



1066 and all that: The beginning of the battle of Senlac

Historic Battle Lines

History in schools has taken its fair share of knocks in the last year or so. Debate over skills versus content, empathy or imagination, has been serious, entertaining, vicious and just plain silly at times. Now that it is history per se which is under scrutiny, history teachers in schools and society at large need to consider just what it is we want children to gain from history lessons.

Kenneth Baker sees its purpose to encourage an understanding of how 'a free and democratic society has developed over the centuries' through a core curriculum centred on Britain's political, constitutional and cultural heritage. Problems will be manifold, not least arising from the pretence that liberal democracy is free from ideology. Clearly there are certain freedoms that are valued throughout society, but whether these are best transmitted via a Whiggish view

of British history is debatable. Whose culture is to be transmitted? And will an anglocentric-led content enable pupils to understand the world we live in today, or merely encourage nationalistic jingoism or the 'British is best' variety often encountered in the classroom, especially among white middle-class males?

The ultimate factor determining the content of history teaching is what society believes history is and what it wants transmitted to pupils. In recent years there has been a determined effort to move away from history as received facts about the past, and encourage children to think and make sense of the world they live in, developing an understanding of how we have arrived at today. The Britain we live in is as much a multicultural society as it has always been, and the world grows smaller and smaller. History teaching must relate to pupils' own experiences or they will respond with the cry which is heard today less often in the classroom: 'History is boring'. •

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