

What did – and didn't – SHP achieve in its GCSE books c.1980 to c.2010?

If pupils in school repeatedly fail to see that history has any use they are likely to reject it. A syllabus framed with the educational uses of history in mind ... and frequent discussion with pupils about history, its interest and its values, are suggested as ways in which pupils may come to see that history has its uses for them.

From A New Look at History, 1976

A New Look at History set out the philosophy and aims of the Schools Council History Project. David Sylvester, the founding Director, was the inspiration behind the Project and what most excited me as a young teacher was David's belief that we could enable students to understand the value of studying history if we made that value explicit to students. SCHP created the opportunity to do this in its 14-16 exam course to link second-order concepts (evidence, causation, change etc) to specific course units and to what were called at the time 'adolescent needs' – such as 'the need to think critically and make judgements about human situations' using evidence and the evaluation of that evidence. I was completely sold on the belief that students could and should be shown how to use their knowledge of the past and their understanding of how history is studied to understand and interpret their own world.

My school started to teach the SCHP exam course in 1976 and I have a half-memory of opening the boxes of new SCHP textbooks, wondering what excitements they contained and how on earth I was going to teach an exam course full of content I knew almost nothing about – the history of Medicine, Communist China, a local History around Us unit we hadn't yet devised! Thank heavens I was also teaching Elizabethan England, not the American West! Much of my first two years of teaching SCHP was therefore focussed on getting my mind around the content and exploring assessment – fortunately SCHP was making marking schemes available to teachers, a quite revolutionary moment. No such luxuries were available at A level or for other O level courses unless you were an examiner.

However, over those first years of teaching SCHP, I realised that despite the radical nature of the course (with 4 components – Development, Depth and Modern World Studies plus History Around Us unit – and focus on second-order concepts, all of which was utterly new and different from other courses), the SCHP textbooks were surprisingly unradical. They told students what happened and why in a narrative style similar to other textbooks and, like those other books, they included few tasks (suggestions in the TRBs) and illustrations were in black and white. The main difference was that SHP books included many more sources. Looking back, what stands out most, however, is that the books did not discuss why we were studying concepts such as evidence and did not discuss SCHP's core aim of helping students understand how they could use their knowledge of the past and their understanding of how history is studied to understand and interpret their own world. That was left to us as teachers, assuming we'd read the TRBs and *A New Look at History*.

What happened after those early teaching years was something I didn't imagine in 1976 – I found myself in a position to influence SCHP's textbooks and other publications, working from 1983 to 1990 as Director of what had become known as SHP (the C in SCHP was dropped when Schools Council funding ended in 1983) and as Publications Director from 1996 to 2012. This article is my explanation of how SHP's GCSE publishing developed over those thirty years. I'll discuss three phases and then briefly explore whether these books still have a CPD value for teachers today:

- i) The 1980s – a diversity of books, mostly now forgotten or unknown, in which we were exploring different approaches to structuring the teaching of the Development and Modern World Studies
- ii) The 1990s to the early 2000s – the *Discovering the Past* series (known by their white covers) which offered teachers a wider range and depth of content but were structurally more conservative.
- iii) c.2008-09 – we put a much stronger emphasis on visible learning - strategies to help students explicitly understand how to improve their learning – including new ideas about the structure of books, despite the time and space taken up by these being the first SHP books to contain guidance on assessment for individual specifications.

It's important to emphasise that this article is very much my interpretation of what the books were aiming to achieve and how they developed. At the heart of my interpretation is a paradox – that despite SHP publishing becoming highly successful and the books very widely-used, it was very difficult to make SHP's core aim explicit in our GCSE books. This has necessarily meant discussing some aspects of SHP's history as context.

I have not written about SHP books published after 2012 when I stopped working for SHP. I did edit and write for another GCSE series in 2016 but that wasn't under the auspices of SHP.

Notes for younger readers – history education in the 20th century had a different language. We had exam boards and a syllabus, not awarding bodies and a specification, we had O level and CSE until 1986. 'Key Stages' and numbered year groups (Y7 etc) started with the National Curriculum in 1991. The cursed idea that textbooks should contain guidance on assessment did not raise its ugly head until the 2000s. Therefore to help those who weren't teaching in olden times I've anachronistically used the terminology current in the 2020s rather than the terminology of the time.

In addition – the original SCHP course contained 4 units – Development, Depth and Modern World Studies plus History Around Us unit. The latter two were assessed by coursework and there was an Unseen exam assessing students' ability to use sources. Gradually this course changed (for example with the abolition of coursework) but between 1986 (when GCSE began) and 2016, awarding bodies each had two major specifications – one based on the SHP course, the other being Modern World 20thC history. Further information about the aims and structure of the original SCHP course and how they were inter-related (see especially page 17) is available at:

<http://www.schoolshistoryproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/NewLookAtHistory.pdf>

Phase 1 – The 1980s: new approaches to structuring courses.

There were two aspects of SHP publishing in the 1980s:

1. The success was publishing new versions of some of the original textbooks. These books had different structures from the originals because we felt they would be more effective in helping students and teachers focus on the core aims of the units.
2. We also tried to increase the range of topics teachers could choose from in the exam course and publish books for them – but we failed in every case!

I'll begin predictably with the successes – new versions of the books for the Development Study on Medicine through time and the Modern World Studies on China and Northern Ireland (MSW was a coursework unit which took a current issue and traced its origins and development).

These new books had different structures from the originals. My own eureka moment in terms of teaching structure came c1978 when teaching Medicine through time, started with prehistory. I finished teaching our History Around Us unit three weeks before Christmas so had to decide whether to start the jog through medical history with prehistoric and maybe Egyptian medicine before Christmas (and recap it afterwards!) or use those three weeks to give students a panorama of the whole course, discussing the big picture of changes, continuities and turning points? I chose the panorama and it helped students understand the nature of the Development Study and increased their ability to contextualise the story of each period as we came to it.

Out of experiences like mine and those of other teachers came the structure of the book for a new Development Study on Energy through time (introduced for the new GCSE and published in 1986) and for the revised 'Medicine' book in 1987. Both were written by Joe Scott, SHP's National Co-ordinator 1980 to 1983, and had similar structures. Here's 'Medicine' as an example:

pp. 4-75 – An outline of the 'story' through time

pp. 76-113 Factors – Why do things happen in history? – Individual enquiries the roles of Religion, War, Government, Science and technology

pp. 114-153 – Why did it happen then? – Individual studies on possible turning points – penicillin, women in medicine, vaccination, Vesalius and Harvey

pp. 154-173 – Understanding change and continuity – Individual studies on the pace of change, development, turning points, changes that got nowhere, progress.

This was a dramatically different structure from the original Medicine book which started with prehistory and worked steadily through to the beginnings of the NHS. The aim of this revision was to help students and teachers focus on the conceptual understandings of change, continuity and causation and avoid the misconception that the main focus was the history of Medicine or of Energy – and so prepare students more effectively for their exams. It was also based on the belief that students would develop a stronger

grasp of the overall chronology by revisiting the outline and moving around 'the story' rather than undertaking one slow jog through the topic. This was an early example of providing 'CPD in a textbook', aiming to help teachers teach more effectively.

Looking at this structure forty years later, I'm still impressed though now I'd add a very brief overview before the 70-page overview – the whole story in 3 or 4 spreads as we did in the 2010 books which required students to think about shape of the overview and about the conceptual targets in the first few pages of the book. And I'd add an overall Enquiry question to link it all together!

We also applied this new structure to revisions of two Modern World Studies books – *Northern Ireland* (1987) and *China* (1988). Again they started with an overview which took up a third of the book. The second section of *China* then focussed on four key turning points and the third explored changes and continuities in Chinese history since 1900. *Northern Ireland* had a similar structure, following the overview with studies of factors affecting events, then studies of turning points and finally of Irish links with the wider world. These different structures again focussed explicitly on the conceptual objectives, the core aims of the Modern World Study unit.

The other original feature of these Modern World Studies is that we held a competition to find authors – a sure sign there was no pressing schedule to meet! I advertised for authors in SHP's termly information bulletin and those interested sent in a book plan and chapter for their chosen topic. We had enough submissions for it to be a hard choice and two teachers who hadn't written before did really good jobs – Paul Davies on *China* and Tony McAleavy on *Northern Ireland*.

Where did the money come from for this work? Funding from the Schools Council had ended in 1983, reducing SHP staffing from 2.5 people to just 0.5 of me so funding was needed from somewhere to pay for the work on these books. The situation with the original titles was however complicated by the fact that copyright in the original books had been held by the Schools Council (SHP never received any royalties for its original books) and then passed onto its successor body SCDC, the Schools Curriculum Development Committee.

To revise those original books we therefore got help from SCDC – a grant of £30,000 to pay for authorial and editorial time. However, because these books were revisions, they had to be published by Holmes McDougall of Edinburgh, the publisher originally allocated to SHP by the Schools Council (the Council shared out projects amongst publishers but, by the time SHP was developed, only small publishers were left as options). Holmes McDougall did not have the resources of the major publishers so the revised books were still in black and white with quite simple artwork illustrations. Despite this, this very ordinary-looking revision of *Medicine* (revised by Chris Culpin in the early 90s) stayed in print until 2007, selling over 70,000 copies, a decent total given that the original 1970s publications were still widely used. (Not that SHP got a penny – just as with the original books, royalties on the revised books went to SCDC in return for the grant we'd received.)

The situation with the new Energy topic was simpler – we could make a fresh start. The funding for the work on the book came through the national TVEI initiative (Technical and Vocational Education) and the

book was published by OUP, quite independently of SCDC. OUP's role explains the very different appearance of *Energy* from the three revised books. *Energy* was in full colour and full of striking visual artwork representations of topics and concepts.

Now for the second thread in SHP publishing in the 1980s – our attempts to extend the options available in the exam course. Look away now if don't want to read this catalogue of failure!

Appearance isn't everything! Attractive though the *Energy* book was, hardly anyone taught or bought it – the topic of Energy didn't appeal to history teachers, and it didn't survive in specifications for very long. However its ideas paved the way for the restructured revision of *Medicine through time*. We didn't even get as far as books with the other ventures! We planned a third SCDC-funded, revised book on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, another original Modern World Study option. The book was written but SCDC wanted to have the text agreed with representatives of both sides of the issue ... and that agreement was never forthcoming (surprise?) so the book was never published.

We got further with plans for four new Depth Studies – Iron Age to Roman Britain, The Crusades, Fourteenth Century England and Germany 1918-1945 to join the original threesome – Elizabethan England, Britain 1815-1851 and the American West. In the late 1980s all the awarding bodies agreed to examine these new topics using specifications drafted by SHP and, because these were new topics, we were free to work with OUP as the publisher. Writers were chosen, they began work and in two cases finished the texts – and then the National Curriculum was announced. This mattered because, in its original form, the NC included History to 16 and the draft 14-16 outline curriculum would have put an end to SHP's exam course. History didn't become compulsory to 16 of course but, as soon as the picture became clear, the awarding bodies were racing to create revised specifications for GCSE, including for their new versions of SHP, and three of those four new Depth studies were forgotten. No prizes for guessing which one remained.

SHP's publishing in the 1980s was therefore only partially successful. Attempts to produce new books failed but the revisions were a success, demonstrating how using a different course structure could improve students' understanding of the aims of the Development Studies and Modern World Study. In retrospect, I have a feeling that new topics and books were considered partly because they would bring in funding, as with *Energy* and a short-lived plan for a new MWS on Japan but neither idea was a response to teachers' needs or interests. The four Depth Studies that were never published were less about income, more a desire on my part to widen the chronological spread of the options but I doubt if the three 'early' topics would have had many takers. And these were still quite conventional topics – no exploration of other cultures, even if issues of empire and cultural understanding were implicit in the topics on Iron Age to Roman Britain and The Crusades.

One final essential question – did the new books tackle SHP's core aim of helping students understand how studying history can be useful to them? The new Modern World Studies books had concluding questions and brief text which linked to this aim – but it was brief and we didn't use design to flag up the importance of the questions as we could have done. The *Medicine* book was less explicit – issues about progress and turning points created opportunities for teachers to discuss this aim but the books didn't talk directly to

students about the issue. The book needed more space for this, clear examples, direct text – something to shout ‘this is important, it’s worth thinking about!’

Phase 2 – The 1990s to the early 2000s: depth of coverage and variety of presentation

Under Colin Shephard (Director 1990-1996), a publishing contract was signed with John Murray which for the first time brought SHP a share of the royalties of the books it created. This was highly successful in terms of sales and teachers' responses to the books and it was also essential – along with income from the annual conference, the royalties kept SHP in existence.

One consequence of the creation of a necessary income-stream was that the focus of SHP publishing changed. In the 1980s our focus had been on resources for the 14-16 exam course – even the disappointing *SHP History 11-13* series was preparing students for the exam course – but now SHP was publishing for KS3, for A level and for Modern World History units at GCSE as well as the core SHP courses that were offered by all the awarding bodies (SHP was one of two main specifications offered by awarding bodies, the other being Modern World 20thC history).

In hindsight, one consequence of this huge commitment to publishing was that it became harder to concentrate on SHP's original core aim of helping students understand why the study of history helps them make sense of their world. Looking back, I find this very puzzling – I can see it clearly now but, as I was more involved with SHPs publishing than anyone from 1996 to 2012, I must have been largely responsible for losing sight of our original goal.

Over the next couple of pages I'll explore this paradox of achieving success while losing sight of SHP's core aim by looking at the GCSE books from this period, the *Discovering the Past for GCSE* series (the 'books with the white covers'), and the spin-off *Essentials* books. The 'white books' were highly successful – teachers still talk very positively about them and they remain in use two decades after publication, even if teachers increasingly rely on battered copies because some titles are out of print.

Firstly, two paragraphs of necessary but boring description! There were actually two phases to the 'white cover' series. The first books, published between 1996 and 1998, was initiated while Colin Shephard was SHP Director – two core SHP topics (Medicine and the American West), three books for Modern World courses (Russia 1905-41, USA 1919-41 and Britain and the Great War) and one book, Germany 1918-1945, used for both courses. I wasn't involved in this phase, other than writing the Medicine book and, looking at the publication dates, I'm surprised to discover that Medicine was the first of these books to be published – I'd long assumed it was published after the 20thC topics.

The second group of books was edited by Chris Culpin and myself and appeared between 1999 and 2000 and were chiefly for SHP courses – Crime and Punishment, Elizabethan England, Britain 1815-51, The Struggle for Peace in Northern Ireland – together with a book on South Africa which was more likely to be used by schools using the Modern World specification. Finally in 2001 came Medicine for Edexcel, a spin-off from my Medicine book.

Why were the GCSE 'white cover' books so successful? Unlike some other SHP series, there wasn't one big idea behind these books – Colin's aim was all-round excellence. Not a bad target! One great strength was

that they were about the topics, the history, and not limited by the content of a single specification. With the exception of the final book, *Medicine for Edexcel* (about which more later), they could all be used for any of the three SHP specifications or for the various Modern World specifications. They offered teachers depth and variety of material to choose from – a wealth of text, lengthy sources, large illustrations and, in the later books, plenty of varied artwork which presented key ideas with clarity in addition to explanations in text. The books were rich in knowledge and activities – not that books being rich in knowledge was worth commenting on. Isn't that what books are supposed to be?

This depth of material was made possible by having plenty of time for research and writing. We weren't fighting to get the books published as quickly as possible to meet a deadline dictated by exam reform, the kind of national round of specification reform that developed in later years. We had time to research the topics and choose content that told students important things about the issues. Also important was having plenty of pages – we weren't squeezing too much material into too few pages for fear of looking too difficult. With the exception of *Britain and the Great War* they were all over 136 pages and the Development Studies on Medicine and Crime and Punishment over 200 pages long. And those pages were all used to discuss the history and provide strong questions and activities – none of the books contained guidance on answering exam questions. We assumed and trusted that teachers knew how to adapt the material to their individual specifications, that it was more useful to give teachers a wide range of material to choose from than yet more guidance on to answering a 15-mark question, guidance that could never have the authority of the awarding bodies themselves and would at some point be out of date.

As a writer, one memory of working on the Medicine and Crime books is the time I had to sit in the university library and seek out material that had not appeared in books before – the articles in *Speculum*, for example, a deeply academic journal for medievalists that gave me the material to create the street scene artwork of late medieval London to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of public health laws at the time. Similarly I found material in court rolls from Norfolk and Wakefield to show the complexities of attitudes to crimes and punishments in the 14th century – just two of many examples of the material that made the books look so teachable and so enthused teachers.

Having described those strengths, this was in other ways a more conservative series than those SHP produced in the 1980s. Individual topics, questions and activities pushed boundaries but there's no sign of the structures of the 1980s books which allowed us to focus more explicitly on the core aims of the Studies in Development and Modern World Studies. The 'white cover' books did have longer and very clear concluding sections on conceptual understandings and course aims, similar to the concluding sections of the 80s, but most of them returned to a 'start from the beginning and work through to the end' structure. As I wrote three of these books and edited two more I was clearly as much responsible for this as anyone – and I must admit, this now puzzles me, particularly the absence of any effective big overviews at the start of the Medicine and Crime books. Why didn't I go back to the 1980s structure include an opening overviews? I don't know.

The one really helpful structural change came in two of the Depth Studies. All the books used enquiry questions to structure their individual sections but *Elizabethan England* and *Britain 1815-1851* went

further, building the whole topic round a major enquiry question – ‘Was Elizabeth a successful ruler?’ and ‘Why wasn’t there a revolution in early 19thC Britain?’. This gave these Depth Studies a structural coherence that the 1970s books hadn’t had and had the potential to give students a greater sense of achievement when completing their overall enquiry.

Out of this core GCSE series emerged *Essentials* books on four major SHP topics – Medicine, Germany, American West and Northern Ireland. These were much shorter, intended to be more immediately accessible for students, very focussed on teaching activities and, as the title suggests, covering the basic content. One of them, however, did return to the 1980’s spirit of offering a different structure and that was *The Struggle for Peace in Northern Ireland (2004)*. Ben Walsh wrote the white-cover version, his immense knowledge of and commitment to understanding the history producing a really good book. Ben then let me use his book as a quarry for a very different structure for the *Essential* version. It began with an overview of core issues in just 8 pages – on similarities and differences between religious groups, on the geography of Ireland, a timeline activity. And then the book moved away from chronology to explore a series of enquiries asking questions geared to understanding how study of the past helps understand the world today. These are the questions which led into a concluding question ‘Why has it been so difficult to have lasting peace?’:

1. Is it really all about religion?
2. Does history really make peace more difficult to achieve?
3. Why don’t the simple answers work?
4. Why are fears and prejudices so strong?
5. Why should be optimistic about peace?

The radicalism of this approach may well have driven by the impossibility of creating a ‘simpler’ narrative approach but it still feels to have been the right approach in terms of offering teachers and students a direct route to achieving SHP’s aims for the Modern World Study.

These books were highly successful and I was very pleased with those I wrote and edited, despite my later misgivings about structures. However I remain puzzled by the absence in the books of discussion of SHP’s original core aim of helping students understand why the study of history helps them make sense of their world. Even the series aims, set out in the TRBs, don’t mention this aim – they’re about interesting and motivating students, thorough exam preparation, tackling conceptually difficult areas, developing students’ ability to work as historians. So what had happened?

There’s no simple answer – I wish I could see into my own mind to find out what I was thinking back then. One contributory factor was that we were juggling a huge amount of SHP work – conferences, CPD, books for every level. Much of this was shouting at us ‘you need to do this NOW!’. Deciding what to include about the aim was also difficult – it needs identifying as an aim at the beginning of the books, space in the form of

several pages to set out the issue, create material to work with, summing up text, much more than just a couple of questions to prompt teachers to raise the issues. We also needed to spend time discussing how to do this and pushing our publisher to give us the pages – but all those other priorities got in the way. Maybe the passage of time had an influence too – it was 30 years since I'd first been excited by SHP's aims.

So all I can say in conclusion is – wonderful books but I still regret that one shortfall.

One final paragraph about this phase of SHP publishing. After the 'white cover' Medicine book was published, we had a request from Edexcel for a book that contained just the content needed for their Medicine specification. It was a portent of things to come – a book written for a single specification. In part this arose out of the great success of the 'white cover' book – Edexcel teachers wanted to use it but there were details from their specification that we hadn't included and details they didn't need. I agreed to write *Medicine for Edexcel*, using as much as possible of the existing book. What's interesting looking back is that, while it was for the Edexcel course, references to assessment are minimal compared to later GCSE books. Just 7 of the 212 pages relate to exams – two sets of sample questions and sources for an exam assessing the use of evidence. But, importantly, there's no guidance on how to answer these questions successfully and no other references to the other exam on Medicine. So, while this book was a sign of things to come, it bowed its head only very slightly in the direction of providing guidance on assessment. Sales were good, though not so good as to think we should have produced individual books for the other specifications – proportionally the white cover book outsold the Edexcel book significantly!

Phase 3 – 2008-09: Three doses of Medicine – Making the learning visible

It was nearly a decade before SHP published any more GCSE books – we were concentrating on A level and a big KS3 series and, anyway, the ‘white cover’ books had done so well there was no need to do more. Then, before we’d finished that KS3 series in 2008, we were pitchforked into writing new GCSE books by an overhaul of the specifications – and by now the culture of books had changed. Hodder Education (which had taken over John Murray) wanted SHP to create Medicine books for each of the individual awarding body specifications, books that would be ‘badged’ by the awarding bodies to show they approved our work. Medicine was Hodder’s priority because it promised the highest sales – new versions of Crime and Punishment were written at a slightly later date and Depth Studies books were revised from the strong base of the 1990s GCSE series but as I wasn’t involved in those books I’m going to concentrate here on the three new Medicine books.

After some uncertainty, we decided to go ahead. Left to our own devices, SHP would still have considered publishing one generic book, covering a broad range of content and omitting any advice on tackling specific types of questions but, in fairness to Hodder, we had to compete on the same footing as other publishers i.e. producing books for a single specification. Dale Banham and I acted as series editors but ended up doing a lot more than editing!

The biggest pressure we faced was time because the schedule for the new GCSE allowed only fifteen months, between the publication of the specification details and the beginning of teaching. It was a short enough time if we had simply rewritten the existing SHP Medicine book with minimal changes but we wanted to produce very different materials, incorporating ideas about learning and teaching that Dale Banham and I had been developing through Dale’s teaching and in the KS3 series we were just completing. Deeply over-optimistic though this was, given the schedule, we wanted to create books that again offered teachers a form of ‘CPD in a textbook’.

It’s worth spending another paragraph on the schedule as this explains what I will say next. These were big books – the OCR and AQA books were 216 pages and Edexcel 234 pages. We got first sight of the draft specifications in the early summer 2008 and after a short delay, started work on the OCR book in August and completed it in January 2009 – that’s five months. I had taken 18 months over the 1996 version. AQA Medicine was written by March and Edexcel by May – 3 months each. (I’m exhausted just typing that!). They weren’t published when teaching began in September but appeared soon afterwards. Dale and I were very pleased with them – but the schedule had harmful effects too, contributing to my belief that the development of badged books containing specific guidance for students on assessment is a deeply negative development.

Firstly, the schedule destroyed plans to give experience to new writers, mentoring them through the process of writing drafts and redrafts and learning the craft of creating textbooks. We had identified talented teachers interested in writing but the brevity of the timetable forced us to change this plan, hence Dale and I wrote all three books – my freelance schedule meant I could devote daytime to writing. This was an opportunity lost.

The second very negative impact of this schedule was the lack of time for research. In 1995 I had spent time in the university library, reading new research in monographs and journals. That produced some of the best material in that book but the 2008-9 timetable made such research impossible. This lost the opportunity to find new material and check that the approach of the specifications was in accord with current research – I had a lot of question marks over the portrayals of medieval medicine in the specifications but nowhere near enough time to review this properly.

Despite all this, we went back to first principles, creating a new suite of activities which were structured around the problems students have in learning in Studies in Development and implementing solutions that have been successful. We also made links back to the KS3 National Curriculum, especially the focus on enquiry, to build explicitly on students' previous experience of History. So what did these books offer that previous SHP Medicine books hadn't?

The pervasive spirit of the books was the emphasis on explicitly identifying students' learning problems and creating resources to overcome them. This required re-thinking the structure of the books so that we started with a strong but brief overview because we knew that one major problem students had was losing their sense of the overview of the history of medicine. The 10-page opening therefore gave students the resources to build up an overview of medicine and suggest a hypothesis in answer to the overall enquiry 'Why do people today have better health and longer lives than people in the past?' (This was obviously written before the 2011 election.) The introduction also explained why these overview tasks were important for effective learning and would help students do well. We also introduced the factors that created change or continuity and explained two things not included in previous SHP versions of Medicine – an explanation of why they were studying what was then still called a Development Study and how it fitted into their overall course. This last page ended with the question 'Can you suggest how any part of your History course helps you understand the world today?' It was just one page but SHP's core aim was at last being discussed at the beginning of a unit.

At the start of work on each historical period we also helped students develop overviews of that period – again so there was less chance of them getting lost in detail – beginning each section with a double-page artwork of London with speech and information bubbles providing core information about medical practices and events. This asked students to identify similarities and differences from previous periods and create a hypothesis about the extent of change in the period. Throughout the book we also used diagrams to present information in a variety of ways – concept maps, factors diagrams, memory maps, washing lines, tableaux created with digital cameras, all techniques students could use in other topics and other subjects to learn more effectively.

As in earlier books, we finished with a lengthy section discussing the various aspects of change, continuity and causation but it also summed up our overall enquiry question. In addition, in the OCR book we returned to SHP's core aim with a concluding double-page exploring how history helps us understand the world around us. Two pages wasn't enough but it was a lot more than we'd managed in earlier books. We also identified this issue in the TRBs with a heading 'How does this Development Study inform students'

understanding of their world?’ and a short discussion of the importance of this issue. However, those pages in the OCR book didn’t appear in the other two books, presumably because of pressure of space.

Overall, these were three very good books despite the manic haste in which they were written. The focus on learning effectively and structuring the book and activities around learning problems harked back to the 1987 version of Medicine but took the ideas much further and much more explicitly, explaining to students why we were asking them to tackle the content in these ways and providing many examples of how to summarise, record and understand the material. We were making the nature of learning visible, not hiding it behind a wall of content. We also said more in the OCR Medicine book about SHP’s core aim than in any previous books – maybe still not as much as I think is needed, but it was an advance – but it’s quite shocking, looking again at the other books to discover those final pages on SHP’s core aim weren’t included.

And finally, we did include a lot of guidance on assessment for the individual specifications but refused to be restricted to the boards’ assessment objectives and question types. The guidance on how to collect and record information, how to revise effectively and how to improve written explanations was of value well beyond this unit of the course or history as a subject. We were able to do this because Hodder gave us a lot of pages to enable us to achieve our aims – which I think and hope we did and did so again for the series Dale and I edited for the Edexcel specification in 2016.

In those books in 2008-9 and 2016 we felt it was important not to acquiesce in the move towards textbooks being merely servants of awarding bodies and their assessment techniques. To quote Cath Bishop in her book *The Long Win: the search for a better way to succeed* (2020):

[the dominance of assessment and league tables] *‘has created students throughout the system who are thinking solely about the results, not the process or reasons for learning ... the reward isn’t doing the work or applying the new knowledge acquired or adapting that knowledge for a new context. It isn’t thinking differently or learning how to think; it’s all about the mark you get at the end.’*

Sadly, some textbooks have played their part in creating this ‘it’s only the results that count’ mindset. The quality of books has been the victim of an unholy triple alliance – the involvement of awarding bodies in ‘badging’ books and expecting the inclusion of assessment guidance, the far too-brief schedules for research and writing and, thirdly, the reduction of the number of pages in books. Longer books (like those I’ve described above) can moderate the dominance of assessment guidance by providing more and richer material for teachers to choose from and for students to read and become enthused by, to hear about diverging views and changing historiography, to gain a fuller sense of why they’re studying x and y.

Perhaps I would be less hostile if publishers were more honest about why they include assessment guidance. The explanation I’ve been given is that ‘we’ve asked teachers and they say they want assessment guidance.’ This is an argument on a par with ‘I gave my three-year-old a bag of sweets because I asked him if he wanted a sweet and he said yes’. It’s a pathetic piece of buck-passing when the reality is that once one or two publishers included assessment guidance other publishers felt they had to do so. Publishers should

concentrate on providing books full of good history and guidance on learning – how to study history effectively – instead of paring that back to fit in guidance on how to answer specific types of question.

Reflections: Can ‘old’ textbooks be of value to teachers today?

My first reaction to revisiting these books was how enjoyable it is to look again at individual pages, activities, artwork and ideas about learning and teaching that still look enticing and challenging – and very useable. The creativity of much of this still makes me smile! I do hope teachers take the opportunity to seek out forgotten treasures in these books (many of which are available very cheaply if they’re not in your cupboards!)

In addition, I think there’s also a broader value in these books for teachers and departments. The books may not be new but their ideas on planning, teaching and learning still provide valuable insights into effective GCSE teaching. Here are some of the possibilities based on the work we did on these GCSE books, both what we did well and what we didn’t do nearly enough of! Some of these notes refer to my last GCSE series in 2016, published by Hodder for the Edexcel specification on three Thematic Studies and four Depth Studies – the content may be different from yours but the teaching and learning ideas are widely applicable.

I’ll start with some of the ideas we included that I’m pleased with!

1. Structuring GCSE units around the learning problems students have – for example, some or many students struggle to build a ‘big picture’ of a theme across time. This means they get lost chronologically and miss the point that these units are studies in change, continuity and causation, not just about the topic content. Hence back in the 1980s, we first developed an overview section at the beginning of Thematic Studies but did so more effectively in the 2008-9 books and again in the 2016 books Dale and I edited for the Edexcel specification.

2. We also built in new activities to tackle more detailed problems students have in courses. Constructing a course involves planning around the problems students have in learning as well as around the content and the assessment objectives. For example, many students lose confidence because they struggle to keep track of ‘who’s who?’ – they meet so many names that they lose track and this undermines their confidence in their ability to learn. In our 2016 Depth Studies we used pages to help overcome these problems and it now feels essential – it may not feel that the course is moving forward covering necessary content but it really helps in the long-run – for details see

<https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/WhosWho.html>

3. In our later books in 2008-9 and 2016 we focussed heavily on ‘visible learning’, giving students techniques to help them learn effectively about history – concept maps, factors diagrams, memory maps, washing lines and other techniques – AND explaining how to use them and why they are useful. These techniques can be used at all ages, including A level. Many had strong visual components and are available here:

<https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/attainment/index.htm>

4. We continued to use enquiry questions and the enquiry process, the process being something very different, more explicit and more valuable in the long-term than simply asking 'enquiry questions' which, however we dress them up, may be just 'questions' to students! In some of our Depth Study books c2000 and in more recent books in 2008-9 and 2016 we used this process of asking questions, constructing hypotheses and revisiting those hypotheses really helpful in giving coherence to whole units such as Elizabethan England and Medicine through time. In addition, we used the enquiry process to 'layer' work on a new topic or period e.g. using artwork reconstructions of medical practice in London at the beginning of each historical period to provide a first layer of information for students and to get them hypothesising about changes and continuities. This gives students confidence that they can think about possible answers before they've covered every detail of the topics and more confidence when moving onto a deeper layer of knowledge. Discussion of the importance of developing understanding of the process of enquiry can be found here:

<https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/EnquirySkill/index.htm>

5. We asked a full range of historical questions on each topic rather than restricting questions in books to those examined as assessment objectives. Limiting questions in a Thematic Study or Depth study etc to those on the specified assessment objectives deprives students of opportunities to keep answering other types of questions and distorts the nature of studying history. My worst moment in thirty-five years of textbook writing came in 2016 when an awarding body reader was critical of our inclusion in a book of sources and questions on their value as evidence plus questions and discussion on significance because neither evidence nor significance were among the assessment objectives for this unit of the course. In this person's mind the only questions we should have been asking were about the specified assessment objectives of change, continuity and causation. I was appalled by this reduction to 'lowest common denominator' teaching and publishing but happily my editor at Hodder agreed with me and my original questions on evidence and significance stayed alongside the questions linked to the assessment objectives.

6. The 'white cover' books of the late 1990s in particular were admired and widely used because of their wealth of historical information and sources, creating opportunities to deepen students' knowledge of GCSE topics beyond the basics of specifications. School-produced resources have the opportunity to do this too, making good the loss of richness of material when textbooks have far fewer pages and just cover the basics. This extra depth then gives students the material to debate the answers to questions and issues about their GCSE topics and so build their ability to argue, using evidence to support their views and appreciate that conclusions are often interpretations rather than right answers.

And now for some of those things we didn't do enough of but are really important.

7. Time needs to be built into courses to identify students' likely misconceptions and preconceptions about the content and topics, about their understanding of second-order concepts and about the process of studying history. This discussion of misconceptions was often squeezed

out of our GCSE books but identifying and challenging those misconceptions and preconceptions is fundamental to effective learning. If these aren't identified and challenged EXPLICITLY then they may well stay embedded in students' minds.

8. Students need to understand why their GCSE course contains a variety of types of history – thematic units, depth studies etc. Unless this is explained and discussed, it's all just more content. It was only in the 2008-9 books that we included explanation of why courses were devised to offer varied perspectives and periods of history – something we should have done from the 70s.

9. My final point arises from our consistent inability to include material in GCSE books to help students understand why studying history is valuable to them, i.e. how their knowledge of the past and their understanding of how history is studied can help them understand and interpret their own world. Looking back, this is my greatest regret at all levels – do departments focus enough time on this or, as in our books, does this get squeezed out by material that's of much shorter-term value?

And in broader conclusion ...

Looking back over these series, my final thought is how varied they were, moving from the focus on how to structure teaching Development and Modern World Studies in the 1980s to more conservative structures in the 1990s but a great richness of material and activities and then, in 2010, to a strong emphasis on learning – how to study history effectively – alongside a very different use of overviews and overall enquiry questions. That variety came about because the people who created the books had different emphases and were working in changing contexts – and yet the books were all very successful in providing 'CPD in a textbook', offering teachers new ideas about planning, teaching and learning.

All this, of course, has been my interpretation of these GCSE books, an interpretation vulnerable to the erratic patterns of memory and my own emphases and subjectivity. As Penelope Lively wrote in her book *According to Mark*:

'What people remember is distorted not only by the shortcomings of memory but by the myth-making of the rememberer.'

But then, as historians, you're well capable of coping with potentially unreliable sources!

Appendix: The series and books discussed in this article

SHP publications in the 1980s

Joe Scott, *Energy through Time*, OUP, 1986

Joe Scott, *Medicine through Time*, Holmes McDougall, 1987

Paul Davies, *China*, Holmes McDougall, 1987

Tony McAleavy, *Conflict in Ireland*, Holmes McDougall, 1987

Discovering the Past for GCSE (the 'white cover' series)

(all published by John Murray/Hodder)

Ian Dawson and Ian Coulson, *Medicine and Health through Time*, 1996

Greg Lacey and Keith Shepherd, *Germany 1918-1945*, 1997

Terry Fiehn, *Russia and the USSR 1905-1941*, 1996

Carol White, Margaret Samuelson, Rik Mills and Terry Fiehn, *The USA between the Wars 1991-1945*, 1998

Dave Martin and Colin Shephard, *The American West*, 1998

Greg Hetherington, *Britain and the Great War*, 1998

Ian Dawson, *Crime and Punishment through Time*, 1999

Ben Walsh, *The Struggle for Peace in Northern Ireland*, 2000

Andy Harmsworth, *Elizabethan England*, 1999

Dave Martin, *Britain 1815-1851*, 2000

Christopher Culpin, *South Africa since 1948*, 2000

Ian Dawson and Ian Coulson, *Medicine for Edexcel*, 2001

The Essential Series

(all published by John Murray/Hodder)

Ann Moore, Ian Dawson and Ian Coulson, *Essential Medicine and Health*, 2002

Dave Martin and Nigel West, *Essential American West*, 2005

Ian Dawson and Ben Walsh. *Essential The Struggle for Peace in Northern Ireland*, 2004

Dale Banham and Christopher Culpin, *Essential Germany 1918-1945*, 2004

The Medicine Trilogy

(all published in 2009 by John Murray/Hodder)

Ian Dawson, Dale Banham and Peter Smith, *OCR Medicine and Health through Time*

Ian Dawson and Dale Banham, *AQA Medicine and Health through Time*

Ian Dawson, Dale Banham and Dan Lyndon, *Edexcel Medicine and Health through Time*

Edexcel Series

(edited by Ian Dawson and Dale Banham for Hodder Education, all published in 2016)

This final series is not discussed at length above because it wasn't an SHP series, but I've included it because it has a wealth of teaching and learning suggestions.

Ian Dawson, *Medicine through Time c1250-present*

Alec Fisher and Ed Podesta, *Crime and Punishment c1000-present*

Sarah Webb and Ed Podesta *Warfare through Time c1250-present*

Ian Dawson, Esther Arnott and Libby Merritt, *Anglo-Saxon and Norman England c1060-88*

Dale Banham, *The Reigns of King Richard I and King John, 1189-1216*

Dale Scarboro and Ian Dawson, *Henry VIII and his Ministers, 1509-1540*

Barbara Mervyn, *Early Elizabethan England, 1558-1588*