

# SIMON SCHAMA AND TEACHERS: OUR CHILDREN, OUR HISTORY

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What kind of past is it that Michael Gove's proposed history curriculum offers to schoolchildren and their teachers? Can it be taught? Should it be taught? And what are the consequences for our national culture and identity? The historian leads the conversation and welcomes contributions from primary and secondary school teachers.

Transcript<sup>1</sup> (from Sky Arts HD Programme broadcast Wednesday June 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 at 7pm).

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<http://www.hayfestival.com/p-6108-simon-schama-and-teachers.aspx>. The February 7<sup>th</sup> draft National Curriculum is given as an Appendix to this transcript.

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## **Welcome and introduction: why history matters**

My heroes – history teachers – welcome!

You know that history is a serious matter, never more so than now. Not a stroll down memory lane. It's not, you know, Downton Abbey, Westminster Abbey or Tintern Abbey. It's not just a romance of bustles and butlers. It counts, it matters. It affects how we feel about each other as a collected family of memory. It's very appropriate that we are having this conversation on the border of England and Wales (I hope that some of you in a minute will talk about, well, vent – this is an opportunity for venting; venting suddenly sounds like a Welsh word, actually – it probably isn't, but maybe we'll turn it into one) ... but on the borderland between two different and often conflicting traditions.

History matters perhaps now more than ever because we are at a moment in our history where we are not quite sure where the borders of our country are – what connects is and what might disconnect us. We're at the moment where there is a kind of fierce political movement inside England which is all about turning its back on Europe – UKIP.<sup>2</sup> We're at the moment when it's possible that Scotland might become an independent country once more. Interesting to me, that in the checklist<sup>3</sup> of Michael Gove's<sup>4</sup> desiderata for things that must be known, the Act of Union<sup>5</sup> whereby Scotland, in a kind of shamefully corrupted way, became part of the Union, is not one of the necessary topics.

We're also at a time when issues of allegiance are very distressing. We are faced constantly with the issue of whether or not fanatical religious ideology should overcome and overturn other bonds of the allegiance of memory – the stories that we share together.

So history is not just a stroll down memory lane as you fantastic teachers know. It's an important thing – it's something that ... it's not just simply the antique furniture polish that covers our culture. It will determine for our children really whether we do feel connected as a country. It's got to be, bless her, it's important that the Royal Family does what it does. It's

important that we felt as good as we seemed to have felt last year about the Olympic Games and the Jubilee. There has to be more than that ... it has to be a living thing.

Our kids have to know, and probably all you kids out there do know already, why the Magna Carta<sup>6</sup>, coming up for its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary, made a difference, not just to England but to the world – a difference which turned out to be in some places but not in others, happily irreversible.

So it is an important issue. And, with this in mind, about two and a half years ago, I was weirdly volunteered by Michael Gove – who in many ways I admire and respect – to be, not what was preposterously called ‘History Tsar’ – I am not a Tsar – Jews feel very funny about being Tsars (anybody who was on the receiving end of Tsarishness).<sup>7</sup>

### **The national curriculum – problems with past versions**

But I’ll say a word or two about how the national curriculum might be looked at once again. And I was, along with other people, concerned a bit about what seemed to be the disconnectedness actually of history teaching in schools. Not because, actually, the national curriculum as relatively recently revised and constructed<sup>8</sup> did not provide for a coherent, continuous chronology. The importance of aim, that’s announced yet again in the rubric to the most recent suggestions set out in Michael Gove’s document of February of this year. Because those of you, you know, working in ... those of you who are history teachers know that in theory you look at the national curriculum and it does actually take you through the Middle Ages; it takes you through the Early Modern period; it talks about the relationship of royal power and Parliament and the Industrial Revolution; but in practice, of course ... in practice of course, it worked out rather differently.

And it wasn’t long before I discovered what I really want to hear from you again about what really counted, what made it very difficult to fulfil or realise the aim of coherent, continuous chronology, and that how infrastructural things that had nothing to do with ostensible content or subject guidelines of the national curriculum – namely not enough hours of teaching, not enough specialist-educated history teachers. And for my part anyway, the unsatisfactory situation by which it is possible to finish an history education at the age of 14. There were also huge differences between what independent schools were able to offer by way of number of hours, the amount of classroom time and what state schools, and actually, *a fortiori* – the academies – could or are prepared to offer. Now, that’s barely to scratch the surface. I hope I’ve got some primary school teachers here who can talk about the particular difficulties they face.

### **School visits**

So, anyway, with this in mind – that there were these hardcore knotty infrastructural problems which got in the way of the old national curriculum delivering on what it had promised, I went to listen – sit in – classrooms and went to listen to what teachers had to say, and very quickly you know – it was absurd – I needed to be educated myself in this, I found how brilliantly and how heroically many of you actually managed to enrich the life of the students while having to deal with these really fierce constraints of time. And yes [in terms of] constraints of time of course I know we are in a difficult period in terms of the economy in terms of the practical skills that we want our kids to actually acquire. So, you know, the non-obviously functional subjects are inevitably going to be squeezed a bit. But I

know also – because look at all of you here – that many of you are passionate precisely about giving our kids a sense of the kind of country or countries to which they belong. And, as I say, I was really incredibly impressed – pretty much, when I went to sit down with kids.

I went to a Docklands primary school for example where a very limited number of the children had parents for whom English was a first language. These very little kids were doing a unit about Queen Victoria, and Queen Victoria's childhood, and the process by which she became queen, and it was really entrancing – they were completely into it. And that was sort of really rather wonderful.

I went to the Greycoat Hospital School<sup>9</sup> in Westminster – a school of kind of mixed cultures again, and there, even though there wasn't a particularly – you know – there wasn't a sort of deliberately specified module set out, the history teacher there .... Are any of you actually teachers from the schools I am talking about here, because you can give a ...? Too bad. Or (raises hands) ... thank God for that [audience laughs]! A wonderful unit, and I suppose it was early Key Stage 3 we're talking about, maybe yes it was early Key Stage 3, on what was the experience of London where were sitting – so it wasn't a sort of academic ... with a big 'A' or a small 'a'. It was really about the fate of London in the years between 1665 and 1667, that incredible kind of tri-sector of catastrophes that occurred in the country from the Great Plague through the Fire and the Dutch invasion of 1667, and they were engaged not just with the accounts given by Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, but with maps of London, with trying to imagine what would happen when you began with a pandemic – you know – so the very clever teacher was thinking about the difficulties of Sars or influenza epidemics and what that would be like in a culture and a time long ago with very limited public health facilities and no aspirins and no proper pharmaceuticals.

So they were both ... it was effortlessly really wiring together the experience of a long time ago with how the kids might actually internalise it in their own contemporary lives. And this was not a dumbing down. This was not a vulgarising of a knotty historical question. Buried in there was what great history teachers do, namely telling a story that generates questions. That is what history is. It is storytelling that generates an analytical sensibility, and seriously deep, profound questions.

And then I went to Cottenham Village College in Cambridge<sup>10</sup>, and there indeed you know there was the Hitler bit of the Hitler and Henries. It was just ... it was a good hour on the Reichstag Fire<sup>11</sup>. And I was one of the people who thought, you know, 'Enough of the Third Reich!' I always remember Alan Coren, the *Punch* humorist, had to collect – we all do this – had to collect a volume of his essays, and he was told – and *Punch* humour might or might not sell, but the category ... there were three categories of books that always sold. One was animal books, the other was books about golf, and the third one was books about the Third Reich. So he called his book, *Golfing for Cats*, and on the front cover there was nothing but an enormous swastika [laughter].

So I went into the 'swastika' classroom, and these kids were absolutely brilliant, you know. There was a good kind of whiteboard presentation, but they knew exactly what the architecture of the Reichstag before it was burned looked like. They knew about [what] the shifty relationship[s] really between the Ultra-Nationalists of the Right and the completely way-out Nazis were. There was nothing really I wouldn't have asked of my own undergraduates at university that was really ... they were not engaged with. I thought that

this was extraordinary, that it might still be possible – given changing the infrastructural constraints, to actually make something of the curriculum we have.

### **A critical evaluation of Michael Gove's February 7<sup>th</sup> draft national curriculum**

However, however, I was sympathetic, and still am sympathetic, to an attempt really to give a kind of overarching chronological story, from – as Michael Gove wants – the beginning to the end. But then this document appeared before us all in February of this year. Now I am sure that Michael Gove did not want actually to give us *1066 and All That*<sup>12</sup> without the jokes, but that is pretty much what we've got, I think.

And what is extraordinary, and if you just – history teachers I am sure you've looked at this – since you might live in trembling fear and trepidation of having to teach a 9 year old the Heptarchy<sup>13</sup> – you know, you want to say to Michael Gove, I want to say to him now, Michael – let's you and I go to a class of 9 year olds and do the Kingdom of Mercia with them shall we, and how are you proposing exactly to do that? I would love actually to do that. Also to bring Michael into a classroom and to do the entirety of the causes of not just the English, of course, but the Scottish, English and Irish civil wars in something like 45 minutes. If you actually take the number of statutory, non-negotiable, indispensable items on the document that we now have as the sine qua non of what all you, you know, all my friends out there are going to have to teach, that's what it comes down to, you know – vroom (gesticulates) there was Disraeli, – vroom (gesticulates again) – there was Gladstone, kind of whipping past one, actually. And what is sort of absolutely ..., all you can do, right I think all you can possibly do, if you are doing for example Crimean War or something – whatever it's going to be, you know, the French Revolution, maybe if its lucky, get a drive-by ten minutes, really, at this rate.

It's actually, of course, it's a sort of Gradgrindian<sup>14</sup> philosophy of historical pedagogy. All you can do is, you know, put salient facts up on the board, have the kids remember them, and see if they have remembered or forgotten them next week – or something, the week after. There is no possibility of telling the story to generate questions, even though question-asking is actually specified in a rather eloquent and sympathetic way in part of the rubric to the new syllabus. And, if you look – I don't know, maybe ... and a little bit much for the *New Statesman* to describe, to say, 'this is not a curriculum, it's more like a pub quiz', but they're on to something.<sup>15</sup>

Also, can you actually, how much faith can you put in a document in any case which seemed to believe that Adam Smith was English – you know, truly astonishing. He is in a list of figures who are said to be part of the English enlightenment. Don't tell that to Alex Salmond.<sup>16</sup> And there is sort of just, you know, what is, one of the least of subjects, seems to be essentially memories of A-level work circa 1965 or something, or between 1950 and 1965, embalmed in an aspic, and then sprinkled over the aspic are a kind of garnishing of tokenism, so that Mary Seacole is there for example, but not Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>17</sup> You know you wouldn't know that actually British history is also about people other than white males, mostly. So that there is a little tokenism here and there – of the wrong kind, of absolutely the wrong kind, in my view. But mostly it is, as I say, it makes it completely impossible to do really what, you know, the engagement, particularly in Key Stage 3, of kids in the issue of asking hard questions, of having questions generated out of the narrative which you are providing.

## Clive of India

And if you take one example, one example that I thought was, to me, screamed of a kind of, I don't know ... want to say insulting – oh yes, I do – a sort of offensive imperviousness to what it takes to wire together the past to the gloriously but challengingly changed character of Britain. It was three words in one item in this new national curriculum, and these three words were: 'Clive of India'.<sup>18</sup>

Now, think of what Britain's like now. You know, this is not tokenism. It's very important, not just for those who are of Asian origin, but for all of us, to know actually what the relationship between, you know our 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain – Scotland very much part of it, and Ireland – and [what] the fate of the Indian sub-continent was. Couldn't Michael Gove, or whoever was talking to him, put himself in the position of a small boy in Bradford, or Southall, or somewhere like that, saying, 'Dad, what are we doing here? Why? How did we come ...? How did all the ...?' You know. You could make that point for different cultures too, for Jewish culture, for Afro-Caribbean culture. How did it happen to be? How did we come to be British?

And, believe you me, the answer is not 'Clive of India' (words emphasised – laughter from audience). Why, it should be Derek and Clive and Clive of India (more laughter).<sup>19</sup> And the reason it isn't Clive of India, it's because Clive of India along with Wolfe and Québec was also embalmed in those boxed pages of ancient imperial histories of 'Our Island' and 'Our Empire' stories of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>20</sup> Robert Clive was a sociopathic corrupt thug whose business in India was essentially to enrich himself and his co-soldiers and traders as quickly and outrageously as possible. He makes the chief executives of our more dodgy banks, ([e.g.] Fred Goodwin), look like a combination of Mary Poppins and Jesus Christ by comparison.

But it's not the squalor of Robert Clive – maybe that was Michael's idea – that you actually have an example of someone for whom a kind of criminal squalor is the point of the exercise. The issue I take with Robert Clive is his ultimate insignificance. There is a huge story behind 'Clive of India' – namely how the British came to be in India in the first place, and how did a trading company – the East India Company (words emphasised) come to be a government of pretty much an entire subcontinent of a hundred million people. That is an extraordinary story. That is a story – one of the great stories of how we came to be the Britain we are, or of how we were the Britain we were in the period of the Durbars in the high 19<sup>th</sup> century.

And to answer that question we need more than the sort of forty minute drive-by you get if you abide by the national curriculum guidelines. You need to ask one much bigger question, 'What was 18<sup>th</sup> century India like?' What was wrong with the Mughal Empire? Why did the Maratha ...? What was the Maratha Confederacy?<sup>21</sup> But why was it incapable of resisting the intrusion of the British? But more particularly, and this is not to make a cheaply anti-imperial point – it is not to congratulate or to deplore the British Empire – it is to understand its causal reality. The crucial thing is, what was that shift by which a failed trading company – the East India Company – discovered that it could make more money by putting itself in charge of the government of Bengal, and then of Madras, and then of Bombay, and then of an enormous expanse of the sub-continent. How was it that the business of government came to supplant the business of business? That's the story. Now to do that you need to know *real Indian history*, not in impossible detail, with the help of – you know – myriad of online sources, with

the help of maps, with the help of diaries – all the things you're using. But it does presuppose you're interested, as the rubric of the national curriculum says we all ought to be – and bravo to it, in the history of other people than ourselves.

Which brings me at length to a sort of sense of a conversation we might have, in a minute, about you know, ultimately why history is important – what we want to give our kids.

### **The glory of history in the western tradition – Herodotus and Thucydides**

The glory of history in the western tradition – about which we do not need to be apologetic for a minute – goes back to its founding fathers, to Herodotus<sup>22</sup> and Thucydides<sup>23</sup>. It really does in my view, because history in the end, for those of us who have been lucky enough to practise it, to write it, to read it – does certain things. In the first place the word itself is Greek – *historia* ... is simultaneously a narrative *and* it is a matter of enquiry. Two things – I am told by classical scholars more distinguished than I – meant the two things indistinguishably. And it occurs in the first line of Herodotus's great history. So it is story-telling from which question-asking is necessarily inseparable.

Secondly, it is about the history of *other people* – people disconnected from us in time and space, and sometimes in culture too. One of the most remarkable things about Herodotus's history is that he is so fascinated with the Persians – with the enemy, as well as the remains of the Syrian and Babylonian culture, and the Egyptians. It's the first real attempt at Egyptian ethnography. And it was not coincidental, because Herodotus was not from Athens – he was an Ionian. He was a kind of inveterate traveller. I always think of him as one of those people you come across in a carriage in a train going to say Newcastle, and he will not shut up. And then you realise – having been irritated – that how grateful you are that the Herodotus figure will not shut up, telling you where he has been in his life and times. That is the glory of the chatty, pluralistic open-mindedness about the enemy – about people who are not like us.

Thucydides is of course the flintier figure altogether. It is to Thucydides we owe the more aggressively analytical, philosophically embedded sense that history will tell us about the uses and abuses of a power. It too will tell stories, but they need sometimes to be chastening stories. Thucydides of course was a general. He was a sacked general who fought in the northern theatre of the Peloponnesian War, and who looked on the history of what became the Athenian Empire when it committed the act of hubris – that was the campaign to Sicily – with horror.

### **Summary – how these two Greeks might feed into a national curriculum model**

And many of his debates – the narrative are ... is ... meant to culminate in those great debates about whether or not to go to Syracuse – the great confrontation between the young, feckless, glamorous adventurer Alcibiades and the wise old general Nicias who nonetheless is prepared to follow orders, even though he knows it's going to lead to catastrophe. And to Thucydides history is not about self-congratulation. It's not really about tracing the pedigree of the wonderfulness of us.<sup>24</sup> Nor is it about tracing the pedigree of the reprehensibly awful nature of us, either. It is a chastening, disenchanting, honest, tough-minded, gadfly-stinging version of looking critically at ourselves and see what we have become and where we came from. Historians, for Thucydides, are meant to keep the powerful awake at night, meant to keep them honest.

And I come from a culture where I teach in America<sup>25</sup> where there is a lot of ... you know ... tremendous history being written – and being taught, but if anything it suffers slightly from a sense of insular self-congratulation. And, if you take our two Greek founding fathers – our Greek patriarchs, together – if you take Herodotus's aversion to the insularity of history, his attempt to embrace, to say, we cannot understand what makes us Greeks, what makes us come together as a particular cultural force in the world, unless we understand Persia and Egypt and Asia Minor and so on; and then you take Thucydides' aversion to history as a chronology of national self-congratulation – you have the glory and honour of western history, and that's really what we need to instil – those are the things that ought to animate, in my view, a construction of a national curriculum, which ... but I do think that it's not impossible to do this ... if some of you teachers don't feel the same way – you feel, 'oh we have loads of time, loads of time – it's just that the national curriculum as set out now is so misguided we can't do it.

But it seems to me not impossible to do, to actually do this coherent chronology, and if for example it needs to be somewhere between the national curriculum as was – the only slightly arbitrarily connected modules – and this, you know somehow pedantic ... both pedantic and utopian scheme of knowing the names of the main Chartists or something. It does need to have kind of 'nodes'. It does need to have concentrations of questions.

### **Continuing the curriculum critique: Religion, Puritanism and (later) the social and moral conscience of the tribunes of Victorian England**

Here's one for example – absolutely ... to me, astonishing to me, in this national curriculum, is something that was incredibly important to British culture, and I mean Scottish, Irish and Welsh as well as English culture, namely ... everyone ... *religion! Religion*. Religion and its relationship to secular power, whether you look at Henry II and Becket, but of course the absolutely crucial issue lying behind that very dense, knotty and all-important issue of medieval history which we are supposed to teach to, what ... our ten year olds or something, or earlier, is the relationship between the papacy or Angevin – later Plantagenet – sense of their own independent sovereignty. That's an incredible ... you know ... and why would our children not understand the importance of a debate between, 'Is your allegiance to God, or is it to the king?' Should they clash? To God in the figure of the Pope, or to the king. That is something I would have thought that all our kids would have been able to get to grips with.

The word 'Puritanism', staggeringly, does not appear in the list of must-know-about in the national curriculum, whereas it's inconceivable that you'd be able to understand how we came to chop Charles I's head off, how Cromwell came to be Cromwell if you don't actually know the substance and content of Puritanism.

There's not a word on Union of Crowns<sup>26</sup> not a word on how the King James Bible came to be conceived of as an act that would somehow bind the different Christian communities of the countries together.

I think that there are concentrated areas where big questions might be asked. The relationship for example between – let's do another one – industrial energy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the extraordinary presence of what we might call the social and moral conscience of the tribunes<sup>27</sup> of Victorian England. It is rather amazing that the great, immense, read figures of Victorian Britain are those who are most hostile to the notion of

material accumulation, namely Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens and John Ruskin. And in some sense their greatness – those are the tip-top three – I can think of all sorts of other people too – Pugin, and so on. And that immediately gives you some sense of what, not to mention somebody who is not on the list, Friedrich Engels<sup>28</sup>, our Manchester manufacturer, and important for the 1845 report on the Condition of the Working Class. And you can really understand the nature of the Victorian conscience, and you can really understand where eventually the Labour Party would come from – trade unionism would come from, unless you understand, again, how electrifying and dramatic and powerful the social conscience was actually in Victorian England. It's a thing to be proud of – a thing to celebrate, a thing for kids to engage with when they think about our own condition now – when they think of the relationship of the public conscience to private cupidity, to the kind of rip-roaring nature of the economic system.

So we can I think ... you know the issue I want to hear from you about – should you as teachers just really fling this back into the teeth of the Department for Education as full of impossibilities and absurdities, or should we work with it? Are there things in the national curriculum with which you are working now that are just fine, or should that be abandoned altogether? And what is it you want really? How you feel – parents too ... as well. You are absolutely part – necessarily – part of this debate. Tell me what's on your mind.

Thank you very much, OK.

(Applause)

### **Questions from the floor**

**Simon Schama:** First hand up – it's right there.

**Speaker 1 from floor:** I do agree with you, and I do think history teachers are the anarchists in the classroom.

**Simon Schama:** Yeah.

**Speaker 1:** Whatever they set up, we will put it back where it should be. That's what I would say. I think you will always have ... we'll do the tests, we will run through the chronological gallop for a bit, and then we'll get into the debate in the areas that are meaty, and each teacher will do that separately, and I will probably want to celebrate some of the glories of ...

**Simon Schama:** Yeah.

**Speaker 1:** ... our past.

**Simon Schama:** Sure. Magna Carta is worth celebrating.

**Speaker 1:** ... and at the same time ...

**Simon Schama:** Well, promise .... What's your name?

**Speaker 1:** [Gives his first name and surname]

**Simon Schama:** Right. I'll be after you. Promise me you're going to continue to be an anarchist in that case, actually. The issue ...

**Speaker 1:** [says something indistinguishable along the lines that he does promise; Simon Schama speaks over him, but obviously in support]

**Simon Schama:** The issue is whether, you know, this enormous kind of whalebone structure that is sort of set out in this sort of un-thought-through list of topics, makes it incredibly difficult to do that. There is no sense of how this all will be tested. No, you know (gesticulates) ... two words I hate that actually (O God, you know) that actually make me feel physically sick are 'key-developments'. You know – really. So when ...so when key-developments that don't belong in the great tradition of storytelling .... The word 'key-developments' is attached to King Æthelstan. Actually I'll give a magnum of fabulous burgundy to somebody who can stand up here, now, and tell me the key-developments in the reign of Æthelstan ... and King Canute. I don't want to hear the word 'waves' either (laughter from floor). *There are no key-developments actually in the reign of Æthelstan*, because it's stupid really.

So the issue of whether or not this sort of sense of, you know, competence in history, will enable you to actually ... you know ... give kids a sense of ... hey, but these very important events happened, but they were understood and written about in different ways. There is no right ... you know ... if you asked a royalist ... you know ... supporter of Christian absolutism in 1642 what they thought the role of the monarchy should be, and you asked a Puritan Member of Parliament what ... you know .. who is to judge and so on, so that they can actually feel that dispute really about historical truth is not the same thing as saying, 'these things don't happen' – it's not the same thing as chaos and confusion, let alone relativism.

So ... you feel you could live with any version of the document that appeared?

**Speaker 1:** Having taught since 1980 and having subverted right back to Thatcher I think I could pretty much teach proper history to ...

**Simon Schama:** But the national curriculum as is gives you ... doesn't it give you bigger space to do that?

**Speaker 1:** It does, but I think what will happen is you can tick boxes ...

**Simon Schama:** Actually I want to ask you ... there is, there ... if my adorable, horrible, reactionary friend Ferguson was here with me – he'd say – my lovely Niall – he would say, but they don't know who John Hampden is, and David Starkey would say they have no idea – you know – they mix up Oliver Cromwell with Thomas Cromwell. Does a sense actually of leaping over – because there is a kind of module-friendly nature of the curriculum, vast areas of British history and indeed of world history are not taught at all – not give any of you teachers pause? You know, I mean, don't you want a kind of way in which you can join the dots up without having to join them so kind of relentlessly as the curriculum document now suggests? Or are none of you bothered by that?

I mean, it does seem to me extraordinary that it's quite difficult to ... you know at the moment one thing I did not hear from schools very much is the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 18<sup>th</sup> century is the furnace really in which modern Britain is formed, whether you know as an imperial power or whether as an industrial power – this is *the* moment where Britain became Britain, in some ways. But – that's not a concern? (Scans audience, using hand) I think there was somebody who had their hand up. Yes – this lady on the right.

**Speaker 2:** Hello. I'd like to just ...

**Simon Schama:** What's your name?

**Speaker 2:** [Gives her first name]

**Simon Schama:** And ...?

**Speaker 2:** I'm a parent.

**Simon Schama:** Yeah. Good. Good. Good.

**Speaker 2:** Not a teacher. And from a parent's point of view my children *love* history [indistinguishable, but along the lines of 'because of the way we parents are'] but [because of] the time constraints of the classroom, where they make up for it is watching *Horrible Histories*, which they adore ... and whether that's a realistic version of it ... but to help them understand history ... helps where teaching – you know they just don't have the time to cover everything in the curriculum. So, it's left to parents to help their children to actually take it that little bit further.

**Simon Schama:** Well, bless you. How old are your kids?

**Speaker 2:** My son has just started Key Stage 3 – so he's just 12, and my daughter's 9.

**Simon Schama:** Great. Great. OK. Well, I wish you .... No, I mean parents are teachers too, of course. When I say history is a serious matter, I was born in 1945, and my Dad was – you know – passionate about history, starting with Shakespeare and the Bible, but then my Dad would sort of walk me around kind of ruins of London in the Blitz actually, in the City – not just the bits that survived – you know, St Paul's and the Tower – and London was full of soot-covered ruins that stuck out like stumps of blackened teeth and he would know really where the medieval city was and where the post-Fire of London city was, and it was completely magical to me, and it was important in those grim and tough and bleak years really to understand ... there is a glory to British history, but the glory to British history is argument, dissent – the freedom to dispute. It's not an endless message of self-congratulation, pro-Empire, against Empire – it is ... that is what the glory is ... it's division. It's the separation of division really that is at the heart of the story, beginning with Magna Carta.

But you parents here – use anything: museums, exhibitions, the Web – absolutely anything you can get. The web is an incredible resource now. So, you know, but there's nothing, nothing that you know is better than actually the passion of parents themselves, is it?

Lady there is waving. Hello.

**Speaker 3:** I only do supply teaching now and I was doing supply teaching in a ...

**Simon Schama:** Were you a full-time teacher?

**Speaker 3:** I was.

**Simon Schama:** Where?

**Speaker 3:** I was a full-time teacher in [gives location, a city].

**Simon Schama:** O.K.

**Speaker 3:** And I taught English as a second language ... [indistinguishable] ... History. Anyway I was teaching in this [school for secondary students] in [gives details of a different location, not the same as the city mentioned before] and we had [identifies teacher] [a teacher] who was [gives further details of identity of teacher] and there on the blackboard was 'Clive the Invader'. Would you approve of this aspect of teaching English history?

**Simon Schama:** No. I wouldn't. You know, I mean ... I think ... Clive the Inv...? No, I wouldn't have Clive there at all to be honest, actually.

**Speaker 3:** It's hilarious.

**Simon Schama:** No I wouldn't have him either as invader. No, the sort of dumbly partisan hostile is as bad as the unthinkingly self-congratulatory. As I said the real question around how the British came to rule India is what happened to the Mughal Empire, what actually happened to ... you know ... what was India like before the British – how could the suddenness of this happen? And, as a matter of fact, you know, there are all sorts of extraordinarily interesting highways and byways. OK – alright, to my ... [some kind of time alert bleper goes off] time thing has come on.

The figure who is not in Michael Gove's precious list is Warren Hastings<sup>29</sup> who is much more important and interesting, but Hastings is really interested for example in the East India Company supporting the religious education of Hindus and Moslems, and the generation which followers of William Jones<sup>30</sup> and those slightly unfairly demonised by my old friend Edward Said as (uses fingers to indicate quotes) 'orientalists'<sup>31</sup>, you know – the British are responsible. There is a great debate which comes, over education – both primary and secondary education – Indian education in which the young Macaulay<sup>32</sup> takes part in the 1820s and 1830s when the Charter of the East India Company comes round for renewal, and it actually sounds incredibly boring, but it's very profound, because the issue was: Are we, the British, here in India to restore, revive and reinvigorate Indian institutions, or is that sort of condescending, patronising – and should we be here essentially either to make money, and if we can't make money, to leave; or the third option, should we be anglicising India? Now that is a profound debate that takes place both in India and in Britain too. And if you think about it ... you know ... a debate like that actually cuts to the quick of our own questions about what our culture is like now. These are the great questions, which I am convinced you can ... and more important than 'Clive the Invader'. OK.

**Speaker 3:** (Continuing) I am a school governor and at the moment I am going to do quite a battle royal with our head over the teaching of history in our school, which I don't think is satisfactory.

**Simon Schama:** Tell him to call me – I'll sort him out.

I've got to stop in a second, but forgive me at the front here [person waiting to ask a question].

You've been a good class. I want to, and I may be going over .... I'm going to give you a reward. Here's a story by somebody we think of as an absolute back-number, Macaulay – you know – a bigger back-number there couldn't be ... and yet Macaulay does a wonderful

thing – in Volume 4 I think of the History of England, because actually he's going to signify an enormous sea-change in British life that will happen with the revolution against the kind of catholic absolutism of James II. And it has to begin with a human moment. Now all of you great history teachers begin with human moments of story. And here's one I love – and I love it because of one verb.

### Final reading

The death of King Charles the Second took the nation by surprise. His frame was naturally strong, and did not appear to have suffered from excess.

This wonderful, feckless playboy is collapsing suddenly.

He had always been mindful of his health even in his pleasures; and his habits were such as promise a long life and a robust old age. Indolent as he was on all occasions which required tension of the mind, he was active and persevering in bodily exercise. He had, when young, been renowned as a tennis player, and was, even in the decline of life, an indefatigable walker. His ordinary pace was such that those who were admitted to the honour of his society ... [heavy irony on Macaulay's part] ... found it difficult to keep up with him. He rose early, and generally passed three or four hours a day in the open air. He might be seen, before the dew was off the grass in St. James's Park, striding among the trees, playing with his spaniels, and flinging corn to his ducks; and these exhibitions endeared him to the common people, who always like to see the great unbend.<sup>33</sup>

And the genius verb here is 'flinging'. The image of the feckless king who is about to kind of go down to a kind of black-faced stroke, enveloping the country and the destiny of the country in revolution and disaster, of the chucking of the corn to the king's own ducks.

And, before I decline and disintegrate in front of you ... my kind, dear audience – my hero history teachers, I thank you for coming.

(Much applause)

### Notes

1. Transcribed and annotated by Robert Guyver. The names and personal details given by question-askers of themselves and other teachers they have referred to have been omitted (for identifiability reasons). The transcript has been annotated where references are made. The sub-titles have been added by RG ([rguyver@marjon.ac.uk](mailto:rguyver@marjon.ac.uk)).
2. UK Independence Party. Nigel Farage's UKIP won 150 seats in the May 3 Council Elections (2013).
3. See Appendix to this transcript
4. Rt. Hon. Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education from May 2010.
5. Act of Union: two Acts of Parliament: the Union with Scotland Act 1706 passed by the Parliament of England, and the Union with England Act passed in 1707 by the Parliament of Scotland
6. Magna Carta, 1215. See <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/magnacarta/> for translation and comment.
7. Michael Gove announced this at the Conservative Party Conference on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2010. See report of his speech: [http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/10/Michael\\_Gove\\_All\\_pupils\\_will\\_learn\\_our\\_island\\_story.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2010/10/Michael_Gove_All_pupils_will_learn_our_island_story.aspx). Mr Gove did not refer to Simon Schama as 'History Tsar' in his speech, but the term was used in the press the following day.

8. See

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/secondary/b00199545/history> for Key Stage 3 (revised for implementation from Sept 2008;) and Key Stage 1 and 2 last revised for implementation from Sept 2000:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/primary/b00199012/history>  
9. <http://www.gch.org.uk/>

10. <http://cvcweb.net/the-college/> See also Ofsted 'Good practice resource - Ensuring rigorous historical thinking: Cottenham Village College' (30 May 2012, ref: 120139)

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-ensuring-rigorous-historical-thinking-cottenham-village-college>: 'Incisive teaching and comprehensive planning, combined with a highly engaging history curriculum, ensure that students develop perceptive and sophisticated thinking. Among other things, students explore the views of historians and this aids not only their knowledge and understanding but also the way in which they think about the issues they study.' The school has worked closely with the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education (and particularly with Christine Counsell). This is a quote from the Ofsted report: 'A key component of the success of teaching is the commitment to regular and sustained subject-specific continuing professional development of all history teachers. There is a recognition and belief in the centrality of ongoing professional development to sharpen practice. As a result, all teachers are engaged with the subject community through, among other things, mentoring trainees on the University of Cambridge PGCE history course, acting as an AST [Advanced Skills Teacher] in history across a range of secondary schools in the local authority, editing *Teaching History*, the Historical Association's journal for history teachers in secondary schools, and presenting workshops at the Schools' History Project annual conference. This work not only engages teachers with the subject community but also contributes to the collective expertise of that community. However, as Matt Stanford, a member of the history team, points out: "We need to know the latest research so that what we have to say is right up to date". Indeed Cottenham Village College was well represented at the Historical Association annual conference (York, May 2013) where both Michael Fordham – Head of History, and Geraint Brown – Advanced Skills Teacher, led a secondary session on, 'Rigorous history and OFSTED success: happy bedfellows'.

11. This event happened 27 February 1933

(<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERreichstagF.htm>), Hitler's Nazi Party having come to power on 18 February. See also R.J.Evans (2003) *The Coming of the Third Reich*, pp. 328-349.

12. *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England, comprising all the parts you can remember, including 103 Good Things, 5 Bad Kings and 2 Genuine Dates*, written by W.C.Sellar and R.J.Yeatman, was first serialised by Punch magazine, but was then published as a book by Methuen & Co. Ltd. in 1930.

13. According to Wikipedia: 'The Heptarchy (Greek: ἑπτὰ + ἀρχή seven + realm) is a collective name applied to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of south, east, and central Great Britain during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, conventionally identified as seven: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex and Wessex. The Anglo-Saxon kingdoms eventually unified into the Kingdom of England', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heptarchy>. But see <http://abuseofhistory.wordpress.com/tag/british-museum/> (What has the Heptarchy ever done for us?) for a discussion of what historians now believe about this period. See also John Blair, *The Anglo-Saxon Age: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2000).

14. Thomas Gradgrind was a fictional character in Charles Dickens' novel, *Hard Times* (1854). The opening scene, set in Gradgrind's Coketown factory school, follows a conversation between him and the class of Mr M'Choakumchild, in which Gradgrind praises Bitzer, a boy who can define a horse with a list of related facts. But the utilitarian Gradgrind pours scorn on another pupil, Sissy Jupe – whose father's profession is 'horse-riding' linked to the circus – who understands the real essence of horses and loves them, indeed has ironically an equally utilitarian attachment to them, given their role in the life of her family. She uses the word 'fancy', to his distaste, when responding to his

question about carpeting a floor or papering a wall with images of horses. Dickens skilfully juxtaposes 'fancy' with 'fact'. Gradgrind's harsh philosophy is contrasted with a more empathetic, indeed merciful, attitude to life in various places through this novel, which satirises a relentless Victorian business model in which people were treated and controlled almost like machines. The circus folk, including Mr Sleary, provide a contrasting natural spontaneity. Although it might be tempting to see, in this talk, Simon Schama playing Sissy Jupe to Michael Gove's Bitzer (or even his Gradgrind!), the truth is more subtle: that it is not *just* facts that are needed, but some emotion too; facts need to be put into much wider contexts as Simon Schama demonstrates, and these contexts require scholarship (as the leadership in the good practice school in Cambridgeshire discovered); indeed in order to allow and facilitate the kind of storytelling that generates questioning, scholarship is certainly needed, but also the kind of empathy that can place a teacher in the shoes not only of the characters in the story, but also in the shoes of the students being taught.

15. Richard J. Evans (2013) 'Michael Gove's history curriculum is a pub quiz not an education – The rote sets in', *New Statesman*, March 21, <http://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/education/2013/03/rote-sets>

16. Alex Salmond MSP, First Minister of Scotland since May 2007, Leader of the Scottish National Party.

17. Mary Seacole (1805 – 1881), Jamaican-born Crimean War nurse and author of *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* (1857). Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1797). Simon Schama writes about each of these women in his *A History of Britain Volume 3 – The Fate of Empire 1776-2000* (2002, BBC Worldwide) in the chapter 'Wives, Daughters, Widows' – Seacole: pp. 220-221, 223; but Wollstonecraft more extensively: pp. 54, 56-7, 74-83, 87-9, 105, 136.

18. This does represent something of a qualitative change from Simon Schama's recommendations [in *The Guardian*] of 9/10 November 2010 (see his article 'Simon Schama: My Vision for History in Schools', [www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/09/future-history-schools](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/09/future-history-schools)). However in this his Hay talk of 30 May 2013 he is making a serious search for what it was that had been really significant about this period, both for India and for Britain. In his list of 6 events which every child should know, in 2010 he had included this description of 'the Indian moment': 'How was it that a country throwing its weight around the world's oceans got kicked out of most of America but in two generations came to rule an immense part of the subcontinent? Any class would want to know about the cunning-crazed Robert Clive; to look again at Siraj ud Daula and the tragic ruin that Warren Hastings became, not to mention stories of Brits who defied the race and culture barrier by wearing Indian dress, speaking Indian languages; illicitly marrying Indian princesses'. 'Robert Clive' is however not described as 'Clive of India' with all that seems to imply.

19. Derek and Clive is a double act of comedy characters created by Dudley Moore (Derek) and Peter Cook (Clive) in the 1970s.

20. H.E. (Henrietta) Marshall (1867-1941) wrote both *Our Island Story* (1905, Nelson) and *Our Empire Story* (1908, Nelson). These books retained a popular readership into the 1950s and 1960s and beyond. On October 5<sup>th</sup> 2010 Michael Gove had said: 'The current approach we have to history denies children the opportunity to hear our island story'. Civitas, a think-tank, supported by subscriptions from *The Daily Telegraph*, republished *Our Island Story* in 2005. Chapter XCIII of *Our Island Story* ('George II – The Story of the Black Hole of Calcutta', pp. 434-436) includes the story of Robert Clive and the Battle of Plassey (1757): 'When Clive heard of this horrible deed [the Black Hole incident], he marched against the native Prince, and utterly defeated him in a place called Plassey. He drove him from his throne, and placed another Prince, who was friendly to the British, upon it; he drove the French from their fortress there, and ever since then the power of Britain has grown and grown in India, until today our King, the King of Great Britain and Ireland, is also the Emperor of India' (Marshall, 1905, p. 436). The king referred to was Edward VII (1901-1910). Simon Schama writes about Clive and related matters in *A History of Britain (Vol. 2) 1603-1776 – The British Wars*, pp. 402-408. This comparison between the Marshall version and scholarly work is an example

of why it is important to have an historian evaluating a curriculum. The influence of Marshall can be seen not only in her 'canon' of events and their romanticised interpretation of British history, but also in the structure of *Our Island Story* with its set of chronologically sequential landmark events linked to the actions of heroes, heroines or – in some cases – villains. It has provided strong images which have fed the ideological battle over the history curriculum (see Andrew Hough, 'Revealed: David Cameron's favourite childhood book is *Our Island Story*', *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 October, 2010,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/8094333/Revealed-David-Camersons-favourite-childhood-book-is-Our-Island-Story.html>). Cameron said: 'It is written in a way that really captured my imagination and which nurtured my interest in the history of our great nation'. But according to Hough he describes it, perhaps perceptively, but not entirely accurately, as a 'novel'. On February 7<sup>th</sup> when Michael Gove announced his curriculum reforms in the House of Commons, he said, '... and in history, there is a clear narrative of British progress, with a proper emphasis on heroes and heroines from our past'. See Hansard, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130207/debtext/130207-0001.htm#13020759000004>.

21. An Indian imperial power. The Maratha Confederacy period was 1761-1818.

22. Herodotus (c.484 – 425 BCE) born in Halicarnassus in Ionia – modern day Bodrum in Turkey, author of *The Histories*, written (in the Ionian dialect) from the 450s to the 420s BCE.

23. Thucydides (c.460 – c. 395 BCE), author of *History of the Peloponnesian War* (up to 411 BCE)

24. Simon Schama first uses this phrase in *The Guardian*, 9 November 2010 (revised 10 Nov), [www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/09/future-history-schools](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/nov/09/future-history-schools). The theme was also drawn upon by Richard J. Evans in 'The Wonderfulness of Us – The Tory Interpretation of History', *London Review of Books*, 17 March 2011, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n06/richard-j-evans/the-wonderfulness-of-us>.

25. Columbia University in the City of New York:

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arthistory/faculty/Schama.html>

26. Actually there is, under 'the Stuart period' at the end of Key Stage 2.

27. A tribune (according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2004) is an official in ancient Rome chosen by the plebeians to protect their interests.

28. Friedrich Engels (1820-1895). This book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, finished in March 1845, was first published in Leipzig in 1846.

29. Warren Hastings (1732-1818) first Governor-General of Bengal. Impeached but acquitted of all charges in 1795. Simon Schama writes about him at length in his *A History of Britain (vol. 2) 1603-1776 – The British Wars*, pp. 408-13.

30. Sir William Jones (1746-1794) was a philologist who worked on the idea of Indo-European languages.

31. Edward Said (1935-2003), author of *Orientalism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

32. Thomas Babington Macaulay (later 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Macaulay [Lord Macaulay] (1800-1859) Whig politician and historian.

33. The reading is from *Macaulay's History of England from the Accession of James II in Four Volumes, Volume One* (my edition is J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, Everyman's Library, at the beginning of Chapter IV, pp. 321-2)

## **Appendix**

### **The draft of national curriculum history (Feb 7 2013)**

#### **Purpose of study**

A high-quality history education equips pupils to think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement. A knowledge of Britain's past, and our place in the world, helps us understand the challenges of our own time.

#### **Aims**

The National Curriculum for history aims to ensure that all pupils:

- know and understand the story of these islands: how the British people shaped this nation and how Britain influenced the world
- know and understand British history as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the story of the first settlers in these islands to the development of the institutions which govern our lives today
- know and understand the broad outlines of European and world history: the growth and decline of ancient civilisations; the expansion and dissolution of empires; the achievements and follies of mankind
- gain and deploy a historically-grounded understanding of abstract terms such as 'empire', 'civilisation', 'parliament' and 'peasantry'
- understand historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses
- understand how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, and discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed
- gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales.

#### **Attainment targets**

By the end of each key stage, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.

#### **Subject content**

##### **KeyStage1**

Pupils should begin to develop an awareness of the past and the ways in which it is similar to and different from the present. They should understand simple subject-specific vocabulary relating to the passing of time and begin to develop an understanding of the key features of a range of different events and historical periods.

Pupils should be taught about:

- simple vocabulary relating to the passing of time such as 'before', 'after', 'past', 'present', 'then' and 'now'
- the concept of nation and of a nation's history

- concepts such as civilisation, monarchy, parliament, democracy, and war and peace that are essential to understanding history
- the lives of significant individuals in Britain's past who have contributed to our nation's achievements— scientists such as Isaac Newton or Michael Faraday, reformers such as Elizabeth Fry or William Wilberforce, medical pioneers such as William Harvey or Florence Nightingale, or creative geniuses such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel or Christina Rossetti
- key events in the past that are significant nationally and globally, particularly those that coincide with festivals or other events that are commemorated throughout the year
- significant historical events, people and places in their own locality.

## **KeyStage 2**

Pupils should be taught about the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome.

In addition, across Key Stages 2 and 3, pupils should be taught the essential chronology of Britain's history. This will serve as an essential frame of reference for more in-depth study. Pupils should be made aware that history takes many forms, including cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history. Pupils should be taught about key dates, events and significant individuals. They should also be given the opportunity to study local history.

Pupils should be taught the following chronology of British history sequentially:

early Britons and settlers, including:

- the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages
- Celtic culture and patterns of settlement

Roman conquest and rule, including:

- Caesar, Augustus, and Claudius
- Britain as part of the Roman Empire
- the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire

Anglo-Saxon and Viking settlement, including:

- the Heptarchy
- the spread of Christianity
- key developments in the reigns of Alfred, Athelstan, Cnut and Edward the Confessor

the Norman Conquest and Norman rule, including:

- the Domesday Book
- feudalism
- Norman culture
- the Crusades

Plantagenet rule in the 12th and 13th centuries, including:

- key developments in the reign of Henry II, including the murder of Thomas Becket

- Magna Carta
- de Montfort's Parliament

relations between England, Wales, Scotland and France, including:

- William Wallace
- Robert the Bruce
- Llywelyn and Dafydd ap Gruffydd
- the Hundred Years War

life in 14th-century England, including:

- chivalry
- the Black Death
- the Peasants' Revolt

the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, including:

- Chaucer and the revival of learning
- Wycliffe's Bible
- Caxton and the introduction of the printing press
- the Wars of the Roses
- Warwick the Kingmaker
- the Tudor period, including religious strife and Reformation in the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary

Elizabeth I's reign and English expansion, including:

- colonisation of the New World
- plantation of Ireland
- conflict with Spain
- the Renaissance in England, including the lives and works of individuals such as Shakespeare and Marlowe

the Stuart period, including:

- the Union of the Crowns
- King versus Parliament
- Cromwell's commonwealth, the Levellers and the Diggers
- the restoration of the monarchy
- the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London
- Samuel Pepys and the establishment of the Royal Navy
- the Glorious Revolution, constitutional monarchy and the Union of the Parliaments.

### **Key Stage 3**

Building on the study of the chronology of the history of Britain in Key Stage 2, teaching of the periods specified below should ensure that pupils understand and use historical concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts. They should develop an awareness and understanding of the role and use of different types of sources, as well as their strengths, weaknesses and reliability. They should also examine

cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social aspects and be given the opportunity to study local history. The teaching of the content should be approached as a combination of overview and in-depth studies.

Pupils should be taught about:

The development of the modern nation

Britain and her Empire, including:

- Wolfe and the conquest of Canada
- Clive of India
- Competition with France and the Jacobite rebellion
- the American Revolution
- the Enlightenment in England, including Francis Bacon, John Locke, Christopher Wren, Isaac Newton, the Royal Society, Adam Smith and the impact of European thinkers

the struggle for power in Europe, including:

- the French Revolution and the Rights of Man
- the Napoleonic Wars, Nelson, Wellington and Pitt
- the Congress of Vienna

the struggle for power in Britain, including:

- the Six Acts and Peterloo through to Catholic Emancipation
- the slave trade and the abolition of slavery, the role of Olaudah Equiano and free slaves
- the Great Reform Act and the Chartists

the High Victorian era, including:

- Gladstone and Disraeli
- the Second and Third Reform Acts
- the battle for Home Rule
- Chamberlain and Salisbury

the development of a modern economy, including:

- iron, coal and steam
- the growth of the railways
- great innovators such as Watt, Stephenson and Brunel
- the abolition of the Corn Laws
- the growth and industrialization of cities
- the Factory Acts
- the Great Exhibition and global trade
- social conditions
- the Tolpuddle Martyrs and the birth of trade unionism

Britain's global impact in the 19th century, including:

- war in the Crimea and the Eastern Question

- gunboat diplomacy and the growth of Empire
- the Indian Mutiny and the Great Game
- the scramble for Africa
- the Boer Wars

Britain's social and cultural development during the Victorian era, including:

- the changing role of women, including figures such as Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole, George Eliot and Annie Besant
- the impact of mass literacy and the Elementary Education Act.
- The twentieth century

Britain transformed, including:

- the Rowntree Report and the birth of the modern welfare state
- 'Peers versus the People'
- Home Rule for Ireland
- the suffragette movement and women's emancipation

the First World War, including:

- causes such as colonial rivalry, naval expansion and European alliances
- key events
- conscription
- trench warfare
- Lloyd George's coalition
- the Russian Revolution
- The Armistice
- the peace of Versailles

the 1920s and 1930s, including:

- the first Labour Government
- universal suffrage
- the Great Depression
- the abdication of Edward VIII and constitutional crisis

the Second World War, including:

- causes such as appeasement, the failure of the League of Nations and the rise of the Dictators
- the global reach of the war – from Arctic Convoys to the Pacific Campaign
- the roles of Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin
- Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe and the unique evil of the Holocaust

Britain's retreat from Empire, including:

- independence for India and the Wind of Change in Africa
- the independence generation – Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, Kenyatta, Nkrumah
- the Cold War and the impact of Communism on Europe
- the Attlee Government and the growth of the welfare state
- the Windrush generation, wider new Commonwealth immigration, and the arrival of East African Asians

- society and social reform, including the abolition of capital punishment, the legalization of abortion and homosexuality, and the Race Relations Act

Economic change and crisis, the end of the post-war consensus, and governments up to and including:

- the election of Margaret Thatcher
- Britain's relations with Europe, the Commonwealth, and the wider world
- the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall.