inference diagrams, and other techniques, allows all pupils to participate in activities and assists in helping more of them to climb into different concepts and ideas that would otherwise not be accessible.

The guiding principle of the schemes of work was not to rule out content and ideas as being too difficult for the age group, e.g. "Why do we need a better interpretation of poor Victorian children?", because where content *is* ruled out as being too difficult this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Year 6 pupils will not be able to understand a topic because the teacher decides that they won't be able to. It remains untaught.

The starting point of these schemes of work is wholly different. Many of the ideas the pupils were presented with incorporated complex historical problems that adults would find challenging to consider. But rather than ruling out these ideas out as far too difficult to teach, the challenge for teachers was to put the problem into wording that pupils could understand, and plan a learning journey that helped them reach their own conclusions. The use of historical enquiry as a planning device was vital in achieving this.

7. Using a range of teaching strategies more effectively meets the needs of the variety of pupils' learning styles

Pupils learn in a variety of different ways. Theorists have expressed this idea through the concepts of learning styles (for example, visual, auditory and kinesthetic) and multiple intelligencies. The schemes of work model a variety of teaching approaches from roleplay to annotation and this variety spreads the likelihood that more pupils will learn at some point through their preferred learning style. However, setting a variety of different styles of task is not enough on its own to improve the standard of teaching. Pace, challenge and engagement also play a vital role, as does planning rigorously within the framework of school history as a discipline, set out in the National Curriculum.

8. Both primary and secondary teachers benefit from planning and teaching together.

So much of what teachers do is completed in isolation from each other. This project has created partnerships across schools which will certainly outlast it. The eyes of primary colleagues have been opened to the best practice in Key Stage 3 planning. This has changed the way they plan Year 5 and Year 6 history in their own schools. At times, secondary colleagues will return to a primary school to repeat the teaching of a scheme of work from this project. At other times, it will be team taught. At other times, primary colleagues will feel free to teach other schemes of work from the project themselves. They will also tweak and change what they already teach to introduce new tasking and techniques they have been introduced to through the project. Likewise, secondary colleagues now have a well tested set of schemes of work which reinforces links with key primary schools through primary liaison. This link with a foundation subject department complements existing links to primary schools through core subjects. It also means that they review their own schemes of work at Key Stage 3 to make sure expectations take into account what they now know Year 6 pupils can actually achieve.