An illusion that makes the past seem real:

The potential of living history for

developing the historical consciousness of

young people

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Ceri Jones

School of Museum Studies

University of Leicester

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Ceri Jones

In the light of widespread concern over the state of history education in England, this study explores how living history at museums and historic sites contributes to engaging young people in representations of the past. It draws on theories of historical consciousness, specifically that of Rüsen, which imply that ideas about the past formed in the everyday exist in tension with learning history in the classroom. Applying Rüsen's theory to a novel context, visits by six schools to the Museum of London and the Tower of London, enabled an examination of the interaction between students' ideas about the medieval past and its representation in living history, and the implications of this interaction for their historical consciousness. Active, conscientious and high achieving, the characteristics of the students involved in this study were significant when understanding their responses to their experiences. However, many of the points made in the literature about the development of young people's historical understanding were reflected in their experiences, and this study, therefore, builds on a growing body of research which suggests that there are significant cultural patterns to how individuals understand the past.

From the evidence of this research, living history's potential lies in enabling students to encounter, ideally through first-person interpretation, perspectives on the medieval past which (as far as possible) come from *within* that period. As a dynamic experience, it simulates the *real-ness* of the past, and makes its differences more concrete for students who are used to thinking about it in abstract ways. More research is needed to understand how the interaction between students and living history performances leads to particular *types* of historical consciousness, however, understanding living history as a *performance*, rather than its capacity for reproducing the past *authentically*, is essential to realising how it interacts with students' ideas of the past.

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Introduction

Since the mid-twentieth century, living history has been used as part of a range of interpretive techniques to teach primary and secondary school pupils about the past at museums and historic sites.[1] However, there remains limited understanding of how its use has an impact on their historical understanding. Whilst living history has become an established area of interest for researchers, studies have tended to concentrate on its capacity to recreate the past authentically, rather than its potential for developing students' ideas about the past. It was not until 2008 that a significant research project was completed into the learning potential of living history, performance and live interpretation.[2] By exploring the impact that this interpretive medium can have on the historical consciousness of English students (aged from ten to seventeen), this study contributes to this growing area of research.

In seeking to understand how young people think about, and respond to, history, this study draws on developments in history pedagogy which focus on 'how ordinary people beyond the history profession understand the past.'[3] Attention is increasingly paid to ideas of the past that students bring into the classroom with them, and which can have an impact on their history learning.

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[1] For an overview of the development of living history in museums and historic sites see Samuel, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory. Volume I: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London and New York.

[2] Jackson, A. and Kidd. J. (2008) *Performance, Learning and Heritage, Centre for Applied Theatre Research* (CATR), University of Manchester, Manchester.

[3] Seixas, P. (2004) 'Introduction' in Seixas, P. (ed), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London, p8.

Partly this is in response to the perceived decline of history education,[4] and the tension between the need for a 'useable' past, which can form the basis of self-identity, and a critical engagement with history, which recognises that there are multiple interpretations of the past.[5] The tension between these different approaches to the past has led to the concern from some historians and politicians that history in school can be 'meaningless' for students, which is reflected in their lack of knowledge of the past and declining numbers of young people studying history once it stops being compulsory in school (the age of fourteen in England).[6] Some of these changes reflect wider developments in understanding how children and young people learn, in particular the adoption of child-centred pedagogies which suggest that they are active learners who form their own ideas in relation to the world around them, which are then stored in frameworks of meaning, or *schema*.[7] These schema, formed in the everyday world as well as inside the classroom, shape how students respond to the history they learn at school and, as this research demonstrates, their responses to living history.

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[4] Cannadine, D. Keating, J. and Sheldon, N. (2011) *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill and New York.

[5] Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (2000) 'Introduction' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives,* New York University Press, New York and London, pp1-17.

[6] See Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, for a comprehensive overview of the repeated concerns expressed over history education in England since the early twentieth century.

[7] See for instance Siegler, R. S. (1998) *Children's Thinking*, third edition, Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Theories of historical consciousness have sought to reconcile the differences between these 'everyday' ways of thinking about the past and the historical thinking necessary for the subject of history. Researchers in the field of history education have adapted these theories to offer an explanation as to why young people develop their ideas about the past in particular ways. Of particular interest is the model developed by German historian Jörn Rüsen, which conceives of historical consciousness as four different types, representing stages in maturation from a basic *traditional* type to the advanced *genetic* type.[8] This study applies Rüsen's theory to a novel context, that of museums and historic sites: it examines the interaction between students' ideas about the medieval past and its representation in living history, and explores the implications of this interaction for their historical consciousness.

This research does not seek to suggest or promote the types of historical consciousness that should result for young people from living history experiences. In England, history education is a highly contentious issue: since the early twentieth century, there has been 'almost continuous controversy,'[9] over how to teach it. Rather, it offers an example of how young people's historical consciousness can be manifest in a particular context and how it is captured using qualitative research methods. The reference to England as opposed to Britain throughout this study refers to where the research took place but also reflects the existence of separate and distinctive history curricula in

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[8] Rüsen, J. (2004) 'Historical Consciousness: Narrative structure, Moral Function and Ontogenetic development' in Seixas, P. (ed), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London, pp63-85.

[9] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p3.

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.[10] Decisions over history education are

made in specific political, legal and administrative contexts and, as Cannadine,

Keating and Sheldon suggest, it is not only England where there has been

controversy over what, or how, history is taught.[11] America and Australia, for

example, have had well publicised 'history wars' over 'what constitutes the

national past, and what version of it should be taught in the nation's schools.'[12]

This study therefore builds on a growing body of research which suggests that

there are significant social and cultural patterns to how individuals understand

the past, although an orientation to the notion of a past, present and future is

held to be innate, even natural, according to Rüsen.[13] This research suggests

that there might also be differences according to students' age, gender,

educational ability, and the way in which they encounter the past outside the

classroom. Whilst I have identified the differences as and when they occurred

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[10] Phillips, R. (1997) 'National Identity and History Teaching in Britain: English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh Perspectives,' in Pendry, A. and O'Neill, C. (eds) *Principles and Practice: Analytical Perspectives on Curriculum Reform and Changing Pedagogy from History Teacher Educators*, Standing Conference of History Teacher Educators in the United Kingdom, Lancaster, pp22-28.

[11] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p2.

[12] Ibid, p1. For an overview of the 'history wars' in Australia see Ashton, P. and Hamilton, P. (2009) 'Connecting with History: Australians and Their Pasts', in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, pp23-41. The conservative attack on the National History Standards in the United States is outlined in Symcox, L. (2009) 'Internationalizing the U.S. History Curriculum: From Nationalism to Cosmopolitanism,' in in Symcox, L. and Wilschut, A. (eds) *National History Standards: The Problem of Canon and the Future of History Teachin*g, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, pp33-54.

[13] Rüsen, J. (2005) *History: Narration - Interpretation - Orientation,* Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.

in the research, more research is needed to understand how these variables influence historical consciousness.

The aim of this study was to explore, in the light of widespread concern over the teaching of history in English schools, the impact that living history techniques, as used in museums and historic sites, might have on the historical consciousness of secondary school age students (aged from eleven to seventeen years). Following the principles of grounded theory, I intended to use two phases of fieldwork to systematically collect and analyse data in order to build theory.[14] My research question for the first, initial phase was the following:

> *Can museums make history more accessible or relevant to young people through using personalities, personal stories and experiences from the past?*

Following the initial period of fieldwork, the research question was revised to reflect an increased focus on the phenomenon of historical consciousness:

> *What impact does living history, as used in museums and historic sites, have on the historical consciousness of young people?*

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[14] Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, second edition, Sage, Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi.

A series of sub-questions shaped the analysis of the fieldwork data and its relationship with the wider context of history education as expressed in the research aim. These were:

a) With reference to debates in history education, why might history be perceived as 'meaningless' for some young people in the present?

b) How do young people conceive of history and who or what shapes their opinions and perceptions?

c) How is history constructed and presented in museums and historic sites, with particular reference to living history?

d) How does the construction of characters from the past impact upon young people's learning? Do different performance techniques have different impacts?

e) Can museums and historic sites make the distant past, in particular medieval history, more accessible or relevant to young people using personalities, personal stories and experiences from the past?

f) Does living history offer museums and historic sites an effective way to engage young people with history?

The first four chapters of this thesis define the relationship between young people and history. Chapter one provides an overview of the widespread concern over the state of history education in England. The implications of a society-wide detachment from history is a theme that has been increasingly

taken up by historians since the late twentieth century,[15] when Hobsbawm

suggested that rapid social changes since the Second World War had alienated

young people from the past of their parents and grandparents:

> The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link
>
> one's contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of
>
> the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late twentieth
>
> century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a
>
> sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past
>
> of the times they live in.[16]

The idea that the past can be irrelevant to some students is not only in relation

to the recent past but, as Hunt suggests, the 'argument seems to gain ground

when the topics being studied are more remote in time.'[17]

Chapter two explores how theories of historical consciousness, including the

model developed by Rüsen, might assist in efforts to understand how students'

perceptions of the past are shaped both in, and outside, the classroom. It

presents evidence which suggests that the reasons why students can find

history challenging is related to broader issues of how the ability to *think*

historically is shaped by inherent tensions in the way in which the past is

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[15] Lambert, P. and Schofield, P. (2004) 'Conclusion: History and Power', in Lambert, P. and Schofield, P. (eds) *Making History: An Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, Routledge, London and New York, pp290-298.

[16] Hobsbawm, E. (1994) *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991,* Abacus, London, p3.

[17] Hunt, M. (2000) 'Teaching Historical Significance', in Arthur, J. and Philips, R. (eds) *Issues in History Teaching*, Routledge Falmer, London and New York, p44.

understood as part of the *lifeworld* and the expectations of history education. Current understandings of how students approach history in the classroom are presented alongside studies which explore historical consciousness in the everyday, providing an indication of how individuals think about, and use the past in their daily lives.

Chapters three and four address the role of museums and historic sites in learning about the past, in relation to how schools have used popular representations of the past to support the learning of history.[18] Drawing on theories which describe how museums and historic sites produce knowledge about the past, chapter three explores how these approaches might impact upon the development of historical consciousness. Chapter four looks specifically at living history as a form of interpretation experienced through the body, which can help to make sense of the past through stimulating the emotional and affective, as well as the cognitive, domains. With particular relevance to living history as an educational medium, recent research suggests that its potential lies in its performative aspects rather than its striving towards the authentic recreation of past lives.[19] The historical knowledge produced by living history performers is ephemeral and elusive, it is formed in the telling, in the interaction between the performer and their audience. The focus on authenticity and 'getting the facts right' can often suppress this aspect of living

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[18] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*.

[19] Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds) (2011), *Performing Heritage: Research Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York.

history: encouraging the audience to accept the representation as *real* may stifle their ability to critically engage with the past.[20]

Chapters five to eight present the original research carried out for this study. Chapter five describes the experimental, qualitative research design which was considered to be the most appropriate in the context of a still-emerging area of interest: as yet there is no one established method of theorising historical consciousness or understanding of the mechanisms which enable students to progress in their ways of thinking about the past.[21] Qualitative research offered the possibility of capturing the emotional and affective impact of living history (as well as cognitive impact), which is considered to be important for understanding what *meanings* young people attach to history.[22] Furthermore, in-depth interviews provided an opportunity to explore students' ideas about the past, which could then be reported, as far as possible, in their own words. Typically, when the historical understanding of young people is analysed and presented as evidence, their voices are often absent because most of the research (carried out in an educational context) focuses on testing their written

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[20] Handler, R. and Gable, E. (1997) *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

[21] Seixas, P. (2005) 'Historical Consciousness: The Progress of Knowledge in a Postprogressive Age,' in Straub, J. (ed) *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, pp141-159.

[22] Wertsch, J. V. (2000) 'Is it Possible to Teach Beliefs, as well as Knowledge about History?', in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, pp38-50.

historical knowledge and skills.[23]   Using a variety of research methods was

important for capturing the different ways in which students expressed their

historical understanding, which was found to be tacitly, as well as consciously,

expressed.[24]

Chapter six provides details of the case study sites and schools involved in the

research. I chose to work with secondary schools to explore how older

students find meaning and relevance in history, particularly when studying the

medieval past. Due to the particularities of the research context, the students

involved (who represented a range of ages from ten to seventeen years old)

attended atypical state, independent and grammar schools, which had the

opportunity to provide their students with a range of experiences in history.

Most of the students were confident, articulate and conscientious learners, and

many of them were personally interested in history. These characteristics were

fundamental to their engagement with, and responses to, the living history

performances, and the findings reported in chapters seven and eight are

carefully presented within that context.

Chapter seven addresses the question that when living history works - when it

is effective and engages young people in the illusion that they are being

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[23] To enable the inclusion of students under eighteen in the research, full ethics approval was
sought and obtained following the University of Leicester's *Research Code of Practice*, available
from http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/committees/research-ethics/code-of-practice [accessed 04
12 2011].

[24] Billmann-Mahedra, E. and Hausen, M. (2005) 'Empirical Psychological Approaches to the
Historical Consciousness of Children' in Straub, J. (ed) *Narration, Identity, and Historical
Consciousness*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, pp163-186.

addressed by, and interacting with, someone who lived in another time - what is it that makes it effective? The format of the performance and techniques used were found to be significant for the learning impact of the performance for students. Chapter eight explores the challenges associated with understanding the medieval past, which was the purpose of the education sessions at the case study sites, and describes the strategies students used to make this history more meaningful to them. Understanding the Middle Ages as the creation of historians, writers, philosophers and scholars, who have inscribed it with their own meanings and assumptions, helps to explain the tension between enduring, popular images of a simple feudal society of peasants, knights and kings, and the more complex 'reality' of medieval life, which students and teachers must negotiate.

Chapter nine draws together the main conclusions from the research and provides some preliminary thoughts on the implications of the living history performances for the development of students' historical consciousness. Living history's potential is suggested to lie in enabling young people to encounter, ideally through first-person interpretation, perspectives on medieval society which (as far as possible) come from *within* that society. Furthermore, it is only through understanding the *performative* aspect of living history that the four types of historical consciousness can be reached. However, without addressing the preconceptions that students hold about the past, their responses to living history will continue to be framed by enduring images and schemata, which they use to understand their experiences. Theories of historical consciousness can help to raise awareness of these *frames* that

young people bring to the museum or historic site, and potentially support museum educators and teachers in using them as a starting point to develop new, more complex ideas of the Middle Ages. I also make some suggestions as to how this research could be taken forward in the future.

Throughout this study, original spellings have been used in quotes and, as far as possible, where quotes have been taken from interviews these have been kept true to what was actually said. In some instances, repeated words, colloquialisms and slang have been removed for purposes of sense. The names of research participants involved in my research have been kept confidential except where individuals gave their consent for their names to be used in a formal capacity. The names of children and young people, their schools and their teachers have been kept confidential for ethical purposes to protect the students involved.

Chapter 1

Making sense of the past: young people and history

1.0 Introduction

In developing an understanding of how living history at museums and historic sites can impact on the historical consciousness of young people, this first chapter begins with a survey of the relationship between young people and history in England at the start of the twenty-first century. In particular, I will examine the claim that history education can be 'meaningless' for some young people, an assertion which needs to be contextualised within the widespread concern for the state of history education in England. As Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon suggest, history has been a contested subject in English schools since its introduction from the late nineteenth century onwards: 'there has been, and still is, serious disagreement about the right kind of history to be taught in schools.'[25] Despite England having a history which, compared to other nations, seems 'a model of ordered continuity and stable and consensual progress,'[26] this has not prevented every aspect of history education being subject to challenge and debate. There is little or no consensus over the value and place of history in the curriculum, or the elements that shape it. These include the selection of its content; its organising framework or narrative; the skills it should

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[25] Cannadine, Keating, and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p2.

[26] Ibid, p3.

develop; the type of pedagogy that underpins it; the age at which it should stop

being compulsory; or the effectiveness of schools in teaching history. There is

also no consensus over the impact of history education on young people.

However, the following comment from Wineburg reflects the dominant

discourse over the twentieth century:

> The whole world has turned upside down in the past eighty years but one
> thing has seemingly remained the same: kids don't know history.[27]

This emphasis on *knowing* about the past reflects the traditional view that

learning history is about developing the cognitive ability of students, by

memorising dates and events, 'findings things out, and solving problems.'[28]

However, researchers such as Wineburg are increasingly focusing their

attention on the importance of the *emotional* engagement with the past and how

that affects how young people think about, and negotiate the different ideas of

the past which they encounter in their lives. As Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg

suggest, the 'guiding assumption of the new work on history teaching and

learning is that the process of communicating knowledge about the past is,

above all, an epistemological and cultural act that conveys deep and sometimes

unintended messages about what it means to be historical in modern society.'[29]

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[27] Wineburg, S. (2000) 'Making Historical Sense' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, p307.

[28] Marwick, A. (2001) *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*, Palgrave, Houndsmill, p28.

[29] Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg, 'Introduction,' p3.

Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon assert that it is important to see education as the interconnection between formal pedagogy and culture, part of 'the shared accumulation and passing on of society's collectively accumulated knowledge.'[30] Young people are supposed to find history 'meaningless' when their ideas about what it means to be historical, and what history is, are not supported by how it is learnt in the classroom: the resulting tensions between these often divergent ideas can create barriers to learning history.[31]

The role of *meaning making* in learning and its implications for understanding subjects such as history can be understood in relation to developments in pedagogy, in particular the idea that to learn effectively, students need to *make sense* of what they learn. Following Heller, making sense of something 'means to transform the unknown into the known, the inexplicable into the explicable, *and* to reinforce or alter the world by meaningful actions of various provenance.'[32] In other words, as Aronowitz and Giroux explain, it means that significance is attached to what has been learned.[33] Wertsch describes this process as the difference between *mastery* and *appropriation*. Mastery involves 'knowing how' to use a cultural tool and apply it, predominately a

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[30] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p219.

[31] See Wineburg, S. (2001) *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, and Davis, E. (2005) *How Students Understand the Past: From Theory to Practice*, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, Lanham, New York, Toronto and Oxford, and Hoodless, P. (2008) Teaching History in Primary Schools, Learning Matters, Exeter.

[32] Heller, A. (1982) *A Theory of History*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p65.

[33] Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H. A. (1985) *Education Under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate over Schooling*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

cognitive process. In contrast, appropriation involves an emotional engagement with a subject, and Wertsch draws on Bakhtin's term *prisvoenie* to describe it as 'the process of making something one's own.'[34] Drawing these ideas together, the implication is that students might *know* and be able to recall information about the past (*mastery*); however, without understanding its significance, without making it 'one's own,' students are unlikely to use or apply this knowledge in the wider context of their lives (*appropriation*). *Making meaning* of history in this context, therefore, relates to the impact of learning about the past on students' emotional and affective, as well as their cognitive, domains.

The importance of understanding the impact of history learning on young people remains significant in relation to the assumed role that history takes in developing ideas about the self and the wider context which the individual inhabits. Whilst for historians such as Marwick, knowing about the past is essential to the creation of identity,[35] from a different perspective the past can be 'a burden and a form of control.'[36] As Marx wrote, 'The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.'[37] For every individual that enjoys history, there will be another who 'hated history in school

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[34] Wertsch, 'Is it Possible to Teach Beliefs, as well as Knowledge about History?' p42.

[35] Marwick, *The New Nature of History*.

[36] Molyneaux, B. L. (1994) 'Introduction: The Represented Past', in Stone, P. G. and Molyneaux, B. L. (eds), *The Presented Past: Heritage, Museums and Education*, Routledge, London and New York, p10.

[37] Marx cited in Patterson, P. (1987) *Negotiating the Past; The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin and London, p56.

so deeply that they never felt the slightest wish to engage with it later in life.'[38]
The past is a remote place, which can make the study of history challenging.

The following sections give an overview of five interlinked themes which have
been distilled from the literature on history and its role in contemporary society.
These themes provide reasons as to why history, the subject learnt at school,
might be 'meaningless' to young people, focusing, in particular, on the
presumed loss of a meaningful narrative that provides the past with significance
and value for *knowing* it in the present.

1.2 The past is remote from present experience

It is impossible to see, hear or touch the past, it can only be known through the
traces which survive in the present. As Ankersmit explains, 'we could properly
say that historians have an "experience" of the documents they find in the
archives but not that they have therewith an "experience" of the past.'[39] Davis
suggests that history is a challenging subject for many students, who must
come to terms with understanding events, people and societies that, in the
present, no longer have a presence.[40] The abstract nature of the past,
populated by shadowy figures, can present, for students, a barrier to
understanding history. They may be resistant to learning about a subject that
seems to have no bearing on the present. Older students are seen as more

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[38] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p14.

[39] Ankersmit, F. R. (2005) *Sublime Historical Experience*, Stanford University Press, Stanford
California, p113.

[40] Davis, *How Students Understand the Past*.

prone to dismissing the past as 'boring'[41] or '"dead and gone" and therefore irrelevant to the ways in which they perceive and view the present.'[42] A feeling of irrelevance may be compounded for young people who find their identity (ethnic, religious, gender or other minority) excluded from the curriculum.[43] Even where an excluded past is recognised it might be 'dealt with unsympathetically,'[44] and Lee and Howson give the example of students from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds in England who may be 'hurt by continuous well-meaning focus on the ills of slavery, which makes slavery something exclusive to Black people and portrays them as nothing more than victims.'[45]

Recent debates have focused on changes made to the underlying pedagogy and purpose of history in the National Curriculum, which have diminished the ability of many young people to make sense of the past. These are

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[41] Clark, A. (2008) *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p2.

[42] Shemilt, D. (2009) *Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful: How Adolescents Make Sense of History*, in Symcox, L. and Wilschut, A. (eds) *National History Standards: The Problem of Canon and the Future of History Teaching*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, p176.

[43] See Davis, *How Students Understand the Past,* Levstik, L. S. (2000) 'Articulating the Silences: Teachers' and Adolescents' Conceptions of Historical Significance,' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, pp284-305, Visram, R. (1994) 'British history: Whose history? Black Perspectives on British history', in Bourdillon, H. (ed) *Teaching History*, Routledge, London and New York, pp53-61.

[44] Stone, P. (1994) 'Introduction: A Framework for Discussion,' in Stone, P. G. and Molyneaux, B. L. (eds), *The Presented Past: Heritage, Museums and Education*, Routledge, London and New York, p17.

[45] Lee, P. and Howson, J. (2009) "Two Out of Five Did Not Know that Henry VIII had Six Wives": History Education, Historical Literacy and Historical Consciousness', in Symcox, L. and Wilschut, A. (eds) *National History Standards: The Problem of Canon and the Future of History Teaching*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, p252.

characterised in the literature as altering what was predominantly a narrative-led subject, which created a coherent story for children to learn, into an emphasis on learning specific periods and historical skills. Without a strong framing narrative to history, students are described as struggling 'to develop broad, coherent and usable "pictures of the past".'[46] Taught poorly, history becomes 'a desiccated version of the past, a relatively meaningless batch of names, dates, and events.'[47] Historians and researchers in England allude to the consequences of this approach, where a 'confusingly episodic and disjointed approach to learning'[48] means that students can display a limited ability to process the information they learn about the past in a meaningful way.[49] Textbooks seek to simplify the complexity of the past but in return they remove all interest, the 'qualifiers, terms of uncertainty, and signs of authorship,'[50] which invite discussion and debate. History may be, in theory, conceptually difficult but, conversely, depending on how it is taught, it may not be demanding enough. As Counsell notes, 'It is either too strange or too

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[46] Shemilt, 'Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful,' p142.

[47] Seixas, P. (2000) 'Schweigen! die kinder! or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, p23.

[48] Hunt, T. (2004) 'How does Television Enhance History?' in Cannadine, D. (ed) *History and the Media*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, p97.

[49] Lee and Howson, 'Two Out of Five Did Not Know that Henry VIII had Six Wives,' and Ofsted (2011) *History for all: History in English Schools 2007/10*, Crown Copyright, London.

[50] Britt, M. A., Perfetti, C. A., van Dyke, J. A. and Gabrys, G. (2000) 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice: A Tool for Document Supported History' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), (2000), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, p438.

familiar.'[51] For young people whose minds are firmly in the present, the past

seems to become more irrelevant 'when the topics being studied are more

remote in time.'[52] Although there is a dispute over actual numbers, there is

some evidence in England that increased numbers of young people are

choosing not to persevere with history after it stops being compulsory at the age

of fourteen, particularly in state schools.[53]

According to The Historical Association,[54] progression in history learning is

increasingly related to the ability of students to grasp that abstract ideas,

complexity and uncertainty are part of history. However, there remain students

who prefer to find out what happened in history and who desire 'clarity and

certainty.'[55] There is essentially a conflict here, which surfaces in the debate

over how history should be taught in schools. Should history engage young

people in the contested nature of the past or give young people a

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[51] Counsell, C. (2000) 'Historical Knowledge and Historical Skills: A distracting dichotomy,' in Arthur, J. and Philips, R. (eds) *Issues in History Teaching*, Routledge Falmer, London and New York, p63.

[52] Hunt, 'Teaching Historical Significance,' p44.

[53] The argument for declining numbers was most recently reported by historian Niall Ferguson, writing in *The Guardian*, see Ferguson, N. (2011) 'History has never been so unpopular', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 29 March, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/29/history-school-crisis-disconnected-events [retrieved 29 03 2011]. Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon present the evidence that falling numbers of young people studying history can be attributed to, 'the "limited place" that history occupies in the school curriculum' and its non-compulsory status after the age of fourteen: *The Right Kind of History*, p218.

[54] The Historical Association is an independent charity which strives to support the study and enjoyment of history, see http://www.history.org.uk/about/ [accessed 04 12 2011].

[55] The Historical Association (2007) *T.E.A.C.H Teaching Emotive and Controversial History 3-19: A report from The Historical Association on the Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching Emotive and Controversial History 3-19*, The Historical Association, London, p8.

straightforward narrative linked to their national identity? It is the apparent decline of this latter approach to history, and the consequences for young people's understanding of history, to which I now turn.

1.3 The controversies of history education

> What a truly universal history will be, no one knows […] It must first inventory the differences, the conflicts. To reduce it to a bland, sweetly ecumenical history trying to please everyone is not to take the right path.[56]

Le Goff's reflection on the impossibility of identifying a 'universal history' is relevant to the second theme discussed here, that there is little consensus over the most effective way to teach history in schools. Since its incorporation into the school curriculum in England, history has been subject:

> […] to almost continuous controversy: about why history should be taught, about what sort of history should be taught, about how much history should be taught, about to whom history should be taught, about how history should be taught, and about how well history was being taught.[57]

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[56] Le Goff, J. (1992, 1977), *History and Memory*, translated by Rendall, S. and Claman, E. Columbia University Press, New York and Oxford, p209.

[57] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p3.

Here I will give an overview of these debates, which are often presented as a polarisation between the value of a chronologically-framed, narrative-based, history and a history which focuses on learning the processes, skills and concepts that enable students to *think historically*. The former approach focuses on *what happened* and why that has value in the present: the latter approach focuses on *how do we know what happened* and the processes that historians use to generate knowledge about the past. Whilst these arguments are often presented as novel and specific to the particular time in which they are made, Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon point out that these are merely 'the latest iteration of long-held positions and entrenched viewpoints.'[58] It seems that history cannot help but raise questions of citizenship, morals and ethics,[59] assuming that it does have the 'potential for influencing future generations.'[60] It is not my purpose here to suggest the correct way to teach history, instead I will outline the salient points of the different approaches to the teaching of history and the impact that these are presumed to have on students' learning.

The role that history plays in promoting a collective sense of national identity is often held up as an example of how the past can be made relevant and meaningful to young people. The emergence of the modern nation-states in the

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[58] Ibid, p3.

[59] Nuhoğlu Soysal, Y. and Schissler, H. (2005) 'Introduction: Teaching beyond the national narrative', in Schissler, H. and Nuhoğlu Soysal, Y. (eds), *The Nation, Europe and the World*, Berghahn, New York and Oxford, pp1-9.

[60] Phillips, R. (1998) 'Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future: History, Identity and Politics in Schools,' in Arnold, J., Davies, K. and Ditchfield, S. (eds), *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*, Donhead, Shaftesbury, p225.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presented the need for a national history,[61] guided by the belief in the importance of a common understanding of the past which would unite its citizens.[62] History education and national heritage provided the means by which to convey these ideas to the wider population.[63] In England, the 'great tradition' of school history,[64] is supposed to have provided an over-arching sweep of history in a chronological framework sprinkled with 'well-known historical figures, personalities, narratives and landmarks.'[65] However, successive changes made to history education over the twentieth century have subsequently eroded the value of this model, which was laid down in the late nineteenth century. Rooted in ideas of identity, cohesion and social purpose, this history provided a 'compelling moral framework,'[66] with exemplars of human action and behaviour for children to emulate.[67] In an evocative passage, Davies explains what this national history might have meant to the young people who learnt it:

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[61] Berger, S. and Lorenz, C. (2008) 'Introduction: National History Writing in Europe in a Global Age,' in Berger, S. and Lorenz, C. (eds) *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion, and Gender in National Histories,* Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill and New York, p13.

[62] Symcox and Wilschut, 'Introduction,' p1.

[63] Graham, B., Ashworth, G. J. and Tunbridge, J. E. (2005) 'The uses and abuses of heritage' in Corsane, G. (ed) *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reade*r, Routledge, London and New York, pp26-37.

[64] Brown, R. (1995) *Managing the Learning of History*, David Fulton, London, p1.

[65] Brocklehurst, H. and Phillips, R. (2004) "You're History!" Media Representation, Nationhood and the National Past', in Brocklehurst, H. and Phillips, R. (eds) *History, Nationhood and the Question of Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, p394.

[66] Seixas, 'Schweigen! die kinder! or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?' p23.

[67] Diorio, J. A. (1985) 'The Decline of History as a Tool of Moral Training,' *History of Education Quarterly,* 25 (1/2) pp71-101.

Fifty years ago all children still learned the history and development of what they called "England" - that is of the United Kingdom with its empire and colonies. They learned it in a spirit of pride and patriotism, being regaled with accounts of kings and queens, heroes and heroines, victories, glorious defeats, and national achievements. They understood what it meant and what its civic and patriotic purposes were.[68]

Within this narrative, England was regarded as a distinct entity, 'fixed and eternal,'[69] with its origins spreading far back into the past.[70] It was a history which demonstrated to children how Britain's 'national-racial character […] enabled its people to achieve greatness',[71] but above all it promoted loyalty to the nation.[72] Although much of this history was 'liberally mixed with myth,'[73] it

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[68] Davies, N. (1999, 2000) *The Isles: A History*, Papermac, London, Basingstoke and Oxford, pxxvi.

[69] Ibid, pxxxvii.

[70] The origins of the English nation remain contested, with historians such as Adrian Hastings suggesting that the origins of the English nation can be traced back to (at least) the Middle Ages, see Hastings, A. (1997) *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Hastings establishes his argument in direct opposition to the substantial body of research which asserts that the nation was consolidated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through institutions, collective practices and ideas, and through an increasingly professionalised approach to history: see Anderson, B. (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London and New York; Hobsbawm, E. and Ranger, T. (eds) (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; and Colley, L. (1992), *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Vintage, London.

[71] Ahier, J. (1988) *Industry, Children and the Nation: An analysis of national identity in school textbooks,* The Falmer Press, London, New York and Philadelphia, p127.

[72] Schissler, H. (2005) 'World History: Making Sense of the Present', in Schissler, H. and Nuhoğlu Soysal, Y. (eds) *The Nation, Europe and the World: Textbooks and Curricula in Transition*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, p234.

reflected many ideas (albeit simplified) of the Whig interpretation of British history.[74] Raking over the past to find evidence for their narratives of progress, Whig historians pointed to England's 'championing of liberty and constitutional values,'[75] as a reason for the global 'supremacy of the English political, religious and social institutions.'[76] For an increasingly literate public, Whig history gave, as Black notes, 'a comforting and glorious account that seemed appropriate for a state which ruled much of the globe.'[77]

Today, national histories remain popular with the public and an explicitly national history with a focus on content continues to appeal to those who assert that the purpose of history should be as 'a socialising subject, transmitting the culture and shared values of society.'[78] School history continues to contain elements of national, collective memory, whether as the 'national story,'

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[73] Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, p33.

[74] For an explanation of the Whig interpretation of history, see for example Butterfield, H. (1973) *The Whig Interpretation of History,* Penguin Books, Harmondsworth and Victoria*;* Bentley, M. (1997), *Companion to Historiography*, Routledge, London and New York, especially pp436-442; Stuchtey, B. (1999) 'Literature, Liberty and the Life of the Nation: British historiography from Macauley to Trevelyan, in Berger, S., Donovan, M. and Passmore, K. (eds) *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800*, Routledge, London and New York, pp30-46; and Burrow, J. (2007) *A History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Enquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century,* Penguin, London.

[75] Berger, S., with Donovan, M. and Passmore, K., (1999) 'Apologias for the nation-state in Western Europe since 1800*,'* in Berger, S., Donovan, M. and Passmore, K. (eds) *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800*, Routledge, London and New York, p9.

[76] Harrison, R., Jones, A. and Lambert, P. (2004) 'The Primacy of Political History', in Lambert, P. and Schofield, P. (eds) *Making History: An Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, Routledge, London and New York, p45.

[77] Black, J. (2005) *Using History*, Hodder Arnold, London and New York, p58.

[78] Brown, *Managing the Learning of History*, p6.

entwining myth, memory and history,[79] or by explicit attempts to simulate

traditional forms of historical consciousness through the 'activating [of]

memories and passing on [of] experiences over time.'[80] An example of this

approach in England was the intergenerational project *Their Past Your Future*,

which brought young people together with veterans and eyewitnesses of conflict

to share experiences and memories, and in doing so enhance 'young people's

knowledge and understanding of the impact and contemporary significance of

war and conflict.'[81]

For those who support the teaching of history as an inculcation of national

values, the cause of the perceived decline in historical understanding and

content knowledge of young people can be directly linked to the loss of the

'great tradition' in schools.[82] However, Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon

suggest that there is limited evidence to suggest that history was ever 'taught to

inculcate national pride, most teachers did not teach history with that aim, and

most pupils did not learn about it for that purpose.'[83] It is perhaps more likely

that shifting ideas of British and English identity, which have been associated

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[79] Wertsch, J. V. (2002) *Voices of Collective Remembering*, Cambridge University Press,
Cambridge.

[80] Carr, G. (2003) 'War History, and the Education of (Canadian) Memory', in Hodgkin, K. and
Radstone, S. (eds) *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge, London and New
York, p74.

[81] Dodd, J., Jones, C. Watson, S. Golding, V. and Kirk, E. (2011) *An Evaluation of the MLA
Their Past Your Future 2 Programme, 2008-2010,* Museums, Libraries and Archives Council,
London, p5.

[82] Brocklehurst and Phillips, 'You're History!': Media Representation, Nationhood and the
National Past.'

[83] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p14.

with the decline of Empire and economic power, the rise of Celtic nationalism, an increasingly multicultural society and changing relationship with Europe,[84] have given rise to nostalgic views of history teaching in a particular era. Bentley suggests that young people trying to make sense of their history lessons should look to the decades following the Second World War because these helped to shape 'the perceptions of their parents and teachers and supplied the material against which many of the young stand in unconscious, or sometimes highly purposive, resistance.'[85]

England in the 1960s and 1970s saw a range of literature emerge about what were described as new and progressive approaches to teaching history. The expansion in primary, secondary and tertiary education led to what Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon describe as a "pedagogic ferment," which 'would profoundly affect how history was taught in schools.'[86] There were the new social histories which placed an emphasis on drawing out 'the perceptions and "voices" of people marginalised in the official texts of history.'[87] The emergence of 'child-centred' pedagogies suggested that pupils learnt best through active discovery and experimentation rather than passive rote learning of dates and events.[88] History also seemed to lose its value in a period which 'witnessed an

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[84] Kumar, K. (2003) *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[85] Bentley, M. (1997) 'General Introduction: The Project of Historiography', in Bentley, M. (ed) *Companion to Historiography*, Routledge, London and New York, pxv.

[86] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p157.

[87] R. Harrison (2010) 'Multicultural and Minority Heritage' in Tim Benton (ed) *Understanding Heritage and Memory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, p168.

[88] See chapter two for an explanation of children's learning theories.

unprecedentedly rapid modernization.'[89] Teacher educators such as Fines thought it was more important for children to 'understand the ambiguities and complexities of history than to be introduced to the subject with unproblematized and often semi-fictional stories about heroes and heroines from the past.'[90] There was an attempt to remove the national bias from history and give the subject a new purpose and value in the curriculum.[91]

Although national histories remain 'indispensable', ideas about identity and belonging continue to change in response to increased globalisation.[92] Children growing up in this rapidly changing environment, Ross suggests, will have different notions of identity. These will be 'multi-faceted and layered […] more complex than the simple affiliations of the past.'[93] Identities can transcend national boundaries: as Torpey notes, 'substantial numbers of people in the developed world' have 'a growing identification with the notion that they are members of a diaspora.'[94] In such circumstances there are calls for new approaches to teaching history, for example what Schissler calls a world history

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[89] Symcox and Wilschut, 'Introduction,' p2.

[90] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p157.

[91] Fines asserted that young people should be encouraged to use primary sources, to question and assess historical accounts and be open to alternative interpretations. See Fines, J. (1969) 'Introduction', in Fines, J. (ed) *History,* Blond Educational, London.

[92] Berger and Lorenz, 'Introduction: National History Writing in Europe in a Global Age,' p25.

[93] Ross, A. (2007) 'Series Introduction', in Cajani, L. and Ross, A. (eds) *History Teaching, Identities, Citizenship,* Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent, UK and Sterling, USA, ppvii-viii.

[94] Torpey, J. (2004) 'The Pursuit of the Past: A Polemical Perspective', in Seixas, P. (ed) *Theorizing Historical Consciousness,* University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London, p249.

which recognises 'cultural diversity and acknowledgement of difference.'[95] This so-called 'progressive "modern world" trend […] strives for a pluralistic curriculum from a global point of view, offering space for a multicultural approach of the past.'[96] As Giroux contends, such a history education can teach young people to be responsible and tolerant by 'actively questioning and negotiating the relationships between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change.'[97]

At present, the National Curriculum in England, implemented in 1988 as part of a government attempt to improve teaching across Britain,[98] represents an 'uneasy compromise' according to Brown, between traditional and progressive forms of teaching history.[99] In their survey of English history education, Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon suggest that whilst the National Curriculum has strengthened history teaching and learning, changes made by successive governments have steadily eroded the amount of time allocated to it. One of the implications appears to be 'increasing conservatism in the choice of topics.'[100] Evidence from *Youth and History,* a study carried out in 1995 in twenty-seven European countries, also implies that progressive and innovative approaches to history are failing to support students' historical understanding in

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[95] Schissler, 'World History: Making Sense of the Present,' p238.

[96] Symcox and Wilschut, 'Introduction,' p5.

[97] Giroux, H. A. (2003) *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York and Houndsmill, p91.

[98] See Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, pp181-218.

[99] Brown, *Managing the Learning of History*, p5.

[100] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p217.

the way their supporters insist. Von Borries writes that these methods 'do not seem to promote students' motivation, acquisition of knowledge, methodological abilities or moral judgements.'[101] Debates have returned to the need for a narrative or 'grand organizing principle,'[102] which would give students the means to understand why they are learning history, beyond a fragmented collection of events and periods. The continuing debate over what this narrative might be reinforces that history is an inherently values-laden subject,[103] with the power 'to define who we are in the present.'[104]

1.4 The appeal of popular history

Developments in pedagogy over the past sixty years have placed an emphasis on providing children with concrete experiences to facilitate their learning: in history these changes 'have taken many teachers of the past out of the classroom and into the historic environment.'[105] Schools use museums and historic sites as part of a range of resources and techniques, including drama

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[101] von Borries, B. (2000) 'Methods and Aims of Teaching History in Europe,' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, p252.

[102] Black, *Using History*, p10.

[103] Phillips, R. (2000) 'Government Policies: the State and the Teaching of History' in Arthur, J. and Phillips, R. (eds) *Issues in History Teaching*, Routledge, London, pp10-23.

[104] Seixas, 'Schweigen! die kinder! or, Does Postmodern History Have a Place in the Schools?' p23.

[105] Stone, P. G. and Planel, P. G. (1999) 'Introduction', in Stone, P. G. and Planel, P. G. (eds) *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education and the Public*, Routledge, London and New York, p5.

and role-play, to bring the past to life for students.[106] At the same time, popular

interest in the past, and the use of varied media to satisfy that interest, has

grown exponentially over the course of the twentieth century, providing teachers

with further resources to use in the classroom.[107] However, popular

approaches to the past become contentious when their role in the development

of students' historical understanding is considered. Rather than an attempt to

understand the past *for its own sake*, which is valued in academic history, the

past is 'used as the mirror in which we search for an explanation and remedy to

our present-day problems.'[108] For this reason, the past is prone to being

infused with present-day political, cultural and social meanings. How can these

forms of the past, their critics ask, have a positive impact on the historical

consciousness of young people, who are at their most impressionable and

malleable?

Popular or public histories can be described as the past practised collectively

through a range of media, which provide the possibility of creating 'new spaces

within which it has become possible to associate oneself to the past.'[109] These

'spaces' may be entered consciously or unwittingly: as Samuel describes,

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[106] See Corbishley, M. (2011) *Pinning Down the Past: Archaeology, Heritage and Education Today,* The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, for an overview of the resources that teachers can use to explore the past with their students. Further references are given in the conclusion to this chapter.

[107] de Groot, J. (2009) *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*, Routledge, London and New York.

[108] Misztal, B. A. (2003) *Theories of Social Remembering,* Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, p13.

[109] Baer, A. (2001) 'Consuming History and Memory Through Mass Media Products', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4 (4), p495.

children often come into contact with the past 'gratuitously and unconsciously in the course of a play or as a result of trying out adult roles - impersonating a historical character, as, say, Lord Nelson, squinting down the end of a telescope.'[110] These early encounters can be enduring, providing a stock of familiar images and ideas which, according to Molyneaux, 'help define our place in a social group and community.'[111] A much cited appeal of popular histories therefore is its open-ended, democratic, even emancipatory potential: the appeal of being able to negotiate history for oneself.[112] As history *for* the public and history *made by* the public,[113] the past is used to fulfil a range of needs, whether serious, such as the search for identity and learning, for entertainment, interest or for merely for 'satisfying a range of popular curiosities.'[114] Public history has often been accepting of minority groups in history, presenting alternative histories to those of the dominant or the élite.[115] They can be more tolerant of myths and memories, which are a fundamental element in human interaction with the past according to Samuel and Thompson.[116] These are

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[110] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p5.

[111] Molyneaux, 'Introduction: The Represented Past,' p9.

[112] Rosenzweig, R. and Thelan, D. (1998) *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, Columbia University Press, New York.

[113] Kean, H. and Ashton, P. (2009), 'Introduction: People and their Pasts and Public History Today', in Hilda Kean and Paul Ashton (eds) *People and their Pasts: Public History Today*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, pp1-20.

[114] Jordanova, L. (2000) *History in Practice,* Arnold, London, p148.

[115] Moran, J. (2004) 'History, Memory and the Everyday', in *Rethinking History*, 8 (1), pp51-68.

[116] Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (1990) 'Introduction,' in Samuel, R. and Thompson, P. (eds) *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London and New York, pp1-21.

histories which are, as Calder suggests, more 'concerned with "being-in-the-world" rather than with abstractly defined truths.'[117]

Mass media products enable young people to experience the past in immersive and multi-sensual ways, including museums and heritage sites, films, television, historical fiction, and digital media.[118] The analysis of the impact of public history on young people and their perceptions of the past depends on the writer's underlying perceptions of human behaviour and action. For those who (implicitly or explicitly) perceive the public to be, as Merriman suggests, 'passive receptacles for ideological messages',[119] or 'unthinking dupes' as Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge more bluntly state,[120] it is possible to imagine that they can be 'credulous [towards the] omissions and fabrications central to heritage reconstructions.'[121] In this respect young people (and the public) are seen as vulnerable to a simplified, superficial and highly subjective history which is potentially being exploited for political, commercial, or other, gain.[122] These representations of the past are illusions, or phantasms, where the object of the representation has no reference to the reality it purports to represent, ideas

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[117] Calder, A. (1991) *The Myth of the Blitz*, Pimlico, London, p9.

[118] de Groot, *Consuming History*.

[119] Merriman, N. (1991) *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, London and New York, p26.

[120] Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 'The Uses and Abuses of Heritage,' p33.

[121] Lowenthal, D. (1998) *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p249.

[122] See, for example, Phillips, 'Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future: History, Identity and Politics in Schools,' for specific concerns about the impact that the media can have on the historical understanding of children.

which find their antecedent in the *reality effect* of Barthes,[123] or the *simulacrum* of Baudrillard.[124] In an era of mass communication and entertainment, culture may sustain the illusion that it has been freed from tradition but new constraints have sprung up in its place through the ways in which representations, including those of the past, sustain structures of inequality (such as gender, class and ethnicity).[125] The public are regarded as susceptible to these representations, which can be 'highly refined […] in the manner of manufactured foods'.[126] These create an accessible, but ultimately sanitised or 'Disneyfied' version of the past,[127] where the focus is on 'empathetic experiences, instant illuminations, stellar events, and blockbuster shows.'[128] Pearce conceptualises the difference as the need for *understanding* versus the need to *feel:* 'Heritage is about feeling good in the present, while history is the laborious struggle to come to terms with a past which was serious then and is serious now.'[129]

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[123] Barthes, R. (1984, 1986) *The Rustle of Language*, Translated by Howard, R., University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles.

[124] The most famous example of the *simulacrum* being Disneyland, 'a deterrence machine,' which acts to conceal that the America surrounding Disneyland is, itself, no longer real; Baudrillard, J. (2001) 'Simulacra and Simulations,' in Poster, M. (ed) *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p175.

[125] Chaney, D. (1994) *The Cultural Turn: Scene Setting Essays on Contemporary Cultural History*, Routledge, London and New York.

[126] Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p143.

[127] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* p259.

[128] Huyssen, A. (1995) *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, Routledge, London and New York, p14.

[129] Pearce, S. M. (1992) *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, p208.

Black suggests, however, that such arguments reflect the 'tendency to underrate the intelligence of the public.'[130] Where the public are regarded as 'active agents in creating histories'[131] or as consumers that interact with representations of the past in sophisticated and critical ways, a much more sympathetic view emerges. The proliferation of mass media products and greater access to those products might actually be, according to Baer, 'creating a richer understanding of history and collective memory and a more reflective and self-conscious historical subject.'[132] Despite increasing attempts to explore the relationship between young people and the past outside the classroom, there are no firm answers to such assertions.[133]

The need to make sense of the past on one's own terms as expressed through popular forms of history draws attention to wider debates about how history (in the objective, academic sense) has sought to provide an alternative to memory. In the next section, I draw out this theme in more detail, for the inherent differences of these two approaches to the past - one through the *everyday* and one through the formal discipline of history - have repercussions for the learning of history in the classroom.

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[130] Black, *Using History,* p120.

[131] Kean and Ashton, 'Introduction: People and their Pasts and Public History Today,' p1.

[132] Baer, 'Consuming History and Memory Through Mass Media Products,' p499. The discourse of the more sophisticated and critical consumer is replacing that of the passive consumer, also see de Groot, *Consuming History*.

[133] See Wineburg, 'Making Historical Sense,' pp313-315, and Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, p150.

1.5 An imposed history versus an organic memory

[T]he cult of the past, far from binding the hearts of people to society, in fact detaches them: there is nothing more opposed to the interest of society.[134]

Halbwachs' concern about the role of the past in society is echoed by many writers on the subject, whereby popular representations of the past formed through memory, heritage and public history exist in tension with formal types of history. Expanding on threads begun in previous sections, here I will explore the deeper roots of why history might be meaningless to young people, namely that the imposition of an impersonal, abstract and *historical* perspective upon the past conflicts with the personal, organic, and spontaneous experience of the past through individual and collective memory. There are many strands to the discourse which has grown up around the contested nature of history and memory, and I have sought to separate out the two themes which I consider are most relevant to young people.

Debates about the nature of history and memory have tended to contrast the essential difference between the two as being that history attempts to understand the past through the creation of objective *distance,* emphasising its difference, and memory attempts to understand the past through subjective *closeness*, emphasising its familiarity*.* Whilst this is a generalisation, as both memory and history can emphasise the familiarity and difference of the past

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[134] Halbwachs, M. (1952, 1992) *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated and with an introduction by Moser, L. A., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p51.

depending on the context,[135] history's concern with *difference* stems from developments in the nineteenth century which accompanied the professionalisation of the discipline and the emergence of *historicism*. Historicism, which holds that change over time is the basis of all social and cultural development, was, 'born from a preoccupation with differences between how we experience our world, on the one hand, and how people in the past experienced theirs, on the other.'[136] As a consequence, every historical period was treated as distinctive. The historian's role was to convey to their readers 'an inkling of "what it was like" or of "what is [*sic*] felt like",'[137] to live in that particular time. From historicism came the purpose of history to understand the past 'as it actually was.'[138] Hindsight became the virtue which created the necessary distance to ensure that the 'historical spirit is fundamentally a critical one.'[139] As Tosh suggests, without historical distance, the 'profound contrasts between "us" and "them" which can cast the present in really surprising light are blurred.'[140]

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[135] Evans asserts, for example, that history has become 'a more theoretically and epistemologically self-conscious discipline,' Evans, R. J. (1997, 2000) *In Defence of History*, Granta Books, London, p257.

[136] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p69.

[137] Ibid, p70.

[138] Ferguson, N. (2004) 'Introduction' in Plumb, J. H. *The Death of the Past*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pxxxii.

[139] Braudel, F. (1980) *On History*, translated by Matthews, S., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, p8.

[140] Tosh, J. (2008), *Why History Matters*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, p12.

However, the abstract and impersonal nature of history is not always appealing. History is imposed from above, as Lambert and Schofield reflect, whereas memory comes from an organic link to the past.[141] Philosophers such as Nora, Ritter and Marquand have juxtaposed the 'erosion of the tradition or "living memory", and its replacement with a "cold", "scientific" history.'[142] Whilst memory is according to Nora, a constantly evolving and life-affirming process, history provides few answers because it is 'problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.'[143] Memory, on the other hand, is 'rooted in the concrete: in space, gesture, image, and object.'[144] In these places, which are neglected by history, the will to remember, the need for an immediate and visceral connection to the past finds its expression in *lieux de mémoire,* places of embodied memory which are material, symbolic and functional. These spaces have far more meaning than the focus of history, which 'dwells exclusively in temporal continuities, on changes in things and in the relations amongst things.'[145]

Nora's arguments reflect many of the issues raised about the relationship of public history and school history. To return to Wertsch's terms of *mastery* and *appropriation,* referred to at the beginning of this chapter, history may be treated as something to be mastered by young people, who need to know the

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[141] Lambert and Schofield, 'Conclusion: History and Power,' p290.

[142] Berger and Lorenz, 'Introduction: National History Writing in Europe in a Global Age,' p17.

[143] Nora, P. (1996) 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History', in Nora, P., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past, Volume 1: Conflicts and Divisions*, translated by Goldhammer, A., Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, p3.

[144] Ibid.

[145] Ibid.

facts for a test, but it is through popular representations of history that young people may have the opportunity to appropriate aspects of the past. In particular those representations which encourage an emotional connection with the past are seen as more susceptible to appropriation, whether it is to preserve the past,[146] make it more familiar in order to lay some claim to it,[147] or to answer what Tosh calls 'deep psychological needs for security.'[148] In this respect, a relationship with the past can be regarded as vital for enabling a sense of identity and worth in the present.[149] Yet, Huyssen sees in the building of museums, memorials and archives evidence that society is 'haunted by the fear of some imminent traumatic loss.'[150] What is being lost, here, is the organic relationship with the past, a relationship that would not have to be remembered if it were present in everyday life. Conversely, it is only through its absence that its presence becomes known, because, Ankersmit claims, 'we experience the past in terms of what it is *not.*'[151]

To return to Hobsbawm's assertion that young people 'grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in,'[152] he is suggesting that the processes by which cultural

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[146] Hewison, R. (1987) *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, Methuen, London.

[147] Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*.

[148] Tosh, J. (2002), *The Pursuit of History,* third edition, Pearson, Harlow and London, p20.

[149] Lowenthal, D. (1985) *The Past is a Foreign Country,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p41.

[150] Huyssen, *Twilight Memories,* p5.

[151] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p189.

[152] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p3.

transference of the past takes place from one generation to another have been disrupted. In traditional societies, according to Connerton, young people would have learnt about the past through 'shared acts of remembering,'[153] in their communities. However, in modern societies, this process has been replaced by that of history: Berger and Lorenz suggest that 'instead of the search for identity in the continuity between "us" and our "forefathers,"' the past 'has become a world apart.'[154] The rapid processes of change and the speed of life have also, returning to Connerton, disconnected the present from the past and utterly revolutionised individual conceptions of the world: 'What is being forgotten in modernity is profound, the human-scale-ness of life, the experience of living and working in a world of social relationships that are known.'[155] For young people growing up in this period of 'immediacy and constant change,'[156] they are seen as caught up in a material world of technology and objects which encourages them to look forward to the future, not backwards to the past. The traditional relationship between the generations, where ideas and skills are passed downwards, has been disrupted by 'a world of objects which changed its face drastically in the course of a generation [and where] parents could no longer counsel their children, who were increasingly left up to their own devices.'[157] By blurring the boundaries between children and adults, the 'effects

[153] Connerton, P. (2009) *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p67.

[154] Berger and Lorenz, 'Introduction: National History Writing in a Global Age,' p18.

[155] Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, p5.

[156] Morris-Suzuki, T. (2005) *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, Verso, London and New York, p3.

[157] Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, p66.

of technology and electronic media have resulted in a sense of social dislocation.'[158]

Hence, the paradox, the 'major and puzzling contradiction in our culture,'[159] that society is obsessed by the past but rejects the tenets of history, is not a paradox at all. It is the consequences of a society anxious about losing the past and overcompensating by attempting to preserve every trace: according to Huyssen the turn to the past, reflects 'society's need for temporal anchoring when in the wake of the information revolution, the relationship between past, present, and future is being transformed.'[160] Returning to earlier themes, without a coherent narrative in which to anchor society's memories knowledge of the past remains fragmented. Whilst technology makes it possible to preserve and archive more historical records than ever before,[161] without a universal set of values or narrative by which to structure the past, it is made, protected and recycled with no discrimination. As Nora states, 'our anxious uncertainty turns everything into a "trace," a potential piece of evidence, a taint of history.'[162] If historical memory is what Simon calls a 'constellation of representations,'[163] then the sheer scale of representations in the present

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[158] Lillehammer, G. (2010) 'The World of Children,' in Derevenski, J. S. (ed) *Children and Material Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, p22.

[159] Huyssen, *Twilight memories,* p5.

[160] Ibid, p7.

[161] Connor, S. (2004) 'Introduction' in Connor, S. (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp1-19.

[162] Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History,' p12.

[163] Simon, R. I. (2005) *The Touch of the Past: Remembrance, Learning and Ethics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill and New York, p34.

makes it difficult to establish a collective sense of the past. Society can,

Huyssen states, only attempt to 'live with the fragments, even to forge shifting

and unfixed identities out of such fragments, rather than chasing some elusive

unity or totality.'[164] However, Rüsen reiterates the need in human life for

narratives which help to make sense of this uncertainty: the 'experience of

temporal change which structurally threatens human life and disturbs the

concept of an unproblematic, ongoing, familiar process in one's own life and

world has to be interpreted in order to adjust human activities to it.'[165]

The difficulty of reconciling a history that finds its virtue in critical distance with

an orientation to the past which conflates the relationship between past and

present is a subject that I will return to in chapter two. Society is suggested to

have returned to memory as an antidote against the cold, objective gaze of

history.[166] While memory has often existed in the margins where 'modernity's

equivocations found their most pressing expression,'[167] the ascendancy of

memory and popular representations of the past came at a time when history

was suffering a crisis of confidence which, according to Nora, has left it

disconnected from its national roots and 'without a practical basis or a practical

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[164] Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p28.

[165] Rüsen, *History: Narration - Interpretation - Orientation*, p115.

[166] Berger and Lorenz, 'Introduction: National History Writing in a Global Age*,'* p21

[167] Radstone, S. (2000) 'Working with Memory: An Introduction,' in Radstone, S. (ed) *Memory and Methodology*, Berg, Oxford and New York, p5.

goal.'[168] If history cannot articulate a coherent purpose and value, then how are its students supposed to understand what it is for?

1.6 A discipline in crisis?

> The thrust of history, the ambition of the historian, is not to exalt what actually happened, but to annihilate it.[169]

In this final section, I draw attention to arguments where history, the academic discipline which has served as a model for the development of history education,[170] has been challenged over its ability to give a meaningful account of the past. As Nora's point above alludes to, the pursuit of an objective, even scientific approach in history has not lead to a greater understanding of the past but only to its dissection. As described in the previous section, the result is that 'we find ourselves in a fragmented universe.'[171] The public have been alienated from history according to Davies by a 'slough of ultra-specialization, of pedagogical theorizing.'[172] The attempt to reconcile history and memory, and to create a history that provides a consensual basis by which to understand the past, has been fraught with difficulty. According to Le Goff, 'Every effort to rationalize history, to make it offer a better purchase on its development,

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[168] Nora, cited in Berger and Lorenz, 'Introduction: National History Writing in a Global Age,' p17.

[169] Nora, 'General Introduction: Between Memory and History,' p3.

[170] Black, *Using History,* p178.

[171] Ibid, p12.

[172] Davies, *The Isles: A History*, pxxv.

collides with the fragmentation and tragedy of events, situations, and apparent evolutions.'[173]

Empirical history, the dominant way of understanding the past since the nineteenth century,[174] has been criticised by historians such as Hayden White for its seeming refusal to 'offer anything in the way of moral or political instruction for the present.'[175] To summarise the impact of work from historians such as White, the notion of what history is, has, in the words of Southgate, changed from 'being a truthful representation of a single reality to being a problematic, multi-layered, palimpsest-like textuality having at best a tenuous connection with the elusive actuality that it purports to describe.'[176] Alternative histories, including feminist and post-colonial histories, have flourished in this context.[177] However, empirical history remains the established way of doing history and Marwick contends that in order to be effective, history needs to be recognised as 'a human activity carried out by an organised corps of fallible human beings, acting, however, in accordance with strict methods and

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[173] Le Goff, *History and Memory,* p215.

[174] Empiricism presumes that understanding comes from experience and, in the historian's case, from the experience of documentary sources from which historians draw inferences about the past. From this process comes a certain kind of historical knowledge underpinned with particular moral values about truth and reality; see Davies, S. (2003) *Empiricism and History*, Palgrave, Basingstoke and New York.

[175] White, H. (2009) 'Foreword: The Postmodern Messenger' in Jenkins, K., *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London and New York, p3.

[176] Southgate, B. (2003) *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?,* Routledge, London and New York, p49.

[177] Iggers, G. G. (2008) *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, Pearson Longman, London.

principles, empowered to make choices in the language they use.'[178] Is

empirical history in crisis? If so, it is unlikely to be as a result of popular history

because, as Evans points out, it is hardly a threat: popular representations of

the past have always been widespread and 'they have always structured the

historical perceptions of the majority.'[179] The survival of the empirical way of

history suggests that it does not have to exist in *opposition* to other forms of

history, but becomes one perspective with which to view the past. The

reconciliation between popular and formal perspectives of the past, therefore,

continues to find itself played out in the classroom.

1.7 Conclusion: what makes history meaningful for young people?

In this chapter I have explored some of the reasons put forward why history

might be considered meaningless to young people. In recent years, history

education in England has been suggested to be in crisis, in danger of being

'fragmented and disaggregated,'[180] reflecting wider issues of educating young

people in the light of changing international social, cultural, economic and

political conditions.[181] Should history reflect the realities of multiple identities, of

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[178] Marwick, *The New Nature of History*, p28.

[179] Evans, *In Defence of History*, p260.

[180] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p217.

[181] van der Leeuw-Roord, J. (2009) 'Yearning for Yesterday: Efforts of History Professionals in Symcox, L. and Wilschut, A. (eds) *National History Standards: The Problem of Canon and the Future of History Teaching*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte Europe at Designing Meaningful and Effective School History Curricula,' pp73-94.

a contested, or *dissonant,* history,[182] be concerned with the theory and practice, or provide the roots by which young people can participate in a shared national, or civic, identity? Where attempts have been made to draw together the elements that make learning history meaningful for young people, inevitably identity is among them.[183] Whether or not students are conscious of it, school history remains a significant resource for identity construction: Barton suggests, therefore, that history needs to reflect their needs otherwise 'we may replace one meaningless version of history with another that is equally meaningless.'[184] Brown similarly asserts that what students learn in history is often a result of how motivated they are by what they are being taught.[185] However, if history only contains what is familiar and of interest to teachers and students, history can become narrowly focused. There is already a concern that history in many schools can be 'boiled down to Hitler and the Henries.'[186] A balance needs to be struck therefore.

In the pursuit of such a balance, there are two elements in history education which are significant for this thesis. One is the attempt to make history more meaningful and accessible for students by the use of popular representations of

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[182] Dissonance was a term used in the heritage context by Tunbridge and Ashworth to refer to the 'discordance or lack of agreement and consistency as to the meaning of heritage', Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, *The Uses and Abuses of Heritage*, p34.

[183] Davis, *How Students Understand the Past*, p120.

[184] Barton, K. C. (2009) 'The Denial of Desire: How to Make History Education Meaningless', in Symcox, L. and Wilschut, A. (eds) *National History Standards: The Problem of Canon and the Future of History Teaching*, Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, pp265-282.

[185] Brown, *Managing the Learning of History*, p38.

[186] Ferguson, 'Introduction,' pxli.

the past, including visits to museums and historic sites. These are recommended for their ability to bring history to life and for stimulating the curiosity and interest of students.[187] In particular, museums and historic sites can be used to 'fill out an otherwise bare and perhaps dimly perceived view of the past.'[188] Another approach that has emerged from the German pedagogical context is to focus on how young people develop their orientation to the past, their *historical consciousness*. Historical consciousness can help support teachers to understand how their students develop their thinking about history and how they cognitively (and emotionally) organise their knowledge. More researchers outside of Germany have started to use these theories to better understand how young people learn about the past, and the impact that different learning environments can have. In seeking to understand the way in which living history impacts upon the historical understanding of young people, I turn, in the next chapter, to the theories of historical consciousness and how these can support a greater understanding of the strategies that young people use to make the past more, or less, meaningful from their perspective in the present.

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[187] Examples for teaching history at primary school level include, Pluckrose, H. (1991) *Children Learning History*, Blackwell, Oxford and Turner-Bisset, R. (2005) *Creative Teaching: History in the Primary Classroom*, David Fulton, London. For secondary-age students, examples include, Phillips, R. (2002) *Reflective Teaching 11-18: Continuum Studies in Reflective Practice and Theory*, Continuum, London and New York and Cooper, H. and Chapman, A. (eds) (2009) *Constructing History 11-19*, Sage, Los Angeles and London.

[188] Fairley, J. (1977) *History Teaching Through Museums*, Longman, London, p129.

Chapter 2

Historical consciousness: understanding how young people orientate towards the past

2.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter examined the arguments as to why the history learnt in school is considered by some historians, educators and researchers to be meaningless for young people. However, it also raised the point that young people are exposed to ideas about the past from a variety of sources in their daily lives and these sources will potentially offer very different representations of, and interactions with, the past than in the classroom. Young people form their ideas about the past potentially through negotiation of these two contexts.

In this chapter, I will explore in greater depth what this negotiation between history in the classroom and the *everyday* means for young people's understanding of the past. In particular, how the way in which young people orientate themselves cognitively towards the past, whether *naturally* through memory or *taught* through history, is a critical element in understanding how young people make meaning (or not) from the past. From this perspective, history is a construct of the human mind, 'a cognitive means of creating sense

of the experience of the past.'[189] It provides a sense of *living in time,* which is thought to be innate or natural to humans: in other words humans are 'historically conscious.'[190] Along with a sense of the present and future, the past is 'an integral part and contested element of human life in an ever-changing present.'[191] The idea that we are conscious of our place in time, that we exist in a present but at the same time have an identifiable past and a future, gives the underpinning assumptions for theories of *historical consciousness.*

Additionally, I will explore how theories of historical consciousness, especially those developed in the German pedagogical context, can help unite notions of thinking about the past with the *historical thinking* practised by historians. Taking into account the different ways in which young people encounter the past can potentially assist teachers in overcoming the challenges that children and young people may face when reconciling notions of the past derived from everyday experience and history. As suggested in chapter one, there is a tension between the innate sense of the past (individual and collective memory) that children encounter in the world around them, and the more formal, critical forms of history which they encounter at school. I will explore the consequences that the tensions between these two understandings of the past can have for young people, and the wider implications for research into historical consciousness.

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[189] Rüsen, *History: Narration - Interpretation - Orientation,* p4.

[190] Davies, M. L. (2010) *Imprisoned by History: Aspects of Historicized Life*, Routledge, New York and London, p82.

[191] Fulbrook, M. (2002) *Historical Theory*, Routledge, London and New York, p12.

2.1 From *Geschichtsbewusstsein* to historical consciousness

First emerging in the writings of German philosophers such as Hegel (1770-1831) and Dilthey (1833-1911) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,[192] the theory of historical consciousness was revived by Gadamer and Lukács in the late twentieth century.[193] It is a way of thinking about the past that is particularly strong in German thought, which MacDonald links to the philosophical tradition of seeking to identify universal ways of understanding the past, present and future.[194] In light of concerns over history education in Germany following the Second World War, theories of historical consciousness have become increasingly important as a means of understanding how young people make meaning of the past. Drawing on studies of collective memory as well as history pedagogy, the *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik* (Manual of History Teaching) in 1979 introduced German teachers to the notion that the most basic form of history is that which is made in the everyday, the notion of 'history as life world' (*Geschichte als Lebenswelt*).[195] In the third edition of the *Handbuch*, Schörken sought to outline in comprehensive terms the theory of *Geschichtsbewusstsein* (historical consciousness) as the way in which an

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[192] Laville, C. (2004) 'Historical Consciousness and Historical Education: What to Expect from the First to the Second' in Seixas, P. (ed), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, and London, pp165-182.

[193] Seixas, 'Introduction.'

[194] Macdonald, S. (2009) *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond*, Routledge, London and New York.

[195] Jensen, B. E. (2009) 'Useable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History' in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, p48.

ordinary person experiences the world as a historical subject. The following

passage is translated from the original German:

> The self experiences the life-world in varying degrees of spatial and
>
> temporal nearness and distance […] The interest of the self is
>
> preoccupied with its own present-day world, which constitutes its sphere
>
> of action. But also past and future times belong to the life-world. Yet the
>
> interest therein is usually less pronounced than the interest in what is
>
> immediately present.[196]

This promotes the idea that an individual's innate consciousness is present-

orientated. It is the realisation, as Seixas makes plain, that the past is always

understood in relation to the specific temporal and spatial context which the

individual inhabits: 'It's achievement is the full awareness of the historicity of

everything present and the relativity of all opinions and thus the breaking of the

field of tradition.'[197] In England, historical consciousness is emerging as a

mainstream concept and can be used interchangeably with other terms such as

historical thinking and *understanding*. However, such terms refer to essentially

the same thing: the way in which children and young people make sense of the

past and their understanding of themselves as historical subjects. Debates

around history education, and the potential solution it offers for understanding

individual and social relationships with the past, means that researchers are

increasingly turning to it as a model. As suggested in chapter one, the efforts

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[196] Translated by and cited in ibid, p49.

[197] Seixas, 'Introduction,' p8.

made to understand why students find history challenging suggest that this has less to do with the content of the curriculum than broader issues of how the ability to *think historically* is shaped by conflicts between 'history as lifeworld' and the expectations of history education.

2.2 Reconciling 'history as lifeworld' and history in the classroom

> Memory was subjective, a plaything of the emotions, indulging its caprices, wallowing in its own warmth; history, in principle at least, was objective, taking abstract reason as its guide and submitting its findings to empirical proof.[198]

'History as lifeworld' makes a virtue of history as a 'normative cultural practice.'[199]   In this respect, history as a means of understanding the past is as 'natural a part of life as eating or breathing.'[200]   However, in practice there are sharp distinctions drawn between this process and the professional practice of history: as Samuel alludes to above, both memory and history are ways of creating knowledge about, and understanding, the past but may be difficult to reconcile. Attempts to blur the boundaries between the two have been met by historians such as Marwick with resistance. Marwick insists that only a history that places a rational, critical eye on the past can be useful, claiming that without 'history (*knowledge* of the past), we, and our communities, would be

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[198] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* pix.

[199] Davies, *Imprisoned by History*, p178.

[200] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, p190.

utterly adrift on an endless and featureless sea of time.'[201] The concern is not only for the subjectivity of memory, but that much of its relationship with the past is formed through instinctual, or unconscious, practices, such as through the body or through the emotions.[202] According to Samuel and Thompson, these practices contribute to the shaping of collective memories in a community. The most powerful of these practices are 'those which influence what people think and do: which are internalized, in their ways of thinking, and which they pass on consciously or subconsciously to their children and kin, their neighbours, intimates and colleagues.'[203] Identifying the collective memories shared by a community can be problematic, however, as these are rarely articulated or may be taken for granted; as Wertsch contends, it is much harder to 'produce collective memory directly.'[204] If we are to think about how the everyday ideas about the past can be reconciled with formal approaches to history in education, then it is helpful to consider how these collective ideas about the past are formed and expressed. In the pursuit of that understanding, theories about cognitive development in children and young people have been applied to ideas about the development of historical understanding, to which we now turn.

2.2.1 Cognitive development and historical understanding

The relationship with the past is created individually, and theories of cognitive development in children suggest that this is partly biological and partly through

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[201] Marwick, *The New Nature of History,* p32*.*

[202] Connerton, P. (1989) *How Societies Remember,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

[203] Samuel and Thompson, 'Introduction,' p14.

[204] Wertsch, *On Collective Remembering*, p117.

interaction with the social world. This section gives an overview of the salient points and the implications for young people learning history. Ideas around the cognitive development of children are dominated by the names of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. From the work of these psychologists comes the concept of child-centred learning, that children are assumed to be 'born with a desire for knowledge.'[205] They make their own meaning about the world, informed by their experiences and their socio-cultural context. Piaget was not the first to investigate children's thinking but he 'without question added more than any other individual to our understanding.'[206] Piaget suggested that the process by which children make sense of the world was not random but framed by a biologically-determined process. The psychological structures that enable children to learn are already present in their minds when they are born.[207] These structures, or *schema*, develop through learning, which Piaget likened to the building blocks of knowledge, with mental development similar to, 'the erection of a vast building that becomes more solid with each addition.'[208] Schema are personal constructions of ideas associated with a particular subject or theme, cognitive tools which provide the individual with a 'mental toolkit […] a

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[205] Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Hermanson, K. (1999) 'Intrinsic Motivation in Museums: Why Does One Want to Learn?' in Hooper-Greenhill, E. (ed), *The Educational Role of the Museum*, second edition, Routledge, London and New York, p146.

[206] Siegler,*Children's Thinking*, p6.

[207] Meadows, S. (1993) *The Child as Thinker: The Development and Acquisition of Cognition in Childhood*, Routledge, London and New York.

[208] Piaget, J. (1967) *Six Psychological Studies*, With an introduction, notes and glossary by Elkind, D., translated by Tenzer, A. and translation edited by Elkind, D., University of London Press, London, p4.

memory organization package or script that underpins our thinking.'[209] As children interact with the world and learn more about it, schemata are altered, modified, or reinforced.[210] As Burke suggests, such theories give weight to the idea that we 'do not reflect reality directly. We perceive the world only through a network of conventions, schemata and stereotypes, a network which varies from one culture to another.'[211] It reaches back to Kant and the idea that the real world is separated from the individual making sense of it: the individual can only *know* about the world through their sensory impressions of it (which is also the basis for empirical history).[212] These thought processes depend upon the individual's ability to create mental representations of objects and people.[213] Piaget also identified that younger and older children have different ways of developing their schema. Whilst very young children are concerned with making sense of the concrete, physical world, and understanding it in a very literal sense, from adolescence onwards, children come to realise the complexity of the world, developing the 'tendency to become involved in

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[209] Nichol, J. (2009) 'Bringing the History Curriculum to Life for Year 8/9,' in Cooper, H. and Chapman, A. (eds) *Constructing History 11-19*, Sage, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC, p36.

[210] Cooper, H. (2009) 'Afterword', in Cooper, H. and Chapman, A. (eds) *Constructing History 11-19*, Sage, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC, pp149-157.

[211] Burke, P. (1991) 'Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future', in Burke, P. (ed) *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Polity Press, Cambridge, p6.

[212] Bentley, M. (1997) 'Introduction: Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography since the Enlightenment', in Bentley, M. (ed) *Companion to Historiography*, Routledge, London and New York, pp395-506.

[213] Turner-Bisset, *Creative Teaching*, p23.

abstract and theoretical matters.'[214] Piaget's theory therefore made it difficult for young children to learn history because of its abstract nature. Until the 1960s, it was not widely accepted that children could be taught to think historically.[215] However, Piaget's experiments were difficult to replicate for further research; he observed children experimenting with manipulable, physical objects, for which there is no equivalent in history, as Dickinson and Lee suggested.[216]

> Whereas Piaget depicted children as little scientists trying to understand the world largely on their own, Vygotsky portrayed them as living in the midst of other people eager to help them acquire the skills needed to live in their culture.[217]

The ideas of Vygotsky, as Siegler's description suggests, placed children's learning in a wider socio-cultural context. Vygotsky considered that children's higher level functions (thinking, reasoning and understanding) develop through interactions with others, which 'serve to mediate between a child and the world-to-be-learned-about.'[218] As a consequence, children are expected to think in

[214] Ginsburg, H. P. and Opper, S. (1988) *Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development*, third edition, Prentice Hall, Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey, p202.

[215] Cooper, H. (2000) *The Teaching of History in Primary Schools: Implementing the Revised National Curriculum*, third edition, David Fulton, London.

[216] Dickinson, A. K. and Lee, P.J. (1978) 'Understanding and Research', in Dickinson, A. K. and Lee, P. J. (eds) *History Teaching and Historical Understanding*, Heinemann, London, pp94-120.

[217] Siegler, *Children's Thinking,* p17.

[218] Light, P. and Littleton, K. (1999) *Social Processes in Children's Learning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p8

certain ways and develop culturally and socially acceptable ideas about the world. This is important for history, which relies on, to some extent, the cultural transmission of ideas about the past. Halbwachs suggests that in creating individual ideas about the past, 'our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu.'[219] At birth, children enter into 'an already complex social world of cognising human beings.'[220] Before they reach school, they have already started to form an understanding of the world. This understanding reflects their background but is also highly idiosyncratic, which makes it possible that children will not express the same ideas or interests about the past or even share the same memories.[221] Building on these ideas, Bruner posited that any discipline could be broken down into its component parts (content, process, technical concepts and skills) and introduced to children at an early age as long as it is at a level which is appropriate to their stage of development.[222] Building upon children's prior knowledge and understanding, the teacher introduces basic concepts at first, the meaning and relevance of which become clearer as pupils acquire greater contextual knowledge and can contend with more abstract, symbolic ideas.[223] Bruner suggested that even

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[219] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p49.

[220] Tonkin, E. (1992) *Narrating our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p106.

[221] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

[222] Bruner, J. S. (1988) 'The Course of Cognitive Growth', in Richardson, K. and Sheldon, S. (eds) *Cognitive Development to Adolescence: A Reader*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates in association with The Open University, Hove, pp33-60.

[223] See Sutherland, P. (1992) *Cognitive Development Today: Piaget and his Critics*, Paul Chapman, London, and Cooper, H. (1994) 'Historical Thinking and Cognitive Development in the Teaching of History', in Bourdillon, H. (ed) *Teaching History*, Routledge in association with The Open University*,* London and New York, pp101-121.

very young children are able to learn the processes of history. The idea of progression in children's ideas and thinking in history, and the teachers' role in developing that progression, are therefore key ideas that have been incorporated into the teaching and learning of history in schools.[224] Despite increased understanding of children's development, more work is needed to understand the relationship between classroom practice and an 'everyday' understanding of the past. There is also a tension between those educators and teachers who see history as a straightforward discipline and those who regard it as conceptually challenging. For instance, Husbands reflects on how history 'was felt to be an academic discipline of ferocious difficulty which was beyond the capacity of most adolescent pupils.'[225] Through research this idea has been undermined.[226] However, according to Lee, this is not a reason to underestimate the challenges that accompany the learning of history, which 'is difficult and does not take place in a flash at 18 or even at 25. It is a gradual process of developing ideas, in which pupils need a great deal of help.'[227]

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[224] Husbands, C., Kitson, A. and Pendry, A. (2003) *Understanding History Teaching: Teaching and Learning about the Past in Secondary Schools*, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia.

[225] Husbands, C. (1996) *What is History Teaching? Language, Ideas and Meaning in Learning about the Past*, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, p8.

[226] Ibid.

[227] Lee, P. (1994) 'Historical Knowledge and the National Curriculum', in Bourdillon, H. (ed) *Teaching History*, Routledge, London and New York, p47.

2.2.2 The past and 'everyday ways of thinking'

The relationship between the past and everyday life is formed through cognitive and bodily practices and, as such, becomes part of lived experience. Memories are, as Radstone suggests, '*actively produced.*'[228] Ideas about the past exist in a state of continual negotiation as the individual experiences the world.[229] However, some ideas need to be enduring or embedded in the social context in order to create a shared and common perspective of the past.[230] This shared perspective has the tendency to, according to Morris-Suzuki, make 'particular parts of history familiar and vivid whilst rendering others distant and unknown.'[231] In this respect, collective memory evokes the past through its representations rather than create a 'transparent record' of what happened.[232] There are choices to be made about what is remembered and what is forgotten.[233] The implications of this for young people learning history is that they will enter the classroom with ideas about the past already in place, gleaned from the 'social milieu' but then stored in their minds in personal schema. Increasingly researchers are turning to these ideas about the past to understand how, in turn, they impact upon, and even interfere with, the learning of history.[234] It is suggested that this can be related to cultural assumptions and

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[228] Radstone, *Working with Memory*, p7.

[229] Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, p2.

[230] Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*.

[231] Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us*, p17.

[232] Radstone, *Working with Memory*, p7.

[233] Hodgkin, K. and Radstone, S. (2003) 'Introduction: Contested Pasts,' in Hodgkin, K. and Radstone, S. (eds) *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge, London and New York, p12.

[234] Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, p248.

ways of speaking about the past, which children encounter through relationships with others in the everyday. These become embedded in schema or the frames of meaning through which they then experience history in the classroom.

I will describe some of the emerging patterns highlighted by researchers who, through working with young people in educational settings, have done much to expand upon how everyday or *presentist* thinking can lead to history becoming counterintuitive. These include social and cultural assumptions made about concepts including power, change and society. Dickinson and Lee observed that if children have limited information about a concept in history, they will attempt to offer explanations, 'based on conventional and conceptually stereotyped views.'[235] Generalisations made from everyday experiences are often made by students about issues of politics and notions of change. Shemilt found that young people often conceive of politics as 'a matter of who has power to oppress whom, a top-down struggle between "haves" and "have nots".'[236] In terms of how change is perceived there is little consensus from students: as Lee and Howson suggest, for some change is 'random and unintelligible, whereas for others it can be given meaning.'[237] These issues are compounded by the use of what are everyday ideas as concepts in history,

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[235] Dickinson and Lee, 'Understanding and Research,' p107.

[236] Shemilt, 'Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful,' p154.

[237] Lee and Howson, 'Two Out of Five Did Not Know that Henry VIII had Six Wives,' p240.

such as democracy, monarchy, society,[238] where 'the only specifically *historical* content is provided by particular instances.'[239] Although children might use the same language as adults, they may not share the same understanding of terms used, which makes it possible to overlook divergences of meaning.[240] What might be termed 'common sense' ideas about the past work less well in the context of history education. Lee and Ashby have written extensively on these and summarise some of the main points in the following paragraph:

> Students who understand sources as information are helpless when confronted by contradictory sources. No one from the past is alive now, so nothing can be known. History, construed as telling the truth about the past, becomes impossible.[241]

For many students, 'telling the truth' about the past equates to there being one possible version of events. As Lee goes on to explain, 'If there is only one 'right' story, and knowing it depends on having seen it (or better still, having done it), we can never say anything worthwhile about the past. Many students

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[238] Chapman, A. (2009) 'Introduction: Constructing History 11-19' in Cooper, H. and Chapman, A. (eds) *Constructing History 11-19*, Sage, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC, pp1-8.

[239] Dickinson and Lee, 'Understanding and Research,' p98.

[240] Kohlberg, L. (1987) 'The Young Child as Philosopher' in Kohlberg, L., DeVries, R., Fein, G., Hart, D., Mayer, R., Noam, G., Snarey, J. and Wertsch, J., *Child Pschology and Childhood Education: A Cognitive-Developmental View*, Longman, New York and London, pp13-44.

[241] Lee, P. and Ashby, R. (2000), 'Progression in Historical Understanding among Students ages 7-14', in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, pp200-201.

stop there, wondering what the point of history is.'[242] From the child's

perspective, this also makes it very difficult to understand how historians can

know about the 'large scale processes and slow changes [in history, which]

logically could not have been directly witnessed even if components of them

may have been.'[243] Children and young people may also be disadvantaged in

history by limited knowledge of historical context, human behaviour and

motivation.[244] The psychology of children and their experiential reality are,

according to Lillehammer, different from adults in that they have far less

experience and social interaction on which to draw. However, they can still be

seen as 'active theorists' who 'constantly reconstruct their "structure of thought"

in order to make sense of the world.'[245] From their perspective, how individuals

or communities acted in the past may be dismissed as irrational or 'stupid'

because it does not conform to their own ideas about how adults should act.[246]

The dynamics and nature of how children develop their understanding also

varies depending on the context of their family, the relationships between its

members and other factors such as religion, ethnicity and social background.[247]

Within these relationships, how children are introduced to the past can be

conflicting; 'ideas of rise and decline, of "heritage" or "exploitation", of progress

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[242] Lee, P. (2004) 'Understanding history' in Seixas, P. (ed), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London, p136.

[243] Lee and Howson, 'Two Out of Five Did Not Know that Henry VIII had Six Wives,' p221.

[244] See Lee, P. J. (1978) 'Explanation and Understanding in History', in Dickinson, A. K. and Lee, P. J. (eds) *History Teaching and Historical Understanding*, Heinemann, London, pp72-93.

[245] Lillehammer, 'The World of Children,' p20.

[246] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' p146.

[247] Black, *Using History*.

or regress, of change or of stability.'[248] Popularly the past is used by adults to draw attention to differences in the present; as Lee suggests, the past is 'portrayed, quite neutrally in a context where adults are explaining to children changes in everyday life, as one in which 'we didn't have those' (whether the particular lack is of TV, or cars, or computers).'[249] For children who cannot imagine living without these material comforts, the past may be perceived in a negative light. Known as the *deficit view* of the past, such ideas are not only restricted to technological differences, but often correspond with ideas of social and cultural progress. As Lee suggests, children can come to think that in the past, 'Moral ignorance and inadequacy was almost universal. Racial prejudice, the status and role of women and class-consciousness were everywhere in the past. Wars, empires, tyrannies and slavery were common.'[250]

In articulating their ideas about the past, young people do not always make the distinction between memory, history and myth. Lee and Howson have found evidence which suggests that students draw on a range of miscellaneous material when constructing ideas about the past: 'Much of it is derived from the present and personal living memory, sometimes projected back into the past, and then used to launch a trajectory into the present and future.'[251] Whilst there is little consensus on how to overcome these everyday ideas about the past

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[248] Husbands, *What is History Teaching?,* p75.

[249] Lee, P. (2004b) 'Walking Backwards into Tomorrow: Historical Consciousness and Understanding History,' *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research*, 4 (1), p35.

[250] Ibid, p36.

[251] Lee and Howson, 'Two Out of Five Did Not Know that Henry VIII had Six Wives,' p240.

through teaching, if not addressed these ideas can, following Kohlberg, 'be maintained in spite of adult teaching.'[252] Shemilt goes even further to suggest that the 'nature and sophistication of students' *historical consciousness* is indirectly limited by how much they know […] and directly limited by the sorts of sense they make of what they know.'[253] How, then, can notions of historical consciousness draw attention to the ways in which children develop their ideas about the past and assist teachers, historians and researchers in addressing this tension between 'history as lifeworld' and history in the classroom?

2.3 A model of historical consciousness

In seeking to understand the historical consciousness of young people, it was necessary to adopt a theoretical framework which would consider the orientation to the past in the 'everyday.' As has been established, there is a substantial difference between historical thinking from the perspective of the historian and so-called 'everyday' or 'common-sense' approach,[254] the latter of which is more relevant to the experiences of young people. A model which takes history in the everyday as its starting point is that developed by German historian, Jörn Rüsen.[255] Essentially, Rüsen suggests that history is a narrative construction of the human mind, a cognitive means for making sense out of the experiences of the past: in turn, humans come to be 'shaped by the same past

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[252] Kohlberg, 'The Young Child as Philosopher,' p18.

[253] Shemilt, 'Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful,' p170.

[254] R. G. Collingwood (1946, 1993), *The Idea of History: Revised edition with Lectures 1926-1928*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp234-249.

[255] Rüsen, *History: Narration - Interpretation - Orientation*.

which they are historically dealing with.'[256] The model draws upon what Rüsen

calls 'anthropological universals' of how human beings think about, and

understand the past, rather than drawing solely from a Western perspective of

history. Rüsen argues that to generalise from history would be misguided,

predominantly because the way in which the West conceives of the past 'is a

result of a long process of cultural development and cannot be presupposed in

all types of human society.'[257] As a modernist historian, Rüsen's ideas reflect

Enlightenment beliefs of working towards a single theory of history which will

explain the 'moving forces of the human world and constitute the entire entity

and totality of history.'[258] His model is ontogenetic, outlining a progressive

development of historical consciousness from a basic, *innate* type to one of

increasing maturity. Although his model is theoretical, Rüsen argues that there

is empirical evidence to support his claims, mainly from psychological studies

which show cognitive development in humans occurs in a sequential process,

each process accompanied by increased complexity in ways of thinking.[259] The

study of historical consciousness is also relevant to narrative psychology, the

study of which emphasises the importance of explanatory frameworks for

human understanding and action, in particular, narrative structuring through

which 'people organize and make meaning of their interaction with self, others,

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[256] Ibid, p5.

[257] Ibid, p111.

[258] Ibid, p136.

[259] Ibid, p35.

and the physical environment.'[260] Before I introduce the stages of historical consciousness Rüsen proposes, I will outline the thinking behind the model, which draws together many of the issues which arise when seeking to define the relationship between history in the lifeworld and history in the classroom.

What Rüsen regards as universal to *thinking historically* is that it can be a cognitive as well as a cultural process. Essential to this process is memory (the act of remembering), which is prompted (partly) by the threat of *transience* or *mortality* in response to the uncertainty of the future. This encourages individuals to establish a semblance of order 'which enables people to handle the experience of contingency.'[261] By framing the past through narratives, which place events into a wider frame or process of temporal change, history therefore imposes order on an uncertain world.[262] Formed through experience, and 'reflecting the time order of human life,'[263] these frameworks provide a means of orientation towards the past and future which enable us to 'live in the tense intersection of remembered past and expected future.'[264] Hodder and Hutson helpfully describe this relationship in the form of an analogy to the past as a stream or flow within which 'human actors always live in a present, which is

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[260] Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005) 'Narrative Psychology and Historical Consciousness: Relationships and Perspectives,' in Straub, J. (ed) *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, p5.

[261] Rüsen, *History*, p112.

[262] Southgate, *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?*

[263] Rüsen, *History*, p2.

[264] Ibid.

given meaning through reflection on the past and anticipation of the future.'[265] Such frameworks have become especially important, Rüsen suggests, where, with the perceived loss of the organic (*traditional)* connection to the past, 'human beings have lost their guidance by natural instincts.'[266] However, there is a significant distinction between *historical consciousness* and a natural or organic connection to the past; this is the understanding that there is a distant past, beyond lived experience. This is fundamental to the individual as a *historical being*, and provides a sense of identity. Hence, as a *historically conscious* being, Rüsen contends that the coherent self (human subject) orientates his or herself in response to changes in time, which includes a time beyond that of living memory. Understandings of the past are formed, according to Rüsen, in two spheres: the external, the everyday or *practical life*, and the internal, subjective life of the individual. This orientation in the present from a past and towards future, then, locates the individual within a context which gives longevity to their kind, or to their communities of interest, effectively making them *part of history.* History is a way of making sense of the world, which ultimately reflects moral values and forms of reasoning because it 'evokes the past as a mirror of experience within which life in the present is reflected.'[267] The ability to experience time as present, past and future in an external world and the synthesis of these three states of being, values, and experience into a temporal whole (*narrative*) leads to the creation of meaning (*interpretation*): this provides the means by which the individual orientates

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[265] Hodder, I. and Hutson, S. (2003), *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*, third edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p154.

[266] Rüsen, *History*, p1.

[267] Ibid, p24.

themselves to time and progresses through life. In Rüsen's words, history 'reveals to us the web of temporal change in which our lives are caught up and (at least indirectly) the future perspectives towards which that change is flowing.'[268] To some extent the fear of mortality alluded to earlier is overcome by the sense of 'temporal immortality' conferred by history, a familiar form of which is national identity: 'Nations often locate their wellsprings in a hoary and ancient past, and project an unlimited future perspective embodying national self-assertion and development.'[269] In terms of narrative *competence*, the ability to make sense of the past through carrying out particular procedures, depends upon three elements: form (historical experience), content (historical interpretation) and function (historical orientation). From the differences that can occur between these three competencies come four *types* of *historical consciousness.* Each type consists of six elements: content, or an experience of time; patterns of historical significance; a mode of external orientation; a mode of internal orientation (historical identity); a relation to moral values; and a relation to moral reasoning.[270] I will outline here the basic features of each of the four types - traditional, exemplary, critical and genetic - following the descriptions given by Rüsen,[271] and Seixas, who has applied these types to their manifestation in historical thinking.[272]

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[268] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p67.

[269] Ibid, p68.

[270] Rüsen, *History*, p28.

[271] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p72.

[272] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' pp145-153.

The *traditional* type of historical consciousness experiences time as the repetition of a permanent and 'obligatory form of life.'[273] The past is given precedent over the present. The past has direct and unmediated relevance in the present, and individuals and communities work towards 'the conservation of sameness over time.'[274] External orientation comes in the compulsion to respect pre-given ideas about the valid form of a common life and, similarly the individual will take on particular roles depending upon what is valued in the community. The implication is that there is little choice over what these forms will take, they are handed down. Moral values are similarly based on stable ideas that have endured over time; as a form of reasoning, their effectiveness lies in their *a priori* status as something given, which the community looks to in answering moral questions.

The *exemplary* type of historical consciousness is a didactic history, exploiting the past as a source of precedent, timeless rules, examples of conduct and moral values for action and understanding in the present. Historical events do not possess any significance 'in themselves' but as an 'abstract idea of temporal change and human conduct.'[275] According to Rüsen, this type of historical consciousness tends to dominate most history curriculums. For Seixas, this type gives the present precedent over the past, providing a 'broad,

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[273] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p72.

[274] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' p145.

[275] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p73.

universal vision that allows insight into the more limited, particularist, parochial views of people in the past.'[276]

The *critical* type of historical consciousness is described as a negative historical identity because it rejects conventional and authoritative ways of thinking about the past, and renders 'problematic present value systems.'[277] Neither the past nor the present appear to be given precedent, rather the desire is to work towards counter-narratives that create ruptures in continuity and stability. The past 'loses its power as a source for present-day orientation.'[278] It opens up, however, the opportunity for new ways of defining historical identity in the present and future, which are 'unentangled by role determinations and prescribed, predefined patterns of self-understanding.'[279]

The *genetic* type of historical consciousness finds meaning in the continual change of forms of life and value systems over time. Change is regarded as giving history its meaning, a dynamic process where temporal change is not a threat but 'becomes a path upon which options are opened up for human activity to create a new world.'[280] The future is given precedence over the present and past, and the dominant pattern of historical significance is one of development. Social life is regarded as complex and profuse forms of identity ensue; different perspectives are acceptable because these can be integrated

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[276] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' p146.

[277] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p75.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

[280] Ibid, p76.

into notions of temporal change. Indeed, to stay the same is a greater threat: 'To remain what we are, not to change and evolve, appears to us as a mode of self-loss, a threat to identity. Our identity lies in our ceaseless changing.'[281] The individual accepts that there are multiple standpoints and many voices in history, and in doing so 'attempts to construct a picture of life in the past that is both consistent with the available documentary traces and to which she can exercise some human relationship.'[282]

These, then, are the basic features of Rüsen's model of historical consciousness. In the following section I will discuss the value of this model, particularly for history in the classroom.

2.4 The value of models of historical consciousness

Rüsen's model has been reviewed, applied and refined by researchers in the field of history education from where the following discussion about its value emerges.[283] Generally, the value of this model lies in its recognition that there are diverse forms of historical consciousness and that it is possible to move between the four types. Rüsen asserts that the four types are not essentialist categories and may exist together in what he describes as complex 'ad-mixtures.'[284] A student, for instance, might reveal the capacity to think genetically but may also think traditionally, depending on the context. The

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[281] Ibid, p77.

[282] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' p150.

[283] For example, Lee, 'Walking Backwards into Tomorrow;' Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' and Shemilt, 'Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful.'

[284] Rüsen, *History*, p37.

model *in-itself* does not seem to imply that one orientation towards the past is more desirable than another, although its ontogenetic form suggests that the *genetic* type is the *natural* culmination of the other three types: this is a contested point however (see below). The implied diversity in historical thinking is helpful for preventing the conflation of everyday or 'common-sense' ways of thinking about the past with academic approaches through the use of the single term, history, which can be misleading.[285] Teachers who are aware of the potential differences in how young people can approach the past may be better equipped to address the preconceptions that their students bring into the classroom. An awareness that historical consciousness is not a fixed and stable means of thinking about the past, but can (potentially) change over time and depending on the context, is also helpful considering the diverse ways in which students encounter and access ideas about the past. Morris-Suzuki and de Groot both suggest that new technologies and media forms are not only changing how young people engage with the past, exposing them to a vast 'web of inherited ideas and images,'[286] but the technologies used are changing how young people access and engage with historical, and other, information.[287] In particular, the Internet and its non-linear approach to the presentation of text can mean that users can access information in a highly idiosyncratic manner, following links and new searches though 'a multitudinous (though not unlimited) range of pathways through which the user navigates according to his or her

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[285] Hoffer, P. C. (2008) *The Historian's Paradox: The Study of History in our Time*, New York University Press, New York and London.

[286] Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us*, p27.

[287] de Groot, *Consuming History*.

interests.'[288] The broader social, economic and political changes which accompany these technological changes, suggest to Lee that the most suitable form of history would be one 'that allows students to orientate themselves in time genetically, but to understand the past to which they orientate as constructed historically.'[289]

The possibilities that Rüsen's model suggests for developing an ideal, or 'normative' form of historical consciousness presents many issues for debate.[290] There remain many questions to be asked about how these four types relate to each other and how they can be developed in the classroom. Whilst historiography demonstrates what skilled cognition *looks like*, at present there is, as Wineburg points out, 'scant advice for how to achieve it.'[291] Such a model can help answer these questions, whether the types exist in isolation or whether they might potentially 'co-exist in any particular encounter with the past.'[292] In Rüsen's work there is, as yet, limited evidence as to the mechanisms or processes which might lead to the development from one type to another: Seixas raises the point that there might be additional stages or movement between them.[293] Another concern is that by describing his model

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[288] Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us*, p212.

[289] Lee, 'Walking Backwards into Tomorrow,' p38.

[290] Billmann-Mahedra and Hausen, 'Empirical Psychological Approaches to the Historical Consciousness of Children.'

[291] Wineburg, S. S. (2005) 'The Psychological Study of Historical Consciousness' in Straub, J. (ed) *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, p208.

[292] Lee, 'Walking Backwards into Tomorrow,' p5.

[293] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness.'

as ontogenetic, is Rüsen implying that the latter types (critical, genetic) are more advanced than the preceding types (traditional, exemplary)?[294] In current theory and practice, the *genetic* type in particular is associated with academic history. Embedded into the model therefore appears to be the theoretical view that the history practised by historians is more 'advanced' than that of the everyday. Jensen has pointed out that the model privileges academic, empirical forms of understanding the past because it presumes that history 'is only understood as the distant past […] as if memory ceased before the day we were born.'[295] Rüsen argues however that the distancing affect of historical consciousness is essential for understanding the past as something separate from the present and future, it is 'a means of ascribing to the past the special importance of a historical relationship.'[296] Writing more generally about models of historical consciousness, Counsell suggests that these may actually diminish the teacher's analytical capacity to address problems that arise with individual students. They may not respond in the way that these models suggest, partly because they are often developed externally to the classroom in 'ideal' environments which do not reflect the complexities of history teaching in the real world.[297]

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[294] Ibid.

[295] Jensen, 'Useable Pasts,' p52.

[296] Rüsen, J. (2007) 'Memory, History and the Quest for the Future,' in Cajani, L. and Ross, A. (eds) *History Teaching, Identities, Citizenship,* Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent and Sterling, p18.

[297] Counsell, 'Historical Knowledge and Historical Skills.'

Whilst researchers contend that there is still much to learn about historical consciousness, for example, how it may be manifest 'across a range of age-groups,'[298] another value of its pursuit is that it is leading to research conducted with young people in a variety of scenarios inside and outside the classroom. For example, Seixas has used the theory of historical consciousness to investigate how school and family settings, as well as popular film and television, might shape young people's ideas about the past.[299] Much of the evidence provided so far focuses on how researchers and historians conceive of young people's orientation to the past. How do young people articulate their ideas about the past and what value do they place on learning history? I turn to this issue in the next section to ask, what evidence of historical consciousness is there from the perspective of young people?

2.5 Evidence of historical consciousness in the 'everyday'

Whilst historians and philosophers have attempted to define historical consciousness since the eighteenth century (see earlier in this chapter), only relatively recently have researchers applied its theories to young people's historical understanding. Predominantly, such research has been conducted in the field of history education and carried out in classroom-type environments in the form of written or verbal tests. Examples in England include the School's Council History Project (1972-1976), which explored how children could be

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[298] Shemilt, 'Drinking an Ocean and Pissing a Cupful,' p175.

[299] Seixas, P. (1993) 'Historical Understanding among Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting', in *Curriculum Inquiry*, 23 (3), pp301-327.

taught to use evidence and apply judgements in the classroom.[300] Project

CHATA (*Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches*), funded by the

Economic and Social Research Council, investigated how children's historical

ideas develop between the ages of seven to fourteen years,[301] and the Nuffield

Primary History project carried out classroom-based curriculum development

through case studies and action-research with pupils.[302] Other researchers

have taken a society-wide view of historical consciousness in order to examine

the diversity of cultural forms through which communities express their ideas

about, and attachment to, the past. In 2002, Ribbens published a survey of

historical consciousness in the Netherlands for the years 1945-2001,[303] and in

2009, de Groot published a similar survey in the UK, although the author

confined his survey to the twenty-first century.[304] The type of research that has

been carried out, therefore, tends to diminish the voices of young people, which

makes it difficult to identify how they think about the past, the value (if any) they

attach to history, and its significance in their lives. In 1998, Phillips wrote of the

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[300] Husbands, *What is History Teaching?,* p75.

[301] Dickinson, A., Lee, P. and Ashby, R. (1997) 'Research Methods and Some Findings on Rational Understanding', in Pendry, A. and O'Neill, C. (eds) *Principles and Practice: Analytical Perspectives on Curriculum Reform and Changing Pedagogy from History Teacher Educators*, Standing Conference of History Teacher Educators in the United Kingdom, Lancaster, pp113-125.

[302] Dean, J, (1997) 'Changing Teaching: The Nuffield Primary History Project', in Pendry, A. and O'Neill, C. (eds) *Principles and Practice: Analytical Perspectives on Curriculum Reform and Changing Pedagogy from History Teacher Educators*, Standing Conference of History Teacher Educators in the United Kingdom, Lancaster, pp74-85.

[303] Ribbens, K. (2002) *Een eigentijds verleden. Alledaagse historische cultuur in Nederland, 1945-2001*, Hilversum, Verloren. An English summary is available from http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/let/2005-0907-200441/UUindex.html [accessed 27 10 2011].

[304] de Groot, *Consuming History*.

difficulty in Britain of attempting to 'gauge precisely the ways in which children and young adolescents consume [the past] outside of school.'[305] The context for this statement has changed very little over ten years later. However, since 1998 there have been several, large-scale studies carried out in Europe, North America and Australia, where the authors have attempted to develop generalised views about how particular communities of people use and think about the past in their everyday lives. What characterises these studies is that they have sought to retain the voices of their subjects. In Britain, Merriman's *Beyond the Glass Case*, published in 1991, remains the most comprehensive attempt to conceptualise peoples' attitudes towards the past and history. Evidence was obtained through postal research with households across Britain.[306] More recently, Bennett *et al* have carried out a national study which, following on from Bourdieu's *Distinction*, offers an analysis of the 'social aspects of cultural practice in contemporary Britain.'[307] Whilst not specifically looking at history, it does examine the relationship between class and the consumption of cultural forms such as music, film, television, and the literary and visual arts. From North America comes Rosenzweig and Thelan's ambitious 1998 study, *The Presence of the Past,* which involved qualitative research with a range of diverse communities.[308] Two notable studies have been carried out in Australia. The first, published in 2008, was carried out by Clark with young

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[305] Phillips, 'Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future,' p224.

[306] Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case: The Past, the Heritage and the Public*.

[307] Bennett, T., Savage, M., Silva, E., Warde, A., Gayo-Cal, M., and Wright, D., (2009) *Culture, Class, Distinction*, Routledge, London and New York, p1.

[308] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*.

people, albeit in a school setting.[309] The second, was a three-year national study, similar to that by Rosenzweig and Thelan, carried out by Ashton and Hamilton.[310] All of these studies responded to similar issues to those addressed in chapter one and a national discourse of what Ashton and Hamilton call 'historical amnesia.'[311] In seeking evidence of historical consciousness, I have tried to look for broader views rather than the research being tied to a particular museum or historic site. This meant that research into historical consciousness such as MacDonald's 2009 study of visitors to Nuremberg was consulted but the very specific nature and context of the site meant only a few generalisations could be made.[312]

Drawing on this evidence, the following sections present what I consider to be the predominant ways in which historical consciousness can be manifest in the 'everyday' world of adults and young people. Rüsen's assertion that historical consciousness is a dynamic process is supported here by suggestions that historical consciousness may have a relationship with age, class, and ethnicity. Generational differences have already been suggested in chapter one to be significant, which covered the assumptions made about young people's relationship with the past. In terms of adult and older people, Halbwachs evocatively describes the conventions that adults are less interested in the past

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[309] Clark, *History's Children*.

[310] Ashton, P. and Hamilton, P. (2009) 'Connecting with History: Australians and Their Pasts', in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today,* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp23-41.

[311] Ibid, p25.

[312] Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond.*

because 'absorbed as they are with everyday preoccupations, [adults] are not interested in what from the past is now irrelevant to these preoccupations.'[313] This is compared to the elderly who 'are tired of action and hence turn away from the present so that they are in a most favourable position to evoke events of the past as they really appeared.'[314]

2.5.1 An active relationship with the past

Young people and adults are interested in learning about the past, but, as these studies suggest, on their own terms and for their own needs. The past is given relevance and meaning in peoples' lives by connecting it to the present, which was not always possible through more formal approaches. In Australia, prescribed curricula in school were described as 'dull' and 'repetitive' by young people: rather than lectures or copying from textbooks, students wanted more discussions, greater diversity of content, hands-on approaches and the opportunity to develop their own interpretations of historical sources.[315] In North America, experiences of learning history in school were negative for many adults because teachers were described as unable, or unwilling, 'to hear perspectives different from their own.'[316] Freed from the constraints of the classroom, adults in the West were free to pursue their own interests. Far from the passive consumers of history and heritage, Rosenzweig and Thelan found that participants in North America 'pursue the past actively and make it part of

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[313] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p47.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Clark, *History's children*.

[316] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, p113.

everyday life.'[317] In the US and UK, the past was a source of information, curiosity and guidance, its sheer size and diversity enabling people to use it in myriad ways. Furthermore, it could be a source of resistance to official or collective narratives. As Merriman writes, 'images of the past, because they are held in the head and may not even be articulated, cannot easily be controlled or challenged, and they can thus be used by the individual as a very personal way of coming to terms with his or her situation.'[318] Engaging with the past was a serious pursuit: in North America, participants evaluated and analysed the sources they encountered, and employed a range of skills, including interrogation, cross-examination, and empathy in their pursuit of understanding. They took their own meanings from historical sources, considering that they 'controlled their own access to wider pasts by selecting where they wanted to go and how they wanted to get there […] They also chose the contexts in which they engaged those texts.'[319] By using the past in this way, participants were able to piece together their own stories, and 'could decide how much research would satisfy their curiosity.'[320] Australians in Ashton and Hamilton's study were conscious of themselves as historical beings. They understood that wider social and cultural processes, actions and events, which they were exposed to through the media, shaped their lives. Similar to North America, Australians demonstrated 'a strong sense of ownership, or desire for control, over the past.'[321] In both Australia and America, participants valued the work of

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[317] Ibid, p18.

[318] Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, p41.

[319] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, p101.

[320] Ibid, p102.

[321] Ashton and Hamilton, 'Connecting with History,' p36.

historians but recognised academic history as only one means of accessing the past.

2.5.2 Many layered pasts, shaped by experiences in the present

Throughout the national studies, respondents referred to different conceptions of the past, ranging from a personal past, which was formed of a composite of family and community memories, and attachments to places and material culture, to the history interpreted and written by experts and institutionalised in schools and museums. How the respondents described their relationship with these different conceptions of the past very much depended upon their sense of identity and experiences in the present. In the UK, Merriman identified class as a critical element in determining how the relationship with the past was defined. Merriman found that those respondents he identified as lower status placed greater significance, and value, on the personal past, whilst the opposite tended to be true for those of higher status. The importance of class in shaping responses in Britain was supported by Bennett *et al,* who found that class remained 'a central factor in the structuring of contemporary cultural practice in Britain: class matters.'[322] As Merriman writes, 'It is intuitively clear that people from all areas of society derive a sense of belonging from the roots provided by their family and, often, a certain locality. For those of higher status, however, this past is overlain by another phenomenon which largely masks it: the sense of past as an impersonal heritage.'[323] Those identified as higher status were much more likely to visit museums and heritage sites and to be interested in

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[322] Bennett *et al*, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p52.

[323] Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, p129.

British and World history. Twenty years later, the findings of Bennett *et al* are remarkably similar:

> Whatever social advantage might arise from heavy engagement in cultural activities will accrue to those who are highly educated, who occupy higher occupational class positions, and those who have backgrounds within higher social classes. Higher social class is associated with regular attendance at the theatre, museums, art galleries, stately homes, opera, cinema, musicals and rock concerts. It is also strongly associated with owning paintings and reading books. Belonging to the lowest social classes tends to be associated with never doing these things.[324]

Returning to *Beyond the Glass Case*, differences in status (and age) were also played out in how respondents used the past to 'express ideas, hopes and fears.'[325] Respondents who had (or valued) the security of material comforts in the present were more likely to have an unfavourable view of the past; this view was held by those who were younger and of high status. As Merriman noted, their dominant position in the present 'can be legitimised at least to themselves, by pointing to the harshness of the past.'[326] By contrast, those who were older or of lower status tended towards a more positive view of the past, although they did not, conversely, want to return to the past. However, it was viewed as

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[324] Bennett *et al*, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p52.

[325] Bennett *et al*, *Culture, Class, Distinction*, p52, p29.

[326] Ibid, p40.

a time when the disadvantages they had in the present were fewer, or it triggered a reflection on the amount of change which had taken place in their lifetime: 'their ideas about the past can be both a refuge from the present and at the same time a means of criticising it for the absence of certain values.'[327] Respondents could also hold contradictory views about the past 'without any cognitive dissonance.'[328] Some people of lower status held nostalgic views about the past simultaneously with a positive belief in progress, whilst others of higher status viewed the past as unfavourable but did not enthusiastically endorse progress. Overall, it seems to point towards an *exemplary* historical consciousness, one which draws on the past to shape an understanding of the present. Although change is acknowledged, it either positions the past in a negative or positive light, rather than seeing change as a force which is embedded as part of the historical process, as the *genetic* type requires. Whilst Merriman's study focused on class and age differences, Rosenzweig and Thelan's study found ethnicity to be a significant determinant of how lives were shaped by history. The values and life experiences deemed important by ethnic groups were reflected in the narratives that they told. For many White Americans, their understanding of the past reflected narratives of decline, telling the 'story of an America that was "getting worse" – more crime, less morality, less trustworthy government.'[329] In contrast, the life experiences of Mexican Americans often led to the construction of a 'traditional narrative of linear progress,' comparing life in Mexico with a new life of advantages in North

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[327] Ibid.

[328] Ibid, p35.

[329] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past,* p137.

America.[330] Black and African Americans and Native Americans used the past to, 'affirm and build ties to their communities […] And in some ways […] connect their narratives much more explicitly to the American national story than most white Americans do, even while they dissent sharply from its traditional formulations.'[331] There are elements of the *exemplary* type, but also of the *critical* type in the need to assert an alternative narrative to that of official forms of history, a trend which can also be seen in the lower status respondents identified by Merriman.

2.5.3 The value of knowing about the past

The majority of respondents to Merriman's survey considered there was great value in knowing about the past, even if they did not visit museums or heritage sites. Non-visiting was connected to scepticism towards, or dislike of, how the past was put on display rather than a rejection of history *per se*. Young people, whom teachers 'struggle to get […] interested in Australia's past,'[332] seemed to agree that it was important to know about the past, even if they were not personally interested in history.[333] For American adults there was a sense of moral agency in the turn to the past; participants described how they 'wanted to make a difference; they wanted to take responsibility for themselves and others.'[334] Rosenzweig and Thelan suggest that for 'all their idiosyncrasies, respondents seemed to be talking about variations on a common quest to

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[330] Ibid, p138.

[331] Ibid, p149.

[332] Clark, *History's Children*, p2.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, p63.

uncover where they'd been and how they hoped to proceed.'[335] However, this

was not an orientation to the past that came *naturally*: 'they did not inherit the

ability to use the past; nor did that ability grow steadily as their bodies grew.

Taking on new responsibilities - leaving home, getting married – required them

to free themselves from other people's uses of the past and develop their

own.'[336] Respondents used the past to look for patterns which could be

fashioned into narratives that could help them to shape their lives and look

forward into the future. They used the past to draw moral lessons and develop

their values and beliefs, similar to how the past is used in Rüsen's *exemplary*

type of historical consciousness. The idea of change, however, was core to this

orientation to the past (the *genetic* type), as was a focus on experience (as

opposed to events). This expression of historical consciousness, the use of the

past as a source of lessons for the present, is one which MacDonald suggests

is pervasive in society, the 'general assumption that history teaches and that

knowing about it is in itself a way of making sure that there is less chance of

bad events being repeated.' [337] The need to leave evidence of the past behind

for descendants in America was not only connected, however, to the need to

learn from the past*,* but there was often a desire for *immortality* by the individual

creating that past as a legacy for their families.[338]

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[335] Ibid, p63.

[336] Ibid, pp63-64.

[337] MacDonald, *Difficult Heritage*, p170.

[338] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past.*

2.5.4 History is not *what happene*d, but subject to interpretation

Evidence from the studies explored here suggest that the public are conscious that history can be a 'construction' in the present. It is a narrative that is potentially subject to different interpretations depending on the perspective from which it is written: 'They understood that experiences would be interpreted differently by different people and differently by the same person as needs and circumstances shifted.'[339] Rosenzweig and Thelan considered that this points to the understanding of historical consciousness as a dynamic process: as people age and change, so do their attitudes and understanding of the world around them. This was accompanied by the view that the past did not have any meaning *in-itself.* Lessons that could be drawn from experiences were not always evident and meanings had to be made by the individual, which was a large part of the appeal of history for the participants Rosenzweig and Thelan interviewed. However, participants were also aware that this meant the past could be used to advance diverse social and political agendas in the present, something they were concerned about, particularly when they did not agree with the agenda being put forward. Whilst many respondents trusted historical sources that were the result of independent, original research, other respondents were much more sceptical about formal sources of history, which increased amongst people from minority groups.

2.5.5 Disengaged from history?

All the studies consulted here conclude that the discourse of 'historical amnesia' and disengagement from history presumed to be prevalent in the West

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[339] Ibid, p70.

(presented in chapter one) is misleading. However, they do seem to confirm

the ideas that there is a distinction between the personal history constructed in

the 'lifeworld' and formal, professional perspectives on history constructed by

historians, museums and heritage sites. People *are* interested in history, albeit

a history which they mostly fashion themselves from trustworthy sources.

Participants in Britain, America and Australia clearly wanted to be engaged with

the past, to experience it as directly as they could. Rosenzweig and Thelan

describe it as the development of a 'culture in which individuals took

responsibility and acquired skills to interpret history for themselves.'[340] There

was a real need for the past, rather than, as Merriman describes it, 'a mass

persuasion of people to visit by successful marketing strategies.'[341] However,

the past is not a romantic source of comfort and familiarity either, as writers

such as Hewison have suggested.[342]

From this research it seems that there is some truth to the idea that members of

the public use the past for their own advantage. They shape their own

narratives in response to questions about their lives and the world around them,

rather than turning to academic histories for their answers. However, whilst

some communities or groups are sceptical about official narratives, justifiably in

the case of exclusion or misrepresentation, this does not prevent them from

using these narratives to develop their own ideas about the past. Neither is the

public rejecting, on the basis of this research, *thinking historically*: they seem to

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[340] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, pp194-195.

[341] Merriman, *Beyond the Glass Case*, p23.

[342] Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*.

bring their own critical eye to the sources of knowledge about the past and have

their own opinion as to which is authoritative and can be trusted. The view of

the pursuit of history in the everyday is that people are equally as interested as

historians in understanding what happened in the past, but their discoveries are

aimed at very different ends. These are personal, directed at developing their

own sense of history rather than for society as a whole. Whilst these studies

fail to address the meaning of history for those who do not actively engage with

the past, they provide an indication of how some members of the public think

about, and use the past, and further demolish the discourse of a paradox where

the public is amnesiac about history but obsessed about the past.

2.6 Conclusion: models of historical consciousness and the relationship of young people and the past

Models of historical consciousness have been suggested as a means of

understanding how young people orientate themselves towards the past,

present and future, and how they make use of the past in understanding their

temporal and spatial context. Rüsen's model in particular provides a typology

of how the orientation towards past, present and future is manifest in ways of

thinking and narrative structuring. The past is used as a means of making

sense of the world. Studies of historical consciousness in the West appear to

support this notion. Where young people and adults see the value of history,

they reveal the preference for an active or practical relationship with the past

which is relevant to their 'lifeworld.' It is not a content to learn or information to

be absorbed but a part of living memory and has practical use in discussion and

developing ideas that can be put to use in the present. Herein lies the tension

with academic histories which seek to do the opposite, to remove the past from the present and understand it *for itself*. However, as Husbands suggests, it is possible to overstate the differences between the different ways of approaching the past. Young people are not learning to become history scholars, however they are engaging in a similar task; not only are students 'constructing an interpretation of the past […] history teachers try to develop pupils' understandings of the past and of the limitations of historical understanding.'[343] By coming to understand the relationships between the different types of temporal and spatial awareness, researchers hope to understand, in greater depth, the way in which cognitive and affective ways of thinking can influence students' understanding of the past. As I will explain in the following chapter, museums and historic sites are places where such research could be carried out. In particular, it is assumed that the tangible, seemingly direct link to the past provided by the material remains or reconstruction of the past can support young people in their learning. In the following two chapters I look at the evidence for how museums and historic sites, particularly those which use living history, might support the development of young people's historical consciousness.

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[343] Husbands, *What is History Teaching?* p5.

Chapter 3

Developing historical consciousness: the role of museums and historic sites

3.0 Introduction

In the first two chapters, I explored the first of my research objectives: with reference to debates in history education, why might history be perceived as 'meaningless' for some young people in the present? I used the theory of historical consciousness to present the view that young people have an active or practical relationship with the past which is relevant to their 'lifeworld,' but which can create ideas and preconceptions about the past which conflict with how history is taught in the classroom. In this, and the following, chapter I mean to examine how history is constructed and presented in museums with a particular focus on living history. Museums and historic sites have long been used by teachers to 'bring the past to life' for their students, and the addition of living history to a range of interpretive measures means that it is important to examine here the ways in which museum practices might impact on historical consciousness. As early as 1895, visits were being made to museums by schools and loans services were being created.[344] For children and young

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[344] Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1994) 'The Past, the Present and the Future: Museum Education from the 1790s to the 1990s', in Greenhill, E. (ed) *The Educational Role of the Museum,* Routledge, London and New York, pp258-262.

people who are still developing their cognitive ability to think in terms of abstract ideas, concrete, material evidence is thought to help provide meaning to their history learning in the classroom. The virtues of a highly visual and 'hands-on' approach to the past have been recognised in history education since at least the early twentieth century:

> The Board of Education, in its *Suggestions* for 1918, argued that children needed 'the picturesque element.' Material culture - in the form of houses, food, dress and means of locomotion - was easier for children to understand than more abstract political and constitutional questions; material artefacts were also – as progressive teachers showed – ideal candidates for 'handwork' (e.g. modelling and drawing), for 'playway' forms of education, and for what was called, after Froebel and Dewey, 'learning by doing.'[345]

For these reasons, museums and historic sites are considered to be popular with schools in England, although information on how many schools use museums and historic sites has not been consistently collected.[346] Over the last forty years the number of museums has grown considerably,[347] and Jordanova suggests that the popularity of museums means that they 'contribute

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[345] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p37-38.

[346] Hooper-Greenhill, E. (2007) *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Routledge, London and New York, p15.

[347] Watson, S. (2006) '"England Expects": Nelson as a Symbol of Local and National Identity Within the Museum', *Museum & Society*, 4 (3), p130.

to the views members of the general public hold about history.'[348] However, Stone remains cautious about the use of museums and heritage by schools, indicating that most history teachers are trained in a context 'dominated by a view of the past as driven by documentary history.'[349] Furthermore, as addressed in chapter one, museums have, along with other forms of popular history, been accused of creating superficial, even trivial, representations of the past which stifle the complexity of history, present the past as familiar, and appeal to forms of identity in the present which discourage the understanding of past human societies for their distinctive characteristics. In that respect, following Rüsen's model, it could be expected that a museum experience would satisfy the *traditional* and *exemplary* forms of historical consciousness, rather than the *critical* and *genetic* types.

Here, I am not seeking to define the ways in which schools could, or should, use museums and historic sites, but, drawing on ideas about the ways in which they produce knowledge about the past, I will look at how museums might impact upon historical consciousness. I begin by looking at what material culture can bring to an understanding of the past, and how museums create histories from the traces of the past. This is followed by an overview of the ways in which theories of learning developed in museum and heritage contexts encourage us to see that it is not only the museum or historic site that produces meanings about the past, but those who encounter exhibitions and displays

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[348] Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p142.

[349] Stone, P. (2004) 'Introduction: Education and the Historic Environment into the Twenty-First Century,' in Henson, D., Stone, P. and Corbishley, M. (eds) *Education and the Historic Environment*, Routledge, London and New York, p4.

create their own meanings in response to them. This dynamic, relational process between the individual and the histories presented in the museum or historic site is, as I will explain, potentially a critical feature in the development of historical consciousness of young people.

3.1 Producing knowledge about the past: museums and historic sites

Although they may draw on the methods of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and ethnographers, museums and historic sites are regarded as producing their own histories. The process by which the material culture and remains of the past are researched, collected, interpreted and displayed can be very different according to the purpose and mission of the museum or historic site. In this section, I provide an overview of the following themes: what material culture and historic remains can bring to the understanding of history for young people; an examination of the processes by which museums and historic sites create their histories; and the main issues relevant to the development of historical consciousness arising from these features.

3.1.1 What material culture can tell us about the past

As part of a history education, museums and historic sites, according to Fairley, can bring a sense of immediacy to the past.[350] Museums and historic sites provide an environment in which 'the remains of a past can be displayed, talked about, touched, wondered over.'[351] They can provoke the curiosity of students

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[350] Fairley, *History Teaching Through Museums.*

[351] Pluckrose, *Children Learning History*, p95.

and provide the opportunity to exercise their historical imaginations.[352]

Engaging directly with the remains of historical buildings, their physicality and layout can provide clues as to their purpose. Teachers can stimulate historical thinking in their students, as Stone explains, by encouraging them to 'ask questions of, and then interpret, that physical evidence of the past.'[353] The use of handling collections and artefacts can equally help to 'make the past more vivid.'[354] Heritage provides a tangible link to the past which, Stone suggests, 'is exciting, immediate and real. It provides a more rounded view of the past than a history lesson constructed around documentary sources alone.'[355] What is it about material culture, including artefacts, buildings and ruins, which excites such enthusiasm amongst these writers? In their research, Jackson and Kidd found that many children and young people have absorbed the value ascribed to artefacts by museums and historic sites. From their visits to these sites they have 'learned to have a respect and awe for the "real" objects which they encounter.'[356] In part, it is the idea that material remains can bring the individual into direct contact with something that was made, handled and used in the past that makes encounters with them so significant: they have 'a charisma that stems from an awareness that it is a tangible link with the past.'[357] Hein considers that this perception is linked to enduring ideas 'that the true

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[352] Turner-Bisset, *Creative Teaching.*

[353] Stone, 'Introduction,' p3.

[354] Trewinnard-Boyle, T. and Tabassi, E. (2007) 'Learning Through Touch', in in Pye, E. (eds) *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, pp192-200.

[355] Stone, 'Introduction,' p2.

[356] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p126.

[357] Fairley, *History Teaching Through Museums*, p2.

nature of things lies beyond them in a world of absolute, changeless reality.'[358] Historical objects can 'serve mediately to bring us closer to reality,'[359] and, for the purposes of this study, the vanished past. In such *object-centred* approaches,[360] it is the aesthetic qualities of the object, its shape, material properties, visceral quality, its physicality, feel, texture, and colour which can be 'expected to provide us with clues about the way people used to live; for example, we might better appreciate the technologies they used.'[361] It may also give evidence for the 'emotional or psychological dimensions of material culture.'[362]

The idea that objects connect us to a vanished past is a compelling one: in their study of public attitudes to the past in North America, Rosenzweig and Thelan found that many individuals regard material culture as an uninterrupted link to the past. Coming into contact with artefacts, respondents felt that 'they were experiencing a moment from the past almost as it had originally been experienced.'[363] This encounter with historical artefacts is what attracts thousands of people to museums each year, they have a special 'quality which

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[358] Hein, H. S. (2000) *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London, p70.

[359] Ibid.

[360] Harvey, K. 'Introduction: Practical Matters,' in Harvey, K. (ed) *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, Routledge, London and New York, pp1-23.

[361] Wing, A., Giachristis, C. and Roberts, R. (2007) 'Weighing up the Value of Touch', in Pye, E. (eds) *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Contexts*, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, p32.

[362] Harvey, 'Introduction,' p2.

[363] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past,* p106.

moves and excites us […] the "power of the real thing".'[364] Whilst the curiosity

attached to traces of the past is cultural, the preservation and display of

historical artefacts is suggested by Buchli to have long been a preoccupation for

many human societies.[365] Historians, too, attach great value to being able to

deal with *real* documents from the past: 'there is something about walking out of

an archive at the end of the day, your clothes and hands dark with rotting paper

and the dust of decades, that provides an emotional link to the past.'[366]

Handling artefacts from the past may take place on the assumption that young

people daily come into contact with material culture, and is one means by which

'the child comes to know the world into which it is born.'[367] However, the nature

of this process is not always well understood, according to Dudley: 'the

museum goer may come away informed, provoked, moved or inspired by the

objects they see – but how?'[368]

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[364] Pearce, S. M. (1994) 'Objects as Meaning; or Narrating the Past', in Pearce, S. M. (ed), *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, Routledge, London and New York, p20.

[365] Buchli, V. (2002) 'Introduction' in Buchli, V. (ed) *The Material Culture Reader*, Berg, Oxford and New York, p2.

[366] Hitchcock, T. (2008) 'Digital Searching and the Re-formulation of Historical Knowledge', in Greengrass, M. and Hughes, L. (eds) *The Virtual Representation of the Past,* Ashgate*, Farnham and Burlington, VT, p83.

[367] Renfrew, C. (2004) 'Towards a Theory of Material Engagement', in De Marrais, E., Gosden, C. and Renfrew, C. (eds) *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World*, MacDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Cambridge, Oxbow Books, Oxford, pp28-29.

[368] Dudley, S. H. (2010) 'Museum Materialities: Objects, Sense and Feeling,' in Dudley, S. H. (ed) *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, Routledge, London and New York, p3.

Looking beyond the aesthetic and material properties of material culture, it has been suggested that objects and material remains carry social and cultural meanings which can be inferred by those who research and study them.[369] If the role of history can also be seen, according to Hodder and Hutson, as the pursuit to 'grasp the meaning of human action,'[370] then *object-driven* approaches regard material culture as providing evidence of human societies, the 'people that made, used and lived with those objects.'[371] Theorists in archaeology understand material culture as evidence of a reciprocal relationship in that the object not only reflects the society in which it was made, but objects are also 'actively involved in the formation and structuring of [social] practices.'[372] However, the meaning of objects for individuals and societies must be inferred from the 'minds of people long dead.'[373] The role of archaeologists, historians and curators is to connect the two: as Shanks and Tilley describe 'concrete and particular […] empirical objects' are 'meaningfully constituted and linked in structural relationships underlying their physical presence, forming a network of cross-references.'[374] Through these connections it is almost possible to recreate past human societies, to think of people in the past as 'real flesh and blood.'[375] This desire for a connection with

[369] Shanks, M. and Tilley, C. (1987) *Social Theory and Archaeology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

[370] Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, p128.

[371] Harvey, 'Introduction,' p2.

[372] Shanks and Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology*, p85.

[373] Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, p127.

[374] Shanks and Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology*, p114.

[375] Candler, G. M. (1976) 'Museums in Education: The Changing Role of Education Services in British Museums', in *The History Teacher*, 9 (2), p187.

the people from the past reaches a terrible realisation at Pompeii, where the visible, plaster-encased bodies of the victims of the volcanic disaster that engulfed the Roman city can be viewed alongside the reconstructed remains of buildings and streets. As Beard writes,

> The dead bodies of Pompeii have always been one of the most powerful images, and attractions, of the ruined city […] the impact of these victims (whether fully recast in plaster, or not) comes also from the sense of immediate contact with the ancient world that they offer, the human narratives they allow us to reconstruct, as well as the choices, decisions and hopes of real people with whom we can empathise across the millennia.[376]

Museums and historic sites are, then, not only about the remains of the past but can be a means of displaying concrete evidence of the human activity in history.[377] In the next section, I turn to the processes by which museums and historic sites make this possible, the process by which history is made.

3.1.2 Making histories in museum and historic sites

The past still speaks in its traces, in the signifying residues of the texture of the social world in which it was once located. It is up to us to articulate that past in our own speech, to come to terms with it as a vast network of signifying

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[376] Beard, M. (2008), *Pompeii: The Life of a Roman Town*, Profile, London, pp5-7.

[377] Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*.

residues, to trace the connections down the signifying axes and place them back in our present.[378]

Shanks and Tilley exemplify here the nature of how the past is constructed in the museum and historic site: a process similar to that carried out by historians and archaeologists, whereby the traces of the past are researched, interpreted and represented. In the museum this is achieved through the 'possession of objects from the human past.'[379] Museums and historic sites reflect particular ideologies, practices and ways of thinking which shape how the past is put on display: as Pearce outlines, material culture is 'transformed by the collecting process into a museum collection archive, and clearly it is transformed again as a further stage in the same sequence by the exhibition process.'[380] Without this process, objects, according to Shanks, would exist in a state of non-identity; they need to be given meaning.[381] The material remains of the past therefore may have 'the power of the real thing,' but they do not 'speak' of their own accord; as Knell contends, 'if those objects *are* "made to speak", they do so through a human act of authorship.'[382] Through the process of collection, research and display, layers of meaning may be attached to objects: these meanings may be specific to the article, or reflect themes which the museum or

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[378] Shanks and Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology*, p116.

[379] Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p192.

[380] Ibid*,* p141.

[381] Shanks, M. (1992) *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology*, Routledge, London and New York, p138.

[382] Knell, S. J. (2007), 'Museums, Reality and the Material World', in Knell, S. J. (ed), *Museums in the Material World*, Routledge, London and New York, p7.

historic site seeks to address from the perspective of 'a broad and generalizing intellectual tradition.'[383] In this way, artefacts can be regarded as 'multifarious entities whose nature and heuristic value is often determined by the diverse range of narratives that historians bring with them.'[384] Museums, however, are necessarily selective, and have to make decisions 'about what to display and what not to display and, more fundamentally, which general and specific themes, topics and messages the museum will attempt to convey through its exhibitions.'[385] Artefacts are displayed in their own right as relics, art and treasure, used to illustrate historical narratives,[386] or alongside a range of sensory and textual media, including images, documents and oral testimony.[387] Kavanagh suggests that because of the range of possibilities museum practices present for producing histories, historians in museums 'have possibly the most creative and complex roles of all history-makers. They have a wide range of evidence on which to draw, including objects, oral tradition, and observed social practice.'[388] Similarly, historic sites may use interactive and didactic displays,

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[383] Pearce, 'Objects as Meaning; or Narrating the Past,' p20.

[384] Riello, G. (2009) 'Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives', in Harvey, K. (ed), *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, Routledge, London and New York, p30.

[385] Liddiard, M. (2004), 'Changing Histories: Museums, Sexuality and the Future of the Past,' *Museum & Society,* 2 (1), p15.

[386] Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p205.

[387] Watson, S. (2010) 'Myth, Memory and the Senses in the Churchill Museum,' in Dudley, S. H. (ed) *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, Routledge, London and New York, pp204-223.

[388] Kavanagh, G. (1996) 'Making Histories, Making Memories', in Kavanagh, G. (ed) *Making Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, p5.

such as dioramas, life-groups and reconstructions, to support understanding of material remains on site.[389]

3.1.3 Implications for historical consciousness

What is the effect that museums and historic sites might have on historical consciousness? There is a greater awareness in the sector of how museum and heritage practices are underpinned by the underlying values and ethos of the institution.[390] O'Neill suggests that there are three broad discourses about the role and purpose of the museum in society. There is the essentialist model, which privileges collection, research and preservation; the adaptive model, which states that museums can only justify their existence through serving the public; and the ideological model which implies 'both rationales are naïve covers for the ideological role of museums in supporting power structures.'[391] All three discourses have the potential to support different ideas and notions about the past, which I will discuss here in relation to Rüsen's four types of historical consciousness.

Essentialist museums tend to present the past as didactic, and rely on the 'aura […] of objective knowledge.'[392] The tone and manner of exhibitions are likely to

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[389] Moser, S. (1999) 'The Dilemma of Didactic Displays: Habitat Dioramas, Life-Groups and Reconstructions of the Past,' in Merriman, N. (ed), *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, pp95-116.

[390] Liddiard, 'Changing Histories,' p20.

[391] O'Neill, M. (2006), 'Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice: Towards a New Epistemology of Museums,' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 21, p97.

[392] Ibid, p96.

be 'authoritative and dispassionate,'[393] and to display artefacts or material remains in a progressive, linear narrative.[394] Although change is evidenced in these types of narrative, this change is often presented as inevitable, closer to a *traditional* type. Wright's claim that museums and heritage sites fossilise the past, seems to be relevant to the role of an essentialist museum: 'history becomes timeless when it has been frozen solid, closed down and limited to what can be exhibited as a fully accomplished "historical past" which demands only appreciation and protection.'[395] Gregory and Witcomb's description of how the historic house museum is traditionally interpreted and displayed reflects the tendency of this type of museum to create 'mute, static pictures of the past, which do not affectively speak in the present.'[396]

The adaptive museum, on the other hand, does make connections between the artefacts on display and the lives of the audiences visiting them. They seek to make the past relevant, Shanks explains, not through 'the objects and sites themselves so much as what they say of *us*, of national or local identity, what they symbolise or evoke.'[397] These museums may seek to evoke emotions in connection to past events and human experiences, which, in the difficulty of

[393] Watson, 'Myth, Memory and the Senses in the Churchill Museum,' p205.

[394] Walsh, K. (1992) *The Representation of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World*, Routledge, London and New York.

[395] Wright, P. (1985) *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*, Verso, London, p78.

[396] Gregory, K. and Witcomb, A. (2007) 'Beyond Nostalgia: The role of affect in generating historical understanding at heritage sites', in Knell, S. J., Macleod, S. and Watson, S. (eds) *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, Routledge, London and New York, p265.

[397] Shanks, *Experiencing the Past*, p106.

replicating the 'original emotions once generated may be substituted for others or imitated.'[398] The types of historical consciousness these museums appeal to, I suggest, would be *exemplary*. They seek to forge connections between communities in the present with those of the past and use history as a source of (moral) guidance in the present. At Beamish, The Living Museum of the North, the museum conflates past and present, according to Bennett, flattening out time. By doing so, it encourages visitors to identify with the working classes of the North East, to learn from the example of 'a people sufficiently tenacious, inventive, and, above all, canny enough to exploit its natural advantages.'[399] Whilst Beamish invites its visitors to indulge in nostalgia and sentimentality, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York uses their historical collections 'to promote cross-cultural understanding, to tackle prejudice and intolerance and to foster respect for difference.'[400] Here, the past is used openly as a source of understanding for the present and future. Abram, the Museum Director, writes, 'Our sites and history museums are important not because of the stories they tell but rather because implicit in these stories are lessons so powerful that they, if fully understood, could improve our lives.'[401] The final, ideological model is the museum which is aware of its underlying power relations and hierarchies, and seeks to overcome these in its representations of the past. Such museums could appeal to a *critical* type of

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[398] Watson, 'Myth, Memory and the Senses in the Churchill Museum,' p206.

[399] Bennett, T. (1988) 'Museums and "the People", in Lumley, R. (ed) *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, Comedia, Routledge, London and New York, p65.

[400] Sandell, R. (2007) *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, Routledge, London and New York, p2.

[401] Abram, R. J. (2002) 'Harnessing the Power of History', in Sandell, R. (ed) *Museums, Society, Inequality*, Routledge, London and New York, p141.

historical consciousness, seeking to represent an alternative history to that which is conventionally held, or to challenge misconceptions about the past in the present. This takes place at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, where the museum introduces 'long rooted Americans to their family members before they became acceptable - at the point of their first arrival, when they knew not the language or the customs of their adopted land.'[402]

Finding a museum model that supports the *genetic* type of historical consciousness is more challenging. As described in chapter two, rather than learning from the past or desiring to make it relevant for the present, the *genetic* type seeks to understand the past as a process, where change is an inevitable part of the historical landscape, as are multiple voices and perspectives. The approach to the past is one of critical and rational enquiry: the 'special task' of the historian, described by Collingwood, is 'to imagine the past: not as an object of possible perception, since it does not now exist, but able through this activity to become an object of our thought.'[403] An example of a historic site which seems to encourage visitors to make the past an 'object of their thought,' is Greenough, an abandoned town in Western Australia. Notable for its 'emptiness and relative isolation,'[404] the interpretive methods, according to Gregory and Witcomb, invite visitors to consider what is not there - the absences and silences in the historical record - and to use their historical imagination to make sense of the space. The site therefore demands 'a more

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[402] Ibid, pp131-132.

[403] Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p242.

[404] Gregory and Witcomb, 'Beyond Nostalgia,' p269.

inquisitive approach from the visitor, requiring them to produce their own interpretative narratives as a means to breach the gaps left open.'[405] The initial sense of 'alienation and disorientation' created by the space is, accordingly, 'transformed in the act of interpretation by the visitor into an active critical reading of the past.'[406]

In this section I have suggested that the way in which the past is represented and displayed in museums is inscribed with particular ways of thinking about history. These, in turn, may be related to the four types of historical consciousness developed by Rüsen when considering how the different approaches may impact on the historical understanding of visitors. Most learning theories in museums, however, suggest that audiences, young and old, have their own ideas, knowledge and preconceptions through which they frame what they encounter in the museum. These ideas are similar to those discussed in chapter two, the 'frames' or schema of meaning which are important in shaping student responses to history in the classroom. In the next section, continuing with my objective to understand who or what shapes young peoples' opinions and perceptions of history, I will give an overview of current learning theories in museums and what this means for an understanding of how young people learn history at the museum or historic site.

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[405] Ibid.

[406] Ibid, p269.

3.2 Learning about the past at museums and historic sites

In this section, I examine how the way in which museums and historic sites represent the past might have an impact on young people's historical understanding. I will explore the relationship between museums, historic sites, and their audiences, taking the assumption that there is a dynamic process of interaction between an institution and its audiences, whereby visitors become part of the meaning making process about the past when responding to exhibitions and displays. Potentially individuals can, through this process, build on their ideas about the past, but they can challenge or even reject the information presented to them in the museum. I start by giving an overview of popular learning theories in museums over the past fifty years, followed by a discussion of the implications these theories will have for understanding young people's learning of history.

3.2.1 Learning theories in museums and historic sites

Museums and historic sites have long been recognised as unique environments for education and learning.[407] Whilst museums in particular have been 'active in shaping knowledge over (at least) the last 600 years',[408] for most of this time they have been accessible only to an educated elite. For over fifty years or so, museums have been 'shrugging off their image as stuffy repositories of arcane

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[407] Wittlin, A. S. (1949) *The Museum: Its History and its Tasks in Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

[408] Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1992) *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, London and New York, p191.

information,'[409] and made themselves more accessible to broad communities of learners, from very young children to elderly people.

Theorists of learning in the museum and heritage context tend to privilege the learner as an active agent in their own learning experiences. The findings of Piaget, Vygotsky, Csikszentmihalyi, Bruner and Gardner, which stress the nature of learning as a process that involves language and interaction with others within a socio-cultural context, have informed the influential work of George Hein and Falk and Dierking in the US, and Hooper-Greenhill in the UK.[410] For historic sites, Stone has written extensively of the value in using material culture and heritage to support young people's learning.[411] Common to these authors are a concern for socio-constructivist theories of learning, and an awareness of the museum as places of independent and self-selective learning.[412] To summarise the main features identified by these authors, learning is the process of interaction between the self and external stimuli, which leads to a recognisable change or shift in thinking or acting. The learner plays a fundamental role in this process, building frameworks of knowledge, or

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[409] de Groot, *Consuming History,* p234.

[410] See Falk, J. H. and Dierking, L. D. (2000) *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Altamira Press, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto and Plymouth; Hein, G. E. (1998) *Learning in the Museum*, Routledge, London and New York; and Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1994) *The Educational Role of the Museum,* Routledge, London and New York, and *Museums and Education*.

[411] See for example the edited volumes, Stone, P. G. and Molyneaux, B. L., eds, (1994) *The Presented Past: Heritage Museums and Education*, Routledge, London and New York; and Stone, P. G. and Planel, P. G., eds, (1999) *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education, and the Public*, Routledge, London and New York.

[412] Watson, 'Myth, Memory and the Senses in the Churchill Museum,' p205.

schema, that shape new acquisitions of knowledge, reinforce what is already known, or reject new ideas as incompatible: they 'assimilate events and observations in mental categories of personal significance and character, determined by events in their lives before and after the museum visit.'[413]

Knowledge is not therefore regarded as some external reality to be discovered, but is constructed in the mind of the learner. Learning is recognised as cognitive, affective, embodied, and multi-sensory, since our '[s]enses, spatial locations and movement determine how we experience and interpret the world of which we are a part.'[414] It is connected to experience, which can make it a highly individualised activity.[415] Audiences bring prior knowledge, ideas and assumptions about the past which, in turn, will frame their response to museum or historic site. Learners will make sense of what they encounter in the museum and historic site in their own way.[416] As Weil explains, 'the process by which objects acquire meaning for individual members of the public, will in each case involve the specific memories, expertise, viewpoint, assumptions, and connections that the particular individual brings.'[417] For Pearce, this is part of the process by which 'we humans understand the world and come to terms with

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[413] Falk, J. and Dierking, L. (1992) *The Museum Experience*, Whalesback Books, Washington D.C., p123.

[414] Dudley, 'Museum Materialities,' p10.

[415] Connerton, *How Modernity Forgets*, p32.

[416] Leinhardt, G., Tittle, C. and Knutson, K. (2002) 'Talking to oneself: Diaries of museum visits', in Leinhardt, G., Crowley, K. and Krutson, K. (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey and London, pp103-133.

[417] Weil, S. (2007) 'The Museum and the Public', in Watson, S, (ed), *Museums and their Communities*, Routledge, London and New York, p45.

our place in it. It is the crucial act of imagination by which we make sense of our common pasts and presents and projects these into the future, and museum exhibition is an important part of this process.'[418] Here, is clearly a link to the idea of historical consciousness as proposed by Rüsen.

3.2.2 Issues of authority: learners versus museums

In portraying learners as active agents in meaning-making, such theories have created a dilemma for museums and historic sites. As public institutions, the significance of the historical knowledge that is produced by museums and historic sites is supported by evidence that suggests many people view museums as authoritative places to learn about the past.[419] There are many meanings of authority at play here. There is authority in that histories in the museum are produced by experts.[420] Longevity can reinforce authority, and Merriman draws attention to how the 'long-shelf-life of museum displays (usually twenty years or more) can lead them to preserve long discarded academic views in a highly public arena.'[421] Merriman also uses authority to highlight that museums have, historically, replicated the views of the 'dominant culture,'[422] which privileges certain types of knowledge, and normalises 'highly particularised sets of values.'[423] Lastly, museums are authoritative in that they

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[418] Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections,* p141.

[419] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*.

[420] Walsh, *The Representation of the Past*.

[421] Merriman, N. (1999), 'Introduction' in Merriman, N. (ed), *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, p5.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Sandell, *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, p3.

are regarded as trustworthy. The public who visit museums can do so in the 'faith that they can rely on the professionals to present to them some approach to an accurate picture of the past "as it really was".'[424] Rosenzweig and Thelan found that respondents 'put more trust in history museums and historic sites than in any other sources for exploring the past.'[425] High profile instances demonstrate the media storms which occur when museums have been accused of telling the *wrong* kinds of history.[426] Because of this trust placed in museums, Crane argues that museums have a responsibility towards their audiences, they 'are not supposed to lie to us [...] Assuming that our own memories are fallible, we rely on museums as well as on historians to get the past "right" for us.'[427] Cameron has found that many museum visitors accept the authoritative role of the museum, particularly in the case of difficult or contentious issues. Visitors often want museums to adopt the 'role of moral protector [...] in setting moral standards, offering moral certainty.'[428] As public institutions, given authority by their visitors, museums are potentially powerful places which can shape the perceptions of its young audiences.

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[424] Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, p18.

[425] Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence of the Past*, p105.

[426] See Dubin, S. C. (1999) *Displays of Power: Controversy in the American Museum from the Enola Gay to Sensation,* New York University Press, New York and London; and Luke, T. W. (2007), 'Nuclear Reactions: the (re)presentation of Hiroshima at the National Air and Space Museum', in Watson, S, (ed), *Museums and Their Communities*, Routledge, London and New York, pp197-212.

[427] Crane, S. A. (1997) 'Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum', *History and Theory*, 36 (4), p51.

[428] Cameron, F. (2007) 'Moral Lessons and Reforming Agendas: History museums, science museums, contentious topics and contemporary societies' in Knell, S. J., Macleod, S. and Watson, S. (eds) *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, Routledge, London and New York, p336

However, the dilemma is that the narratives presented by museums and historic sites may be 'read' by visitors in ways that are not anticipated by the museum. Historic buildings may, 'somehow "speak" messages that go against the grain of what they [heritage workers] think appropriate or significant.'[429] This is not to say that the construction of histories in museums and historic sites does not have any bearing on visitor responses. As Gielen reminds us, 'how the past is "staged" has an influence on those to whom it appeals.'[430] Museums produce histories but these are experienced by the visitors, as Watson suggests, to become part of their historical understanding. Museums are 'where "making historical sense" is embedded in the structures of the display techniques and the responses of the visitors.'[431] Whilst some, like Gielen, regard this process as relational, others may give higher priority to the learner or to the exhibition depending on their perspective. Pearce suggests that the meaning of an object does not lie with itself or in the realisation of what it is, but somewhere between the two: 'The object only takes on life or significance when the viewer carries out his realization and this is dependent partly upon his disposition and experience, and partly upon the content of the object which works upon him.'[432] This can be challenging for young people, however, who may have less experience and ability to place an object *in the past*. As Jordanova suggests, some objects need additional explanation and interpretation in order to understand their significance. The Magna Carta, for example, which, despite

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[429] Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage*, p25.

[430] Gielen, P. (2004), 'Museumchronotopics: On the Representation of the Past in Museums', *Museum & Society*, 2 (3), p147.

[431] Watson, 'Myth, Memory and the Senses at the Churchill Museum,' p205.

[432] Pearce, 'Objects as Meaning: Or Narrating the Past,' p26.

being iconic, is not very visually appealing in Jordanova's opinion and, as such, there is limited benefit from seeing it at close hand.[433] Whilst some have criticised museums for reducing their intellectual standards in order to make their collections more accessible, O'Neill points out that such criticisms are 'singularly unhistorical and mean-minded. There is no period in the past when anything more than a tiny minority of the population had the leisure and wealth to seek out subjects of intellectual difficulty.'[434] The reality seems to be that there is no consensus on how visitors will respond to history in museums: they can be, as Kavanagh suggests, 'capable of being gloriously subversive in the messages taken from exhibitions or thoroughly disempowered by omissions, oversights and generalities.'[435] Indeed, some museums have dispensed with taking an *essentialist* perspective and made audience participation a feature of the display, designing exhibitions which invite individualised reflection on what is being displayed, interpretation that is designed 'to provoke the viewer and make them part of the exhibition itself.'[436]

3.2.3 The implications for young people's learning

As suggested throughout this section, learning in museums and historic sites is very different from the classroom. Learning in the museum is not constrained by the learning of a curriculum or mode of assessment, although these are used by teachers in conjunction with a museum visit. Museum learning is seen,

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[433] Jordanova, *History in Practice*, p31.

[434] O'Neill, 'Essentialism, Adaptation and Justice,' p33.

[435] Kavanagh, G. (1996) 'Preface' in Kavanagh, G. (ed) *Making Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, pxi.

[436] MacDonald, *Difficult Heritage*, p139.

predominantly, as an active process between the learner and the museum, which, in turn, has transformed the notion of museum education over the past fifty years.[437] There has been a conceptual change from describing museums as providers of education, to facilitators of learning experiences, reflecting the recognition that museums are spaces for informal as well as formal learning.[438] In the following section, I will draw on recent evidence to draw some conclusions about the nature of a learning experience in the museum for young people.

The implication of understanding students as active learners means that there may be a difference between what the teacher and museum want them to learn, and what students do learn. Whilst their learning may be led and guided by their teacher or by museum educators,[439] children are not always passive and dependent on adults for their learning. They are, as Derevenski describes, 'actors and constructors of their own lives who act not simply intuitively but initiate action by choice.'[440] Children will interact with their peers during a museum visit, which, Falk and Dierking reflect, 'can either help or hinder

[437] Lang, C., Reeve, J. and Woollard, V. (2006) 'Preface' in Lang, C., Reeve, J. and Woollard, V. (eds) *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-First Century*, Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, ppxvii-xix

[438] Kelly, L. (2007) 'Visitors and Learning: Adult Museum Visitors' Learning Identities', in Knell, S. J., Macleod, S. and Watson, S. (eds) *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, Routledge, London and New York, pp276-290.

[439] Molyneaux, 'Introduction: The Represented Past,' p3.

[440] Derevenski, J. S. (2010) 'Material Culture Shock: Confronting Expectations in the Material Culture of Children,' in Derevenski, J. S. (ed) *Children and Material Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, p11.

learning.'[441] In terms of their learning experiences, museums are seen as

providing rich, creative and stimulating learning environments.[442] Museums and

historic sites are seen as advantageous for engaging all the senses, and Wing,

Giachristis, and Roberts claim that multi-sensory experiences can be richer,

more pleasurable and more memorable than uni-sensory experiences.[443]

Whilst Western intellectual tradition has the tendency to separate the body and

the mind,[444] in the museum the body and mind learn together as children are

physically immersed in 'carefully designed experiences' which 'generate

enjoyment, knowledge, understanding and enhanced self-confidence.'[445] The

fluid, informal nature of learning in museums is considered to be able to

capable of restoring the 'natural motivation to learn' by learners 'being freed of

anxiety, fear and other negative mental states'[446] which can be associated with

the more pressurised, formal education context. Museums are places where

'creativity can flourish, where new ideas are generated and where experiences

can be inspirational.'[447] They provide opportunities for 'serious fun,' described

as enjoyable learning experiences but where 'there is serious learning

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[441] Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience*, p51.

[442] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education*.

[443] Wing, Giachristis, and Roberts, 'Weighing up the Value of Touch,' p57.

[444] Homes, D. (2005) 'Introduction: Empire of the Senses', in Homes, D. (ed) *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, Berg, Oxford and New York, pp1-17.

[445] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education*, p171.

[446] Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson, 'Intrinsic Motivation in Museums,' p147.

[447] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education,* p183.

happening.'[448] There can be negative learning experiences in museums, and there are many reasons for this including poor provision as well as negative attitudes towards museums from children and young people. However the evidence, on the whole, points to museums as spaces where children and young people can flourish as they are treated as active and engaged learners in their own right.

3.3 Conclusion: historical consciousness in the museum

This chapter has explored the way in which museums and historic sites construct meanings about the past, leading to a discussion of way in which audiences, young and old, engage with the museum or historic site autonomously. Whilst there is a relationship between the meanings embedded into exhibitions and displays and the meanings that visitors will make, these cannot be determined or controlled by the museum. It is suggested, therefore, that whilst the types of historical consciousness that museums and historic sites are likely to appeal to are very dependent on the underlying values and ethos of the museum, there is no certainty that visitors will reflect the same types in their responses. As my research will demonstrate in later chapters, this was found to be the case: there was a tension between the types of historical consciousness which the teachers and case study sites expected the students to demonstrate, and their response to the living history.

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[448] Watson, S., Dodd, J., and Jones, C. (2007) *Engage, Learn, Achieve: The Impact of Museum Visits on the Attainment of Secondary Pupils in the East of England 2006-2007*, Research report, MLA East of England and Renaissance East of England/RCMG, Leicester, p3.

There will always be limitations, therefore, as to what can be achieved in presenting the past and representing the human dimension of the past in all its complexity may be one of those limitations. Museums evoke the past rather than represent it in its entirety, and often allude to a wider context in which the objects, or material fragments of the past, they display can be located.[449] Objects can be used to ask questions about the people who made them, provide stimulus for discussion and personal synthesis and understanding,[450] but it is not possible to 'retrieve the feel, the affective totality, of what it was like to be alive in the past.'[451] Janes argues that whilst the purpose of museums is to provide answers to the question 'What does it mean to be a human being?',[452] for many museums this is an unrealised potential. One way in which this potential could be realised, however, is through the deployment of living history, an approach to interpretation which directly refers to the human dimension of the past. Evidence suggests that using human experiences and personalities from the past can help young people to engage with history,[453] and it is to the learning potential of living history that I turn to next. However,

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[449] Watson, 'Myth, Memory and the Senses in the Churchill Museum.'

[450] Pluckrose, *Children Learning History*.

[451] Provon, J. D. (1993) 'The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction? in Lubar, S. and Kingery, D. W. (eds) *History From Things: Essays on Material Culture,* Smithsonian Institution Press*,* Washington and London, p6.

[452] Janes, R. R. (2009) *Museums in a Troubled World: Renewal, Irrelevance or Collapse?* Routledge, London and New York, p18.

[453] Hooper-Greenhill, E., Dodd, J., Gibson, L., Phillips, M., Jones, C., and Sullivan, E. (2006) *What did you learn at the museum today? Second Study: Evaluation and Impact of Learning Through Implementation of Education Programme Delivery Plans across Nine Regional Hubs*, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, London and Leicester.

the last word belongs to Hodder and Hutson, who caution that if we are to think ourselves into the past, we need to be 'aware that we are doing it and that we need to do it critically.'[454]

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[454] Hodder and Hutson, *Reading the Past*, p147.

Chapter 4

Living history: bringing the past to life

4.0 Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter, this chapter will seek to outline some preliminary conclusions about the way in which living history might impact on the historical consciousness of young people. To understand the use of living history as an education medium, I will also explore the reasons for its use as a means of interpretation at museums and historic sites. The development of forms of interpretation in museums that place an emphasis on performance, theatricality and interaction, can be connected, according to Hein, to changes in visitor disposition in the twentieth century. The pursuit of knowledge and desire for contact with the 'real thing' has been replaced with the need for highly individual, personal and subjective experiences: 'We no longer rely on representation as veridical witness: invention and fantasy are livelier substitutes.'[455] As Hein goes on to explain:

> Theatricality makes a story more compelling emotively, and so design and the art of spectacle compete with logic and evidence in the inducement of belief.[456]

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[455] Hein, *The Museum in Transition*, p86.

[456] Ibid, p80.

As Howes suggests, this apparent need for emotional and affective engagement challenges the traditional hierarchy of Western intellectual thinking which places a divide between the mind (rational, ordered) and the body (irrational, disordered).[457] As a form of interpretation, living history is experienced through the body, which connects it not with the detached, objective forms of academic history but with forms of history that are closer to memory, and which exist in the 'lifeworld.' Drawing on Landsberg's notion of *prosthetic memory*, living history has the potential to provide experiences whereby the individual 'does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.'[458] As noted in conclusion to the previous chapter, whilst history in museums is ostensibly about human beings and their responses to the challenges, needs and interactions experienced in specific times and contexts, the ways in which exhibitions and displays are created around material culture does not always make the human dimension of the past evident. Living history is a means by which both the human element of history can be made visible and audiences can directly experience those human lives. As this research will suggest, it has the potential to support an individualised perspective on history, helping young people encounter the individuals who (may have) lived in the past, and at the same time place those individuals within their wider social and cultural context. Living history can be used to convey the intangible elements of the past (mindset, personality, expression, language,

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[457] Howes, D. (2005), 'Introduction: Empire of the Senses,' in Howes, D. (ed) *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Cultural Reader*, Berg, Oxford and New York, pp1-17

[458] Landsberg, A. (2004), *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, p2.

conventional and unconventional values) that are not always possible to discern from material culture. This chapter will explore the contention that living history can support young people in making sense of the past, how and why it is possible, especially when it is considered that living history clearly is an artificial construction of the past compared to the authenticity of material culture and historic remains.

4.1 Representing the past: the role of living history

Many terms are used to describe the practices of bringing the past to life including costumed interpretation, museum theatre or performance.[459] Living history has been used here, following de Groot, to define the bodily interpretation of the past, including experimental archaeology, immersive research and virtual simulations of the past (which may take place without an established audience except for the individual carrying out the activity).[460] Living history can take place at a number of different sites, and it can be used variously as an educative tool, a research tool, or as a leisure activity for personal reasons.[461] Until relatively recently, the discourse around living history has focused on its concern with representing the past as *authentically* as possible.[462] A typical stance is that of Elliot-Wright, who suggests that living

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[459] Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (2011) 'Introduction' in Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds), *Performing Heritage: Research Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, pp1-8.

[460] de Groot, *Consuming History.*

[461] Anderson, J. (1984) *Time Machines: The World of Living History*, The American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee, p17.

[462] Handler, R. and Saxton, W. (1988), 'Dyssimulation: Reflexivity, narrative, and the quest for authenticity in 'living history,' *Cultural Antropology,* 3 (3), pp242-260.

history is above all concerned with 'realistic or authentic experience.'[463]

However, of increasing interest to researchers and practitioners is the

performative dimension of living history, which is assumed to bring a distinctly

interactive dimension to learning about the past for its audiences. Living history

can therefore be understood not only as a historical and museological practice

but also from the perspective of performance studies.[464] As a performance,

living history is a contingent and ephemeral form of interpretation, which is more

dependent on the participation and engagement of the audience than other

forms of interpretation. This has implications for the role of living history as a

means of understanding the past. Before exploring this aspect of living history,

however, I begin with a general discussion of what living history is and how it

seeks to represent the past.

4.1.1 A definition of living history

Living history is a wide term that encompasses a number of different practices

and approaches to representing the past.[465] In my research I have narrowed

my focus to living history that is used in museums and historic sites to represent

historical characters in performances to visitors, or where costumed interpreters

are used to interpret a site. Even with this narrow focus there are many

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[463] Elliot-Wright, P. J. C. (2000), *Living History: Brassey's Master Class,* Littlehampton Books, London and Hendon, VA, p338.

[464] See, for instance, Schechner, R. (2006) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, second edition, Routledge, New York and London, which outlines the broad ranging nature of performance studies. Schechner describes performance as 'any action that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed' (p2).

[465] Crang, M. (1996), 'Living History: Magic Kingdoms or a Quixotic Quest for Authenticity?', *Annals of Tourism Research,* 23 (2), pp415-431.

potential variables as to how living history will be enacted. It may be performed

by museum staff, trained actors or volunteers; performers may devise

characters who had a presence on the site or characters may be fictional or a

composite of several characters.[466] There is a difference in the dynamics

created between the audience and the performer whether 'first-person' or 'third

person' interpretation is used. The use of 'first-person' interpretation, where the

performer takes on the role of a historical character and speaks *from* the past -

as opposed to 'third-person' interpretation, where the performer takes on the

role of a historical character but speaks *about* the past from the perspective of

the present - is considered to be more effective at bridging 'the gap between

historical reconstruction and the life of the past.'[467] Although it is seen as a

more authentic recreation of the past, first-person interpretation can have its

drawbacks for audience interaction in that performers are potentially restricted

by the world-view of their character: this can be frustrating for visitors who may

ask questions that the interpreter cannot strictly answer. Third-person

interpretation is more useful for information-giving to visitors but is not as

effective in evoking the past. A solution is to use a mixture of the two

approaches, or have first-person performers accompanied by a non-performer

who can respond to visitor questions when appropriate.[468]

The emergence of living history in the twentieth century at museums and

historic sites is connected to a number of developments. One of the earliest

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[466] Hughes, C. (1998) *Museum Theatre: Communicating with Visitors Through Drama*,
Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

[467] Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation,' p244.

[468] Hughes, *Museum Theatre*.

living history museums, Skansen in Sweden, was founded by Hazelius as a manifestation of the nation as romantic folk community, according to Bäckström, 'a female, organic, social and emotional space; the Hazelian vision of a good society.'[469] Samuel traces the emergence of living history in the UK from the convergence of several movements in the 1960s, including a growing interest in social and industrial heritage and the use of period reconstructions in museums, and to the demand for more sensory, dynamic and accessible experiences in museums.[470] Living history performances can come in many forms, ranging from one-off, single character monologues, the informal population of a site with multiple historical personalities, to entire communities such as that at Colonial Williamsburg, a restored, re-imagined Revolutionary-era township in Virginia, United States.[471] As a form of interpretation it can be used very flexibly: costumed interpreters can act as educational devices to impart information about the past to visitors or 're-create the work and life of the people who populated historic environs.'[472] The experience that many historic sites seek to engender in their audiences is 'the recreation of an entire environment, and thus a world apart from the present, a "magic kingdom" where the past lives.'[473] This is not always a straightforward task: as Handler and

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[469] Bäckström, M. (2011) 'Loading Guns with Patriotic Love: Artur Hazelius's Attempts at Skansen to remake Swedish Society,' in Knell, S. J., Aronsson, P., Amundson, A. B., Barnes, A. J., Burch, S., Carter, J., Gosselin, V., Hughes, S. A. and Kirwan, A, (eds) *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, Routledge, London and New York, p70.

[470] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*.

[471] Handler, R. and Gable, E. (1997) *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg,* Duke University Press, Durham and London.

[472] Hughes, *Museum Theatre*, p34.

[473] Crang, 'Living History,' p14.

Gable suggest at Colonial Williamsburg, in order to convince its visitors that it is a living example of an eighteenth century settlement, it must 'get its publics to see past the reality staring them in the face. They must be persuaded to overlook obvious inaccuracies and anachronisms, as well as all the signs of tourism and commercialism that surround and even invade the site.'[474]

Living history can support and augment other forms of interpretation through performance and story-telling, providing accessibility to history for a range of audiences, and particularly for visitors who respond more effectively to visual and aural communication rather than written text.[475] Living history can be used to provide entertainment at the museum or historic site, where situating it within a historic environment can enhance its role twofold: the authentic backdrop lends weight to the spectacle of living history, and the historical characters can breathe life back into the site.[476] Living history can also be used, as Jackson suggests, to address gaps in museum collections, in historical narratives, or present alternatives to conventional views of the past, thereby enabling the 'recovery of distant, hidden or marginalised voices.'[477]

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[474] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, p49.

[475] Gidlow, C. and Souden, D. (2008) 'Costumed and Live Interpretation at Historic Royal Palaces', *Presenting Historic Palaces, Conservation Bulletin*, Issue 58, English Heritage, London.

[476] Ibid.

[477] Jackson, A. (2010) 'Engaging the Audience: Negotiating Performance in the Museum', in Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds) *Performing Heritage: Research Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation,* Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, p21.

4.1.2 Striving towards authenticity

> What the museum has, in this world of meaning making, is authenticity
> but that authenticity - as in the heritage park - needs careful
> understanding and control; authenticity is a fugitive quality easily lost.[478]

Here, Knell draws attention to the feature that living history practitioners seek to obtain, but which their detractors refuse to recognise: authenticity. Living history has developed various strategies in seeking to recreate the past, including tangible properties such as costumes and accoutrements (for example weapons and domestic items) and intangible features such as mannerisms, expression, behaviour, and personality.[479] Practitioners of living history are keen to highlight the extensive research that goes into their representations of the past, providing a potential link between academic, more abstract, interpretations of history and a more tangible, visual history.[480] Whilst living history is an effective means of conveying what Lowenthal calls 'uncannily dissimilar pasts,'[481] its claims to authenticity are uncertain. As Shanks implies, for a thing or object to 'be witnesses to the past they must have age and authenticity. Their age implies that they have been saved from decay while authenticity implies that their origin or context is known, we know where they

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[478] Knell, 'Museums, Reality and the Material World,' p17.

[479] Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation.'

[480] Elliott-Wright, *Living History.*

[481] Lowenthal, D. (2000) 'Dilemmas and Delights of Learning History', in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, p74.

belong.'[482] Defining authenticity in such terms definitely excludes living history. However, Phillips suggests that authenticity could be equated not with the idea that an object or performance is real and natural, but with 'reference to whatever […] is pseudo, sham, make-believe, mock, false, semi, or synthetic.'[483] Phillips therefore implies that authenticity can be relevant to the value *given* to an object or performance by virtue of its being in the museum. Returning to Knell, the idea that authenticity 'needs careful understanding and control' is a reminder that performances, like museums and historic sites, do not provide *unmediated* access to the past. They are producers of knowledge about the past, inscribing the past with particular meanings that may or may not be 'read' as intended by their audiences. For living history, these meanings are particularly elusive, for, like the past it seeks to recreate, these meanings effectively vanish once the performance is over; although they might live on in the minds of performers and their audiences.

4.1.3 A past that is embodied, felt, not just *thought*

In its most ideal form, the performer of living history seeks to embody the past in order to understand how historical figures made sense of their world. It can be, as Samuel describes, a 'quest for immediacy, the search for a past which is palpably and visibly present.'[484] Although some living history performers may pursue this 'quest' purely for their own interest and edification, at museums and

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[482] Shanks, *Experiencing the Past,* p101.

[483] Phillips, D. (1997) *Exhibiting Authenticity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, p5.

[484] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* p175.

historic sites the performer is often an educative tool for audiences.[485] Unlike

most interpretative forms in museums, living history creates the possibility of a

reciprocal relationship between the performer and their audience. This

approach presumes some attempt on the part of the performer to convey *their*

understanding of the past to an external audience and, similar to an actor, the

skilled performer will use a repertoire of facial expressions, emotions, gestures,

and movements to give a realistic impression. In return, the bodily engagement

of the audience will have an impact on the performance, whether they are

invited to take part in the action or through their physical responses (sitting

down, walking away, coming closer, folded arms) and facial gestures (surprise,

interest, alarm, disgust).[486] The performance is both the process of knowledge

creation and means of information transferral. The *knowledge* of the past that

living history produces is through the body: it is an embodied, performative and

experiential form of understanding the past.[487] Meanings are made through,

and inscribed into, bodily movements, words and actions. This makes living

history, in comparison to other, more permanent methods of interpretation,

contingent and ephemeral, and Jackson and Kidd have highlighted the complex

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[485] See Hunt, S. J. (2004), 'Acting the Part: "Living History" as a Serious Leisure Pursuit, *Leisure Studies*, 23 (4), pp387-403 and O'Brien Backhouse, M. (2009) 'Re-enacting the Wars of the Roses: History and Identity,' in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, pp113-130.

[486] See Schechner, *Performance Studies*, pp103-105 for an example of how the relationship between the performers and their audience can be created on three levels and the potential for acceptance or rejection at each 'level.'

[487] Gregory and Witcomb, 'Beyond Nostalgia.'

ways in which audiences continually 'negotiate their relationship both with the performance and with the museum or site environment.'[488]

To conclude on this introduction to living history, unlike the museums and historic sites which it interprets, the traces of the past upon which living history is founded may be less visible than the processes through which objects are shaped into historical narratives. In relation to composite or fictional characters, there is no *real* upon which the performance is based. Particularly pertinent to first-person interpretation, the knowledge of the past is produced through the body, through gestures, language, movement, and costume in a specific temporal and spatial context. It might be based on historical evidence and fact; however projected through the body and voice of the performer, this evidence takes on a new role, one which seeks to bring the past into the present and make it seem *real*. The impact that this approach to representing the past might have on its audiences, including children and young people, will be the focus of the next section.

4.2 Bringing the past to life: issues affecting living history

Bringing the past to life is the oft-stated intention behind living history. Practitioners and supporters of living history cite its main appeal as making history tangible and enabling performers and audiences alike to immerse themselves in the past. Its visual appeal is assumed to be immediate, creating a 'kind of imaginative contact with the period represented.'[489] For young people

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[488] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction,' p12.

[489] Fairley, *History Teaching Through Museums*, p128.

living history (like material culture) can make the past appear visible and tangible.[490] Used as an educative method, living history is reminiscent of 'theatre-in-education' techniques,[491] story-telling, drama and role-play; a form of play, discovery and exploration that is reminiscent of 'children's natural way of learning.'[492] Hayes and Schindel describe drama as a 'magic casement' through which ideas and knowledge can be introduced to children in 'a visceral and experiential way.'[493] However, Jackson has cautioned against using theatre in a relatively simple manner to 'convey a message because it is inherently an entertaining medium and will therefore make the message more palatable.'[494] Drawing on notions of the 'dialogic' in Bakhtinian thought - the idea that utterances are 'part of what connects us to each other and highlights the dynamic, processive nature of social discourse and meaning making'[495] - Jackson suggests that a well conceived performance can be more than entertaining, it can be 'powerful, moving, and educationally provocative.'[496] The same caution can be used in relation to living history. It can be used to augment museums and historic sites with costumed interpreters who are

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[490] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* p176.

[491] See Jackson, A. (2007) *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings: Art or Instrument?*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, for an in-depth examination of history of, and the issues surrounding, 'theatre-in-education' or TIE.

[492] Turner-Bisset, *Creative Teaching*, p102.

[493] Hayes, J. F. and Schindel, D. N. (1994) *Pioneer Journeys: Drama in Museum Education*, News Plays Books, Charlottesville, VA, p3.

[494] Jackson, A. (2005) 'The Dialogic and the Aesthetic: Some Reflections on Theatre as a Learning Medium,' in *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 39 (4), p106.

[495] Ibid, p111.

[496] Ibid, p106.

aesthetically pleasing and entertaining, but without addressing problematic elements of living history there is no certainty of its effectiveness. As these elements can have a bearing on the usefulness of living history as an educational medium, I will work through these issues one by one.

4.2.1 The relationship between living history and its audiences

> To make the past accessible, to help visitors to start a discourse of their own, we *have* to create images, albeit that they will always be false. The question we have to solve is how to make this obvious and thereby empower visitors to begin to question the images presented.[497]

Here, Sommer draws attention to one of the more controversial aspects of living history: the relationship that should be encouraged between the performer and the audience. How can audiences, which are (it seems) encouraged to accept the authenticity of living history, be encouraged to, instead, ask questions about its representation and interpretation of the past? The answer seems to depend upon *how far* the audience is encouraged to become *immersed* in the supposed reality of 'the past' (re)created by living history or remain *distanced* from it. Performance studies can help us to interrogate and understand the meaning of what it means for the audience to be *immersed* in, or *distanced* from, living history. In traditional theatre, the relationship of the audience to the performance is described as one of *aesthetic distance*; as Jackson notes (drawing on Schechner) it is made evident through the performance that what

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[497] Sommer, U. (1999) 'Slavonic Archaeology: Groß Raden, an Open Air Museum in a Unified Germany,' in Stone, P. G. and Planel, P. G. (eds) *The Constructed Past: Experimental Archaeology, Education and the Public*, Routledge, London and New York, p166-167.

happens on stage is not 'real.' The audience 'keep their distance, literally and

metaphorically' to ensure that 'there is no real confusion between "life" and

"stage".'[498] The ideal relationship for the audience is one of engagement and

the willing suspension of disbelief in what is happening in the performance,

however at the same time the audience is aware that what they are watching is

unreal, a fiction. The role of *aesthetic distance* is seen as having a 'protective

function […] which saves us from feeling so caught up in the fiction that the

dividing line between it and real life gets lost leading to confusion or panic.'[499]

Immersion or the physical act of being involved in a performance however

potentially 'denies or at least severely compromises' the function of *aesthetic

distance*.[500] The concern is that living history, with its focus on audience

involvement, blurs the dividing line between 'art' and 'real life' and tries to

convince its audience of the *reality* of the past it represents. As Sommer

contends, the 'very physical presence of the reconstruction alone creates a

heavy prejudice in favour of its acceptance as reality.'[501] Related to this is the

role of empathy, cited by practitioners of living history as means of engaging

children and young people with the past. They are encouraged to step 'into the

shoes of others'[502] in the attempt to understand another's state of mind,

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[498] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p139.

[499] Ibid, p140.

[500] Ibid, p139.

[501] Sommer, 'Slavonic Archaeology,' p167.

[502] Verducci, S. (2000) 'A Conceptual History of Empathy and a Question it Raises for Moral Education,' *Educational Theory*, 50 (1), p63.

thoughts or feelings.[503] However, empathy can be a difficult and contested

term. Is it a cognitive skill, a disposition, tendency or affective process?

Relatively little is known about how it develops and when.[504] Furthermore, it

may not be beneficial in the development of historical understanding. Jackson

and Kidd have identified what they call the *empathy paradox* whereby living

history performances can narrow children's perspective on the past if they are

encouraged to empathise with living history. Exposed to the view or

perspective of one person or group, children may be encouraged to think, 'that's

"how it was" and all we need to know.'[505]

How living history negotiates the relationship between the performer and their

audience, therefore, is a relationship that needs to be considered when

analysing any living history performance. How far do the audience really

'accept' the reality of living history or is it more likely that they are willing to

suspend their disbelief whilst at the museum or historic site? What might be the

subsequent impact of *immersion* or *distance* (and the possible permutations of

these two positions) on their historical understanding? I will return to these

issues in chapters seven and eight.

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[503] Knight, P. (1989) 'Empathy: Concept, Confusion and Consequences in a National
Curriculum,' *Oxford Review of Education,* 15 (1), pp41-53.

[504] Cooper, *The Teaching of History in Primary Schools.* Empathy has all but disappeared in
history education to be replaced by other terms such as rational understanding, which
Dickinson, Lee and Ashby describe as the reconstruction of the purposes, values and beliefs of
people in the past. They claim this term 'avoids the serious difficulties encountered by attempts
to borrow more elegant but misleading terms such as "empathy".' See Dickinson, Lee and
Ashby, 'Research Methods and Some Findings on Rational Understanding,' p114.

[505] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p114.

4.2.2 The limits of temporal and spatial reconstruction

Whilst questions have been raised about the value of encouraging audiences to accept the 'reality' of living history, as a means of recreating the past it is enthusiastically supported by those who believe it creates a more authentic version of history. Anderson claims that by 'breaking away from strictly written accounts of the past, we have developed a 'living history" that is often successful because it is dramatic, playful, experimental, and memorable.'[506] It may provoke moments of 'spontaneous fantasy', a creative act of the imagination which evokes, and in turn creates, further ideas about the past, a 'transcendent experience of discovery, magic, novelty and mystery.'[507] However, it can also demonstrate the complexity of a relationship with the past lived in hindsight. Whilst the past as 'lived experience [was] something messy and dirty and painful,'[508] its spontaneity is lost in the present: hindsight means that a character has a determined path. Unless the role of living history is to be purely speculative, it is difficult to be flexible in presenting the past. Conversely, living history ends up practised in a very rigid manner where participants are not allowed to interrogate the way in which they live their lives or even attempt to make their situation more tolerable, as surely people in the past must have done.[509] Living history struggles to be real when it only deals in fragments of life: 'rather than stimulating and experiencing a seamless, integrated – hence

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[506] Anderson, J. (1985) *The Living History Sourcebook*, The American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee, p446.

[507] Wells, J. C. (2010) 'Our History is not False: Perspectives from the Revitalisation Culture,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16 (6), p475.

[508] de Groot, *Consuming History*, p172.

[509] Ibid.

authentic – life, living historians perform a series of episodic behaviours infused with a decidedly reflexive cognitive attitude.'[510] Despite the radical potential claimed for living history therefore it can, conversely, create a stable, predestined notion of the past, one that must follow a specific path to arrive at the present.[511] This makes it, effectively, little different to the conservative histories of the nineteenth century where the past was guided by Providence, or some other 'invisible hand.'[512]

4.2.3 An un-real perspective on the past

> Hyperreality evokes a sweet, incongruous feeling of nostalgia for something that never was or brings on an adrenalin rush inspired by a fiction so precise that it seems truer than life.[513]

Hein's comparison of museum experiences, including living history, with a *hyperreality* reflects on its lack of a referent in real time or space. Without any connection to a 'remembered reality,' living history comes to depend 'for its vitality on the power of expressive persuasion.'[514] Critics of living history condemn it for creating a past which is safe and sanitised for present-day tastes,[515] or simplifies and idealises the past for the benefit of tourists.[516] In the

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[510] Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation,' p253.

[511] Agnew, V. (2007), 'History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and its Work in the Present,' *Rethinking History,* 11 (3), pp299-312.

[512] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p197.

[513] Hein, *The Museum in Transition*, p81.

[514] Ibid, p82.

[515] Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*.

following extract Shanks is referring to scientific archaeology but he raises an important point that appears to be reflective of all attempts to re-create the past, we cannot help tidying it up:

> Scientific archaeology purifies the past with clean reason; order is brought to the disorder of decay which putrefies. The past is cleaned-up; dirt and decay removed or transformed into knowledge. A conserved past contributes to the health of the present; it is wholesome and nourishing.[517]

Pearce notes that in historical reconstructions the 'air of artificiality is unmistakable. The layout is contrived and is far more "typical" than real life ever is.'[518] The more difficult aspects of history can be erased, neglected or glossed over, including racial prejudice, swearing, violence and poverty. Historical characters do not portray the reality of the past body: Ott points out there is a lack of 'bad skin, scars or injured limbs.'[519] The reason for this, Agnew suggests, is that living history does not always represent the past *as it was* but acts as an opportunity for practitioners to present the past as it *should have been*. Some living history is therefore closer to a 'speculative historical representation [which] insists that the past (and hence the present) might have been different and that acts of oppression and exploitation need not have

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[516] Schechner, *Performance Studies.*

[517] Shanks, *Experiencing the Past*, p73.

[518] Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, p207.

[519] Ott, K. (2005), 'Disability and the Practice of Public History: An Introduction,' in *The Public Historian: A Journal of Public History*, 27 (2), p14.

occurred.'[520]   Even where living history sites seek to convey difficult histories,

Handler and Gable have highlighted how at sites such as Colonial

Williamsburg, practical concerns such as perceived lack of evidence and

interpreter discomfort can militate against the portrayal of these histories.[521]

Schechner highlights how the use of native peoples at sites like Plimoth

Plantation has an element of 'bragging about authenticity', particularly when the

site does not engage with the more problematic histories of 'native "removal" -

the wars, the European diseases, and the general decimation of both cultures

and peoples that took place.'[522]   Similarly, Tyson found at Historic Fort Snelling

that interpreters 'often avoided (what they perceived as) controversial subjects,

thereby looking out for their own, and the visitors', emotional comfort.'[523]   Also

detrimental is taking the opposite extreme, where living history revels in what

Samuel calls the 'horrors' of the past: such an approach, 'makes a great point of

its otherness, and indeed the brute contrast between "now" and "then" is very

often the framing device of its narrative.'[524]   Handler and Gable suggest that

whilst such a view can be used to refute nostalgia, it 'also fits nicely with a

narrative of progress: to teach that the past was not tidy and harmonious, but

dirty and unjust often reinforces the public's belief in the superiority of the

modern world.'[525]

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[520] Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn,' p309.

[521] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*.

[522] Schechner, *Performance Studies,* p291.

[523] Tyson, A. M. (2008) 'Crafting Emotional Comfort: Interpreting the Painful Past at Living History Museums in the New Economy,' in *Museum & Society*, 6 (3), p258.

[524] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p284.

[525] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, p130.

4.2.4 The limits of (re)creating believable people

Living history can play a role in returning the individual to history, or at least reminding us of the role that individuals can play amidst the wider context of political, economic, cultural and environmental forces. Recreating the behaviour and ways of thinking in the past, however, is recognised by Dickinson and Lee as one of the most challenging aspects of history. For children, and for living history performers, it requires much imaginative work and the ability to draw inferences from limited material:

> Coming to see a situation from the point of view of the [historical] agent, and to distinguish what he could know and the way he could see it from what we *now* know and the ways in which we *now* may see it, is a difficult and complex task.[526]

In this respect, living history has the potential to raise more questions than provide answers. Whilst living history can help to explore the lives of ordinary people in the past, for which there is relatively little surviving evidence, it may present an over-generalised sense of the past to visitors because of the familiarity it promotes.[527] The danger with close identification with people in the past means that 'we are almost certainly preventing ourselves, and others, from

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[526] Dickinson and Lee, 'Understanding and Research,' p109.

[527] See Crang, 'Living History' and previous section 4.2.1 for Jackson and Kidd's theory of the *empathy paradox.*

seeing them as clearly as we could.'[528] We may come to assume that people in the past were 'intellectually and psychologically the same in all times, places and circumstances.'[529] It is almost impossible, however, to avoid generalisations in living history, particularly as there is the potential pressure to present 'familiar' characters that visitors will recognise. Thus actual historical personages and even buildings are often 'appropriated in reenactment [*sic*] in a way that effaces their "individuality".'[530] Handler and Sexton draw attention to Stevens' argument that historical reconstructions, with their 'absence of the commonplace and their saturation with the special and the dramatic,'[531] come (unintentionally) to have 'a stock, predictable quality about them, and the nostalgic cult of the quaint is largely responsible.'[532] The lack of material culture for some periods or events may also lead to details being generalised in order to fill in the gaps.[533] This may be particularly pertinent when recreating the distant past 'where most artefacts helpful to living history, with its emphasis on the ordinary and domestic, have either rotted away or were subject to regular

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[528] James, S. (1999), 'Imag(in)ing the Past: The Politics and Practicalities of Reconstructions in the Museum Gallery' in Merriman, N. (ed), *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, p120.

[529] Fischer, D. H. (1970), *Historian's Fallacies: Towards a Logic of Historical Thought*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p203.

[530] Handler and Saxton, 'Dyssimulation,' p253.

[531] Ibid, p254.

[532] Stevens, M. L. (1981) 'Wistful Thinking: The Effect of Nostalgia on Interpretation,' in *History News*, 36 (12), p12, cited in ibid.

[533] Lucy, S. and Herring, C. (1999), 'The Portrayal of Early Anglo-Saxon Life and Material Culture in Museums,' in Merriman, N. (ed), *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, pp74-94.

cycles of repair and alteration.'[534] Living history can also make it difficult to understand how underlying social and economic structures affected people and communities in the past: it is very difficult for performers to allude to these, especially in first-person because their characters may not have been aware of them at the time.

4.2.5 A transient performance: an ephemeral past

The nature of living history as a transient experience can be used to advantage, according to Jackson and Kidd, to 'highlight the transience of history and the impermanence of the people and stories that constitute it.'[535] This suits a progressive view of the past as something dynamic, open to change, similar to the *genetic* type of historical consciousness. Living history also has the potential to provide a challenging and thought-provoking perspective on the content of the past, the way in which life was lived. However, for most practitioners the aim would be to draw parallels with the present. As Hunt argues, addressing the less savoury aspects of the past can be used to challenge 'visitor's perceptions and assumptions' in the present.[536] Farthing also suggests that living history can be used to draw attention to negative human behaviours, attitudes and beliefs which may be linked to the past but which 'linger on, infecting the health of our contemporary social relationships.'[537] The illusionary nature of living history might help in that

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[534] Elliott-Wright, *Living History*, p41.

[535] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p124.

[536] Hunt, 'Acting the Part,' p396.

[537] Farthing, A. (2011) 'Authenticity and Metaphor: Displaying Intangible Human Remains in Museum Theatre', in Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds), *Performing Heritage: Research Practice*

respect according to Farthing because it can represent the more negative aspects of human behaviour in non-naturalistic ways, making it obvious to the audience that it is the intention of the performance. Techniques can be used to keep the audience distanced from the performance so that they can respond critically. Jackson discusses Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia*, or concept of 'multi-languaged discourse,' to draw attention to the potential of performance in representing 'elements of dissonance or challenge and from the presence of "other voices" that can provoke active engagement with the narrative.'[538] Elements of dissonance or conflict can provoke the viewer, preventing them from becoming comfortable with what they are witnessing. From a learning perspective this can be a useful approach, for example Brecht used *astonishment* to shock or startle the audience into asking questions about what was happening on stage - ideally to (ultimately) question their own social reality.[539] As an example of a performance which used dissonance to provoke its audience, Jackson draws attention to *This Accursed Thing*, a performance at Manchester Museum which coincided with the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 2007. The performance featured a particularly challenging sequence between a Black African slave trader and White European slave trader; following their exchange, the White trader turns to confront the audience and demands they tell him what he is doing wrong. Audience reactions ranged from seeking to engage with the trader in a heated

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*and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretatio*n, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, p94.

[538] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience,' p21.

[539] See Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p141-142 for an overview of Brecht's theories on the educative and transformative potential of performance.

debate to avoiding the question completely. For some, it generated strong feelings which remained with them long after the event, particularly as the performance did not try to offer a tidy resolution of the issues raised.[540] However, not all visitors to museums and historic sites appreciate this potential for living history. Jackson and Kidd found that some visitors found it difficult to connect their ideas of performance with the educative function of the museum: 'the perceived contrast between what performance does and what the museum is seen to stand for is underlined time and again in the responses of audiences.'[541] These visitors appeared to be 'confused by the blatant disregard for "truth" that was displayed […] and astounded that a museum (a known purveyor and guardian of the 'authentic) should be involved in such puzzling behaviour.'[542] As suggested in chapter three, the authoritative nature of the past presented in museums, and the desire by some visitors to learn *what happened* in history rather than confront the uncertainty of the past, suggests that museums and historic sites may expect some resistance to promote anything but *traditional* and *exemplary* forms of historical consciousness through living history.

Having explored some of the features of living history which can potentially influence its impact on the historical understanding of its audiences, I now turn to the evidence of living history's learning impact, particularly on children and young people.

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[540] Ibid.

[541] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p75.

[542] Ibid, p128.

4.3 What evidence is there for the learning impact of living history?

This section gives an overview of the potential impact that living history can have for young people learning history, greatly helped by the steady growth of literature in this area in recent years. It explores both the range of practices involved (which is extensive), and the impact of participating in living history for both enactors and their audiences.[543] Alongside the more critical and analytical literature on museum theatre and performance, open-air museums and heritage sites, historical re-enactment and computer games which simulate the past, are the 'how to guides' written by practitioners who wish to pass on their wisdom.[544]

As a growing phenomenon, the value of living history has been variously debated. For Anderson, living history can be a 'significant historical exercise.'[545] Handler, however, takes issue with Anderson's uncritical stance towards living history: 'After all, how can one be critical of the past when one's

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[543] See for example Hughes, *Museum Theatre* and Jackson and Kidd, *Performing Heritage* on theatre and performance. Barndt, K. (2007), 'Fordist Nostalgia: History and Experience at The Henry Ford,' *Rethinking History*, 11 (3), pp379-410 and Piccini, A. (1999), 'Wargames and Wendy houses: Open-air Reconstructions of Prehistoric Life,' in Merriman, N. (ed), *Making Early Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, pp151-172 are good examples of analysis of open-air heritage sites. Historical re-enactment is the focus of Agnew, 'History's Affective Turn,' and During, S. (2007), 'Mimic Toil: Eighteenth-Century Preconditions for the Modern Historical Re-enactment,' *Rethinking History*, 11 (3) pp313-333, whilst the following article considers the role of computer games in reconstructing the past, Rejack, B. (2007), 'Toward a Virtual Re-enactment of History: Video Games and the Recreation of the Past,' *Rethinking History*, 11 (3), pp411-425.

[544] Examples of practitioner-written texts include Anderson, *Time Machines* and Thierer, J. M. (2010) *Telling History: A Manual for Performers and Presenters of First-Person Narratives*, Altamira Press, Lanham, New York, Toronto and Plymouth.

[545] Anderson, *Time Machines*, p10.

obsession is to reproduce it in all its detail?'[546] For de Groot, living history is a

complex process where performers 'seemingly enfranchise the audience, while

also subjecting them to a viewed history, history as a performance and story.'[547]

Living history has also been criticised by many for creating shallow, experiential

versions of the past with little grounding in reality that contribute to the

'Disneyfication' of the past.[548] In particular, Handler and Gable have

condemned *mimetic realism* - the concern to accurately represent the past *as it

was* - for hiding the interpretative role of sites like Colonial Williamsburg and

disempowering its audiences:

> Mimetic realism, the reigning historiographical philosophy at Colonial
>
> Williamsburg, destroys history. To teach the public that the work […] is
>
> to reconstruct the past as it really was erases all the interpretive work
>
> that goes into the museum's story […] Mimetic realism thus deadens the
>
> historical sensibility of the public. It teaches people not to question
>
> historians' stories, not to imagine other, alternative histories, but to
>
> accept an embodied tableau as the really real.[549]

Somewhere in-between these extremes is a form of interpreting the past which

can appeal to young people and, as research shows, gives them useful

information about the past. In this section I will assess the evidence which

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[546] Handler, R. (1987), 'Review: Overpowered by Realism: Living History and the Simulation of the Pas,' *The Journal of American Folklore*, 100 (397), p341.

[547] de Groot, *Consuming History,* p103.

[548] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction.'

[549] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, p224.

points to living history being a means of learning about the past, as well as examining some of the elements of living history which might affect the learning process, starting with the format of the performance.

4.3.1 Variables that can affect the learning impact of living history

With reference to performance studies, and the relationship between the audience and the performer of living history discussed in section 4.2.1, there are likely to be a number of variables which will affect the learning impact of living history for young people. Hughes describes the process of living history as 'an intangible happening between the performer and the visitor. It is that dual feedback, that continuing dialogue with the visitor that separates this from other experiences in the museum.'[550] Jackson notes, too, that the ways in which participants engage with a performance is negotiated, fluid and dynamic: their response may vary 'according not only to the style and content of the piece, but also, in museum settings, to each individual's pre-existing attitudes and inclinations.'[551] Therefore, the *framing* of the performance, the positioning of the audience within the drama, is critical to understanding its impact.[552] Drawing on Goffman, Jackson highlights how 'all kinds of social encounters are given shape and meaning by the "frames" that we construct around them,'[553] and performances act in the same way. Jackson highlights three potential

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[550] Hughes, *Museum Theatre*, p8.

[551] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience,' p11.

[552] See Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings,* p159 and Schechner, *Performance Studies*, p93 for a discussion of 'framing.'

[553] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings,* p161. See also Goffman, E. (1974) *Frames of Analysis*, Harper and Row, New York.

frames which shape how young people encounter a performance. The *cultural* (or *external*) *frame* includes the site of the performance (the museum or historic site where it takes place) and how the teachers (or museum staff) introduce the students to the performance prior to the event. The *theatrical frame* marks out the space in which the performance takes place and where the audience 'sits'; and the *internal frame* incorporates the dramatic conventions used during the performance, such as shifts in time, place, character and the performer's relationship with the audience.[554] How these frames are played out - and their subsequent impact on students' understanding - are likely to vary greatly. There are different degrees of interactivity and response with audiences (some performers work to a script, others will improvise), and different degrees of participation for audience members (based on personal preference as well as the 'control' exercised by performers).[555] Younger pupils may be *immersed* in a performance, dressed in costume and carrying out tasks as though they were *in the past*. Older students do not tend to be as involved in a performance but opportunities may be provided for them to engage with the characters.[556] The many possible permutations of a performance, and the possible reaction of the audience, raises the issue of how far it is possible to generalise about the relationship between the performer and the audience, and the subsequent learning experience.

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[554] Ibid, p163. There may be other *frames*, for example, a potential *frame* might be the *schema* or *mental frameworks* of the audience, who bring their own ideas, understandings and experiences to the performance.

[555] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage.*

[556] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings,* pp147-48.

4.3.2 The impact of living history on learning

Living history has been used for education purposes in museums and historic sites since the 1920s and what Samuel refers to as 'education through the imagination.'[557] Actual empirical evidence of its impact on young people's learning, however, has emerged much more recently. Jackson and Kidd looked at what kinds of impact encountering performances in museums and heritage sites could have on a range of participants' views of the past. They found that it could provide: an increased idea about what the past looks like; a heightened sense of engagement with the past when a specific site and artefacts are involved; a physical *and* intellectual link to the past; and the opportunity for participants (if they were willing) to suspend their disbelief and consider themselves transported back to the past.[558] Some forms of learning appeared to result more frequently from living history performances than others did. Most children and young people learned new knowledge or information about the past from encountering or participating in a performance, or reported enjoyment as a common response to a living history experience.[559] Referring to evidence from elsewhere, Hooper-Greenhill suggests that enjoyment can be a significant element of learning in museums because it can motivate learners and heighten other forms of learning.[560] Malcolm-Davies found that most living history audiences expect to be entertained as well as informed by costumed

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[557] Samuel, *Theatres of Memory,* p182. Also see Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings* for a history of educational theatre.

[558] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage.*

[559] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction.'

[560] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education.*

interpreters.[561] However, Rees Leahy draws attention to the valuable potential of more challenging learning experiences, if handled effectively and sensitively.[562] There is less evidence related to the learning of skills, with Jackson and Kidd finding slender evidence of pupils learning to debate and speak in public through their participation in living history performances.[563] Evaluation by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester with schools, following a museum visit, has suggested that skills learning is often the least reported by teachers and students because the development of skills is seen as taking place over the long term, rather than through a short-term experience at the museum.[564]

Presenting the past as it does from the human perspective, living history has the potential to impact on the attitudes and values of young people towards the past, and, in some cases, develop an understanding of *their* role within history, including an increased sense of ownership and agency towards the past.[565] Working through 'affective corporeal and imaginative engagement,'[566] living history can provide students with a concrete experience from which to draw,

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[561] Malcolm-Davies, J. (2004), 'Borrowed Robes: The Educational Value of Costumed Interpretation at Historic Sites,' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10 (3), pp277-293.

[562] Rees Leahy, H. (2011), 'Watching Me, Watching You: Performance and Performativity in the Museum,' in Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds), *Performing Heritage: Research Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, pp26-38.

[563] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction.'

[564] Hooper-Greenhill *et al.*, *What Did You Learn at the Museum Today? Second Study*.

[565] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction.'

[566] Gregory and Witcomb, 'Beyond Nostalgia,' p265.

and it can generate an empathetic response from them. This was the case for young people taking part in a 'theatre-in-education' session at Roots of Norfolk, Gressenhall, a museum housed in a former nineteenth century workhouse. Focusing on the subject of 'Was the Workhouse so bad?' students compared learning about the past from intense encounters with several historical characters very favourably to learning about the subject in the classroom. Learning about life in the workhouse from the perspective of the workhouse master and an inmate – whose objective was to provoke a response from the students through their exchanges – helped them, in the words of their History teacher, 'to think and reflect and to […] put themselves into somebody else's situation. I think they do become more reflective and they've got a lot more empathy.'[567] The impact of living history can be long-term as well as short-term, and Jackson and Kidd found that young people could recall their living history experiences some months after the event.[568]

4.3.3 *Immersion* in the past: does it heighten learning?

In section 4.2.1, *immersion* was described as the involvement of the audience in the performance. However, in history education, *immersion* appears to have a different (if vague) connotation in the sense of a cognitive, emotional or imaginative engagement where the child considers that they are *experiencing the past*. This idea of *immersion* is considered beneficial: Pluckrose suggests that the ability of pupils to immerse themselves in the past can 'make it easier

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[567] Hooper-Greenhill *et al., What Did You Learn at the Museum Today? Second Study,* p172.

[568] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction.'

for children to recall historical information and to comment upon it.'[569] However, as the examples in this, and the following section, seem to suggest, teachers and museum staff may not always understand the impact of *immersion* in living history on historical understanding (whether it means physical involvement in a performance or the vaguer concept of 'experiencing' the past). *Immersion* may even conflict with the objectives of a history session.

Tzibazi studied the impact of museum theatre on a group of primary school pupils visiting the Museum of London for a session on the Romans, and found that the way in which they were introduced to the performance had a critical impact on their subsequent understanding and 'reading' of the performance. The children's preconceptions of the Romans were not addressed in the context of the classroom and, as a consequence, these framed their experiences at the museum and during the performance. Neither were the children prepared for the performance 'and hence were not aware of the fictional lenses through which they could view the event.'[570] However, despite the children seeking to challenge the performer's plausibility as a Roman soldier, the interaction between the children and the performer, and the children's real desire for learning, created an environment whereby the past developed 'a more humanised dimension […] They viewed it as a place where real people would have lived.'[571] Tzibazi concluded that living history can have an impact on

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[569] Pluckrose, *Children Learning History*, p102.

[570] Tzibazi, V. (2009) 'Museum Theatre: Children's Reading of "First Person Interpretation" in Museums', in Ashton, P. and Kean, H. (eds), *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndsmill, p171.

[571] Ibid, p176.

children's historical understanding: viewing, 'history in the context of their perception of time and place […] what [children] experience, together with their personal engagement with the everyday past in the museum, affects their understanding of history.'[572]

Jackson and Kidd raise the point that, with younger children in particular, pupils can demonstrate 'significant confusion about temporality (although not a confusion that causes them any discomfort), possibly also due to their lack of ability in expressing the duality they feel.'[573] Here, Jackson and Kidd refer to the 'cognitive dissonance'[574] of knowing that a performance is not real but allowing oneself to feel immersed in the illusion. This can be compared to older students and adult visitors who seem to be more comfortable with the apparent dualism of living history. According to Jackson and Kidd, 'they acknowledge that they are entering into a playful relationship with temporality; that they are able to experience their environment, feelings, social context and expectations in the present, whilst simultaneously using their imaginations and the reality that is being presented for them to inhabit the past as well.'[575] Unless it is built into sessions from the beginning, however, this 'dualism' does not automatically lead to a critical engagement with the past.

In their *History Detectives* programme, Historic Royal Palaces have experimented in developing *immersive* education sessions for students aged 12

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[572] Ibid, p177.

[573] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p80.

[574] See section 7.2.4 for a definition of cognitive dissonance.

[575] Ibid, p81.

years and upwards. The programme was designed to overcome the reticence

of young people in taking part in living history performances by giving them the

opportunity to 'show, meet, question and judge historic figures (and the

decisions they made) in real time.'[576] In these sessions, a costumed interpreter

became a source of historical evidence, which the students were asked to

interrogate: the intention was that the students, by listening to the responses of

the historical figure, would reflect on the apparent differences in this verbal

'evidence' in comparison to contemporary written sources on the same theme.

For example, one theme was religion in the sixteenth century and students

were asked to interrogate a Jesuit priest. However, in early sessions it was

found that, conversely, students became involved in their role as 'interrogators'

to the extent that rather than looking critically at both sides of the evidence

presented to them, they condemned the evidence of the performer rather too

enthusiastically. This had not been anticipated with older students and, as a

result, the session was adapted to enable 'a more balanced and rounded

debate.'[577] This example highlights the risk of making assumptions about how

young people will respond to a performance as well as finding the right balance

between involvement and *distance* in order to achieve educational aims.[578] It

also reflects the concern of Handler and Gable that living history potentially

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[576] Ferguson, D. (2009) ' The History Detectives: A New Approach for a New Curriculum', in
Rethinking Learning: Museums and Young People, A Collection of Essays, MuseumsEtc,
Edinburgh, p28.

[577] Ibid, p39.

[578] Jackson raises the difficulties attached to the analysis of theatre-in-education performances
to include 'simultaneously both the interactivity and the aesthetic framework of the event,'
Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings, p159.

'deadens the historical sensibility,'[579] unless the developers of living history performances (whether museum staff, actor or performer) are clear about how critical engagement can be achieved.

4.3.4 When living history is not a learning experience

Whilst there is the potential for living history performances to enrich learning about the past, that is not to say that all living history will be a learning experience,[580] properly interactive,[581] or even a positive experience for participants. Learning takes place in a social context and many different variables can influence the experience of living history. These include the environment of the museum, the relationship between the teacher and their students, and the relationship between the performer and their audience. Young people may be embarrassed or too self-conscious to become involved in a performance.[582] They may dislike performance as a means of recreating the past or simply be uninterested: furthermore, audiences can oscillate between such responses during a performance.[583] Rosenthal and Blankman-Hetrick found that much of the impetus for dialogue during a living history performance came from the costumed interpreters rather than from their young audiences.[584]

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[579] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, p224.

[580] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage.*

[581] Handler and Sexton, 'Dyssimulation.'

[582] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings,* p148.

[583] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience,' p13.

[584] Rosenthal, E. and Blankman-Hetrick, J. (2002) 'Conversations Across Time: Family Learning in a Living History Museum', in Leinhardt, G., Crowley, K. and Krutson, K. (eds), *Learning Conversations in Museums*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, New Jersey and London, pp305-329.

Kostarigka found that living history's potential as a learning experience was less effective when teachers and museum staff assumed that the activity 'itself was learning,'[585] and pupils were not given the opportunity to discuss or reflect on what they had learnt. Learning potential may be limited when little time is given to critical reflection prior to or after a learning experience.[586] Building in the opportunity to interact with the performer after the performance, reflect on the experience afterwards through a question and answer session, discussion group or forum, can often provide the opportunity for a more critical examination of the history being presented.[587] Kostarigka found that living history performances could be detrimental to children's historical understanding if they were given an overly simplified perspective on the past, which could lead them to absorbing a number of misleading ideas and concepts.[588] Where learning was not quite so effectively handled, Tzibazi also found that living history could reinforce misconceptions about the past.[589]

The examples given here reinforce the difficulty of generalising about the impact of living history on young people's learning. In order to engage with a performance, it is assumed that audiences have to be 'actively believing in the

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[585] Kostarigka, E. (2009) 'Learning History in an Open-Air Museum: Historical Re-Enactment and Understandings of History at St Fagans, National History Museum of Wales', The *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 2(3), p98.

[586] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education.*

[587] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage.*

[588] These ideas were not noticed or addressed by teachers or museum staff during, or subsequent to, the experience according to Kostarigka.

[589] Tzibazi, 'Museum Theatre.'

fiction.'[590] Is the effectiveness of a living history performance therefore dependent on if - and how - young people accept the illusion presented by living history as 'real'? Jackson considers that the use of performance in education 'will be effective educationally *only* if it's effective aesthetically.'[591] If audiences do not accept the illusion 'of the past' created by the performance is there a risk that the learning objectives will not be fulfilled? On the contrary, the example of the *History Detectives* provides an example of how young people can be too *immersed* in the performance to achieve the objectives of education staff. Another issue is the extent to which students and their teachers regard living history as a valid means of learning history; if students do not perceive living history as a valuable learning experience then this can also limit its use as an educative tool.[592]

4.3.5 Drawing together the evidence

The intention of this chapter was to explore the way in which living history represents the past and the implications this has for the historical understanding of young people, as a prelude to my focus on historical consciousness. Evidence presented in this chapter suggests that living history does have the potential to support students learning about history. However, it also points to the importance of living history developers and performers being clear about the

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[590] Hughes, C. (2011) 'Mirror Neurons and Simulation: The Role of the Spectator in Museum Theatre' in Jackson, A. and Kidd, J. (eds), *Performing Heritage: Research Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, p192.

[591] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p160.

[592] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, p122.

role of the aesthetic in educational theatre (including the difference between *immersion* and *distance*), taking into account young people's prior conceptions of the past and providing opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences after the event. Good quality sessions with skilled performers, and identifiable learning outcomes, preferably in sympathetic settings, are also critical for supporting young people's engagement with the performance. Particularly for older students, they must be allowed to participate of their own volition.[593] Providing students with opportunities to participate in discussion, and presenting them with complex views of the past, for example through the perspectives of multiple characters, reflects what young people appear to desire in history teaching, as reported in chapter two.[594] However, the concerns highlighted by Handler and Gable, amongst others, that living history stifles critical engagement with the past does seem to be borne out by some of the evidence presented in this chapter. This will have important implications for understanding its impact on historical consciousness, in particular the interconnection between the format of the living history session and the responses of the students, is a significant element which will be considered further in chapter seven.

4.4 Conclusion: preliminary thoughts on living history and historical consciousness

As form of understanding the past, living history shares more elements with history in the 'lifeworld' than it does with academic history. Like memory, story,

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[593] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p148.

[594] Clark, *History's Children.*

myths and other everyday forms of the past, the historical knowledge produced by living history performers is ephemeral and elusive. It is formed in the interaction between the performer and their audience. However, these are where the similarities end. Whilst memory is a 'representation of lived experience,'[595] the performance of the past through living history is self-consciously *enacted,*[596] and it is a representation based on an illusion of lived experience. Although it purports to bring the past to life, there is little that is tangible about a living history performance because of 'the dialogic moment of their telling.'[597] It is a *suggestion* of the past found in gestures, speech, movement and ways of thinking, supported by visual props (the costume, the surroundings) and research or training. However, the focus on authenticity and 'getting the facts right' has made invisible, as Handler and Gable suggest, the interpretive processes which underlie living history, encouraging the audience to accept the representation as *real* and stifling their ability to critically engage with the past.[598] This is not unique to living history; as suggested in chapter one, the tension between the cognitive and the emotional, the rational and the affective is common to historical understanding.

As in the previous chapter, it is only possible to speculate at this stage about the ways in which living history performances may affect historical consciousness. Where the focus is on authenticity, living history, it can be suggested, is more likely to appeal to *traditional* and *exemplary* types of

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[595] Radstone, *Working with Memory*, p11.

[596] Jackson and Kidd (2011), 'Introduction,' p2.

[597] Radstone, *Working with Memory*, p11.

[598] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*.

historical consciousness. What might encourage the *critical* or *genetic* types?

It is possible that these might be stimulated by the focus on living history as a

performance, an interpretation rather than an attempt to *authentically* re-create

the past. Gregory and Witcomb's description of the interpretive approach used

at Greenough, referred to in chapter three as a possible means of appealing to

the *genetic* type of historical consciousness, finds parallels in Jackson and

Kidd's understanding of how living history's potential for emotional and affective

engagement can be used to critically engage audiences with the past. Both

highlight the value of challenging, even disturbing, audiences to get them to

look beyond the immediate 'facts' of history. Jackson and his colleagues have

created the term 'unsettlement' to 'indicate an experience our respondents at all

sites frequently articulated; that of having expectations overturned, assumptions

about the subject matter challenged, of finding that they were personally being

confronted with strong emotion or were expected to participate verbally or even

physically.'[599] As Jackson goes on to describe, moments of unsettlement in a

performance and an emphasis on multiple perspectives can 'provoke active

engagement with the narrative.'[600] By drawing on Bakhtin's concept of

heteroglossia - explained simply as the opposition and struggle in language

between different voices[601] - and the dialogic potential of living history, Jackson

suggests that living history potentially offers the audience a greater degree of

agency to negotiate their own meaning from the narrative.[602] As described in

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[599] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience,' p18.

[600] Ibid, p21.

[601] Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Holquist, M., translated by Emerson, C. and Holquist, M., University of Texas Press, Austin.

[602] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience.'

chapters two and three, the *genetic* type is aware that the past is made up of multiple perspectives, there is no one 'truth' to be found, and this approach to living history would seem to confirm that. However, clearly more research is needed to explore the rather crude relationship established here between the approach to living history and the potential it has for stimulating particular types of historical consciousness. As research in the context of history education has suggested, at the moment too little is known about the development of historical consciousness to be more certain.

The exploration of the possible relationship between students' understanding of history, living history as used in museums and historic sites, and historical consciousness therefore ends with the evidence that despite the criticisms levelled at living history, when used effectively it has the potential to be an engaging form of representing the past. There is evidence that it supports young people in learning about the past, and can have an impact on their historical understanding. At the very least, living history can be used, as Tzibazi found, to give young people the experience of the past as 'a place where real people would have lived.'[603] As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, my research with school groups visiting two case study sites in London builds on many of the findings presented here, as well as raising new questions about the potential for living history in developing historical consciousness. I start, in the next chapter, by explaining the approach and methods I used when collecting evidence of young peoples' experiences of living history, following a visit to a museum or historic site.

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[603] Tzibazi, 'Museum Theatre,' p176.

Chapter 5

Researching historical consciousness in young people

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the rationale for using qualitative research methods to explore the impact of living history on young people's historical consciousness, following a visit to a museum or historic site. Previous chapters have outlined the context for this investigation; namely, the concern expressed over the supposed lack of meaning and relevance young people gain from formal approaches to history. Living history is increasingly being used by museums and historic sites to bring history to life for students and, in some cases, develop their historical understanding. However, (as revealed in the previous chapter) there remains a lack of in-depth understanding as to the contribution that living history makes to students' historical consciousness. Whilst living history has been an established area of interest for researchers since the 1970s, at the time my research into this area began, the literature around living history has tended to concentrate on its ability to recreate the past *authentically*, rather than explore its impact on learning or historical consciousness. It was not until 2008 that a significant research project was completed into the learning potential of living history, performance and live interpretation in the United

Kingdom.[604] Taking an experimental, qualitative approach, therefore, seemed the most appropriate in the context of a still-emerging area of interest in the museum sector. Furthermore, there was scope to explore in-depth the manifestation of historical consciousness in young people; as yet, there is no one, established method for its identification.[605]

5.1 Research questions

The aim of this study was to explore, in the light of widespread concern over the teaching of history in English schools, the impact that living history techniques, as used in museums and historic sites, might have on the historical consciousness of secondary school age students (aged eleven to sixteen years). Following the principles of grounded theory, I intended to use two phases of fieldwork to systematically collect and analyse data in order to build theory.[606] However, as will be described in the narrative, circumstances meant that some changes were made during the process of collecting the data and its subsequent analysis. Initially my focus was to investigate the value of living history as an approach to making the learning of history more 'meaningful' for young people, as exemplified in the research question which guided the first phase of the fieldwork:

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[604] Jackson and Kidd, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*.

[605] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness.'

[606] A detailed explanation of grounded theory methodology is given in section 5.2.4.

Can museums make history more accessible or relevant to young people through using personalities, personal stories and experiences from the past?

In order to understand the findings from the first phase of the research, and the impact of living history upon the students' historical understanding, theories of historical consciousness were incorporated as an explanatory framework. In this respect, the research started to depart from grounded theory and the research question was revised:

What impact does living history, as used in museums and historic sites, have on the historical consciousness of young people?

The series of sub-questions referred to in the introduction (page 6) remained the same throughout the research process. This thesis has been organised around these sub-questions: chapters one and two address objectives a) and b); chapters three and four address objective c); chapters five and six explain the research methodology and the case studies respectively; chapter seven addresses objective d); objective e) is addressed in chapter eight. Chapter nine concludes this study with a discussion of historical consciousness, a response to objective f), and thoughts on how this research could have been taken forward if a second period of fieldwork had been pursued.

5.2 Research theory and methods

This research takes a primarily interpretivist, qualitative approach. Mason describes this as the attempt to understand the interpretations and meanings that people make about the world and their experiences, as far as possible, from their point of view.[607] The underlying theoretical concern is that reality is not out there waiting for the researcher to find it, but that reality is constructed by those who exist within it, including young people. Generally, people 'are conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them. In particular, their behaviour depends crucially on those ideas and meanings.'[608] Whilst such an approach privileges the voices and perspectives of research participants, it is the researcher's task to interpret the meaning behind what people say, giving 'recognition to individual difference and multiple voices while also seeking to illuminate patterns amid the diversity.'[609] Qualitative, ethnographic and naturalist methods are becoming well established in research carried out in museums and education and have been applied to a number of contexts,[610] including the work of Handler and Gable at Colonial Williamsburg.[611] Recent studies include the use of ethnographic methods to explore the development of

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[607] Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative Researching*, second edition, Sage, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi.

[608] Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, second edition, Blackwell, Malden MA, Victoria and London, p24.

[609] MacDonald, S. (2000) 'Historical Consciousness "From Below": Anthropological Reflections', in MacDonald, S. (ed), *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations*, Köber-Shiftung, Hamburg, p98.

[610] Hein, *Learning in the Museum*.

[611] Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*.

exhibitions at the Science Museum; how natural history museums construct and reinforce ideas about human evolution and African origins; and the way in which museums tackle prejudice and frame notions of difference through their displays.[612]

5.2.1 Research and historical consciousness

Taking a focused, in-depth approach was designed to complement other research in the field of historical consciousness which, through testing historical skills and concepts, presents young people's historical understanding from the perspective of formal history education.[613] As discussed in the second chapter, since the 1960s research in the field of history education has greatly increased understanding of how children and young people develop their historical consciousness; however, there is an underlying premise in this research that children and young people need to be learning and thinking about history in particular ways. The intention of researchers is, often, to *test* historical consciousness as a form of competence following 'normative models.'[614] The need for suitable models and approaches to history teaching and learning exists

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[612] These studies are respectively, Macdonald, S. (2002) *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*, Berg, Oxford and New York, Scott, M. (2007) *Rethinking Evolution in the Museum: Envisioning African Origins*, Routledge, London and New York, and Sandell, R. (2007) Museums, *Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference*, Routledge, London and New York.

[613] See for example Voss, J. F. and Wiley, J. (2000) 'A Case Study of Developing Historical Understanding via Instruction: The Importance of Integrating Text Components and Constructing Arguments,' in Stearns, P. N., Seixas, P. and Wineburg, S. (eds), *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York and London, pp375-389.

[614] Billmann-Mahedra and Hausen, 'Empirical Psychological Approaches to the Historical Consciousness of Children,' p165.

alongside the growing exploration into the ways in which children and young people talk about and describe the past outside the classroom. With limited evidence available from the museum sector, it was not possible to define the types of historical consciousness that young people should hold, or the types of learning outcome that should result from a living history experience in a museum or historic site, *a priori*. However, I did assume that there would be some form of learning experience for students resulting from the visit to the museum and historic site, drawing on theories of children and young people as active, embodied learners which meant they would be able to, in some capacity, articulate their experiences.

Using qualitative methods of data generation seemed the most appropriate for engaging young people in the research, and focusing on in-depth specific instances through case studies would enable a comparison of how students respond to different approaches taken to living history by museums and historic sites.[615] Taking an experimental approach gave the opportunity to test how different research methods could capture evidence of historical consciousness. In this way, I aimed to provide, borrowing from MacDonald's terminology, a set of 'suggestive insights, of enrichments to the problems to hand',[616] which would be specific, rather than generalised, but which could provide some preliminary ideas about the role of living history in developing young people's historical consciousness.

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[615] Following Mason, *Qualitative Researching*.

[616] MacDonald, 'Historical Consciousness "From Below",' p100.

5.2.2 Why use qualitative research methods?

Taking into account that applying theories of historical consciousness to the learning impact of living history was a new area of study, exploratory qualitative research seemed the most suitable approach to building upon existing research in the field. With its focus on people and their perceptions of social reality, qualitative research methods seemed the most appropriate to capture how young people articulate their historical understanding.[617] Returning to chapter one, capturing evidence of the *appropriation* of history (when a text is made one's own so it has personal meaning) presents a different challenge for the researcher than capturing evidence of *mastery* (the instrumental understanding of when to use sources, historical skills and so on).[618] Appropriation suggests there is an 'emotional commitment to the texts involved.'[619] Qualitative research therefore offers the possibility of exploring in-depth, young people's affective relationship with history, as well as their cognitive understanding; if I really wanted to understand what *meanings* young people attach to history this would be critical. Wertsch suggests that the dialogue and language that young people use can provide clues as to their appropriation of history.[620] Quantitative research, which offers a large-scale, standard approach to capturing evidence of historical understanding, was therefore presumed to be more appropriate for capturing evidence of mastery.

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[617] Bryman, A. (1998) *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, Routledge, London and New York.

[618] Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, pp119-120.

[619] Ibid, p120.

[620] Ibid.

Throughout the first three chapters of this thesis, I have highlighted research

from the field of education which present children, young people (and adults) as

actively engaged with the world around them. Complementing that perspective,

the theoretical underpinning of qualitative research places an emphasis on the

autonomy of the individual as an active meaning-maker who takes part in

experiences that involve (some form of) interaction.[621] People act depending

upon the meanings and interpretations that they make from the context in which

they find themselves.[622] As witnesses to the experience or context in which the

researcher is interested, qualitative research, as Holloway and Jefferson

suggests, considers people to be 'knowable agents […] subjects who are

always somehow closer to the truth of their self-hood than the researcher can

ever be.'[623] Qualitative research seeks to retain the complexity of the social

world; rather than examining isolated elements, it seeks to capture the

interconnectedness of individuals within their environment,[624] through

describing and interpreting the actions and responses of individuals and groups

in the context of their lived experience.[625] From piecing together the

perspectives of the different actors they encounter, and drawing on their own

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[621] Schrøder, K., Drotner, K., Kline, S. and Murray, C. (2003) *Researching Audiences*, Arnold, London.

[622] Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T, (2000) 'Introduction', in Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (eds) *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*, Routledge, London and New York, pp1-30.

[623] Holloway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) 'Biography, anxiety and the experience of locality', in Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J. and Wengraf, T. (eds) *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Example*s, Routledge, London and New York, pp167-180.

[624] Pole, C. and Morrison, M. (2003) *Ethnography for Education*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

[625] Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press*,* Oxford.

experiences in the field, the qualitative researcher can respond to what Mason calls the 'intellectual puzzle' of the research purpose.[626] Taking a qualitative approach seemed vital therefore in the context of exploring a research field which was not intimately known.

5.2.3 Working with young people

Working with secondary school age students presented the opportunity to explore historical consciousness with an age group that would be able to conceptualise abstract ideas about the past (to varying degrees of ability), as well as engage with history on a practical level. I defined young people as falling between the ages of eleven and sixteen, the age at which most young people attend secondary school in England. Involving young people in research was fraught with complexities, not least because of the ethical dilemmas and the 'relative powerlessness of young people within the research process itself when compared with other groups.'[627] Under the age of eighteen, young people are not considered to have the same decision-making capabilities as adults, nor are they assumed to understand the research process, which makes them more vulnerable to giving their consent to take part. Often, the power dynamics between young research participants and adult researchers mean that young people are 'objectified and held up to (often) negative scrutiny' through the research process.[628] The use of standardised approaches to data collection to ensure comparability, such as questionnaires and other forms of

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[626] Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, p7.

[627] Heath, S., Brooks, R., Cleaver, E. and Ireland, E. (2009), *Researching Young People's Lives*, Sage, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington D.C., p8.

[628] Ibid, p14.

assessment, may only pay a superficial attention to the 'different competencies and abilities of participants.'[629] However, according to Heath *et al*, research with young people increasingly places an emphasis 'on the importance of respecting and indeed foregrounding young people's autonomy and social agency.'[630] In respecting the autonomy of young people, I have attempted, as far as possible, in the research methods used and perspective taken to accurately represent the responses of the students and to make them a presence in my research rather than an absence. Their opinions are included as equals alongside the voices of their teachers, museum staff and living history performers, although their real names have not been used in order to protect their confidentiality.

5.2.4 The use of grounded theory-type methodology

To enrich my understanding of the research context the intention was to incorporate a grounded theory-type methodology within the research process. Aware that living history takes a particular approach to representing the past, one which is embodied, performative and subsequently ephemeral, I wanted to contribute to further understanding of how it might impact on young people's historical consciousness by considering it in theoretical terms. Rather than structuring research around an *a priori* theory and testing it, grounded theory is a means of using research in the field to systematically collect and analyse data in order to build theory.[631] Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss, key

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[629] Billmann-Mahedra and Hausen, 'Empirical Psychological Approaches to the Historical Consciousness of Children,' p166.

[630] Heath *et al.*, *Researching Young People's Lives*, p8.

[631] Strauss, and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*.

principles behind grounded theory include a belief in the complexity of phenomena and human action and the relevance of theory to develop a discipline and act as a basis for social action.[632] Fundamental to the process is the open-mindeness of the researcher; as far as possible, the theory grows out of the analysis of data that has been generated through new fieldwork. According to Strauss and Corbin, this enables the researcher to take a fresh perspective on the field of study, allowing them to be open to multiple possibilities and non-linear forms of thinking.

However, the belief that a researcher can exorcise all influence of external theory is more idealistic than practical according to Charmaz.[633] This was certainly the case for my research. Although the first phase of fieldwork involved the open gathering of research material, following the principles of grounded theory, when it came to the analysis of the material I found that it was necessary to use established conceptual frameworks in order to understand the emerging data. Therefore, whilst during the process of fieldwork I retained my open-ness as a researcher in terms of 'discovering' what was happening in the research field, in order to understand *what* was happening, I turned to theories of learning and historical consciousness. At that stage I departed from the

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[632] Ibid.

[633] Charmaz, K. (1990), 'Discovering Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory', *Social Science and Medicine*, 30 (11), pp1161-1172. Walford also suggests that it is more practical to see research as a balance between 'suspending preconceptions and using one's present understandings and beliefs to enquire intelligently,' in Walford, G. (2001) *Doing Qualitative Educational Research: A Personal Guide to the Research Process*, Continuum, London and New York, p9.

method of grounded theory, although I continued to be influenced by Strauss and Corbin's intensive approach to analysis (see section 5.4).

5.2.5 Anticipating flaws in the use of qualitative research methods

There are limitations to using purely qualitative research. It is criticised for being imprecise, lacking in rigour and the difficulty of generalising from specific instances.[634] Research methods are highly subjective and based on the researcher's interpretations or inferences made about the experiences of others: as Pole and Morrison reinforce 'the doer is at the core of the research; what he or she sees, hears and participates in are central to data collection and analysis.'[635] The centrality of the researcher can make it difficult, therefore, to replicate the research or to generalise from it. Furthermore, the addition of grounded theory presents concerns especially, for example, when developing theory. Charmaz suggests that grounded theory can be guilty of 'glossing over its epistemological assumptions and in minimising its relation to extant sociological theory.'[636] Rigorous qualitative research, however, turns these potential limitations into a strength. Knowledge is the construction of meaning about the world and research is the process of the researcher making sense of the context in which they find themselves. Researchers take into account the impact that they have upon the research process, recognising that they are as much a part of the social world as the subjects that they are studying.[637] Good qualitative researchers are honest about their subjectivity and reflexive about

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[634] Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

[635] Pole and Morrison, *Ethnography for Education*, p19

[636] Charmaz, 'Discovering Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory,' p1164.

[637] Pole and Morrison, *Ethnography for Education.*

the impact they have upon the data generation and analysis, but at the same time recognising that it is the researcher's immersion in the research context, and subsequent understanding of it, which gives qualitative research its 'unrivalled capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts.'[638] I follow Scott, whose goal for qualitative research was 'not to provide a blueprint of audience perceptions for explicit prescriptive purposes. Rather the goal is to stimulate conversation.'[639] Opening up avenues for further exploration is a recognised aim of qualitative research, rather than the finding of 'immutable empirical facts.'[640]

5.3 The research methods

5.3.1 Case studies

The use of in-depth cases is a well-established 'research strategy,'[641] which fits well with the purpose of exploratory, qualitative research. It encourages the generation of 'detailed, intensive knowledge,'[642] about a particular setting or location, which is critical to qualitative research.[643] Case studies can be used to describe *what* is happening in the chosen research context but also *why* something is happening. There is the potential to use case studies as a 'test-

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[638] Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* p1.

[639] Scott, *Rethinking Evolution in the Museum,* p13.

[640] Robson, *Real World Research*, p25.

[641] Denscombe, M. (1998) *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, Open University Press, Maidenhead and Philadelphia, p32.

[642] Robson, *Real World Research*, p89.

[643] Bryman *Social Research Methods*.

bed for concepts and theories,'[644] and they encourage a holistic approach to solving a research problem, by enabling the researcher to examine the context within the *case* from as many different perspectives as possible.[645] In choosing this method I was inspired by approaches taken by Hooper-Greenhill *et al*, who used qualitative research methods to explore the experience of a secondary school visiting Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse for a living history performance,[646] and Xanthoudaki, who used a multi-site case study approach to explore the contribution that museums and galleries could make to art education in schools.[647]

Case study sites were chosen from an initial list of museum and historic sites which offered living history sessions to secondary schools on the theme of medieval history. The medieval period was chosen because, as part of the distant past, the Middle Ages are considered to be one of those periods which young people can find particularly challenging or irrelevant (explored in chapters six and eight). Once I had the support of the museum or historic site, it was possible to contact visiting secondary schools. I aimed to work with a minimum of two schools per site. From four possible case studies, two sites yielded enough replies from school groups to be viable. By taking the site as

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[644] Denscombe, M. (2002) *Ground Rules for Good Research: A 10 Point Guide for Social Researchers*, Open University Press, Buckingham, p152.

[645] Mason, *Qualitative Researching*.

[646] Hooper-Greenhill *et al.*, *What did you learn at the museum today? Second Study*.

[647] Xanthoudaki, M. (2003) 'Museums, Galleries and Art Education in Primary Schools: Researching Experiences in England and Greece,' in Xanthoudaki, M., Tickle, L. and Sekules, V. (eds) *Researching Visual Arts in Education in Museums and Galleries*, Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht, Boston and London, pp105-116

the 'case,' it was possible to examine the experiences of the school groups both across each site separately and between them. To ensure the data from each case was comparable, I devised a four-visit model incorporating a range of research methods. Table 1 gives an outline of this model.

Table 1: The four-visit model (case studies)

Visit	Suggested activity
1	Initial visit to the museum or historic site to explore the site and interview museum staff and costumed interpreters about their approach to history and the rationale behind their use of living history.
2	Pre-visit to the school to meet the young people and their teachers, establish the expected outcomes for the visit and explore the young people's initial ideas and perceptions of history, museums and the Middle Ages
3	Accompany the group on their visit to the museum or historic site and observe as much activity on the day as possible.
4	Second visit to the school to interview the young people and their teachers about their experiences and record any potential changes in their views and attitudes towards history

The model was used flexibly to suit the needs of the organisations and schools. A variety of research methods were used to capture evidence, and these are described in the following sections.

5.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Within the case studies, the chief method of data generation was through semi-structured interviews, carried out before and after the living history experience. Interviews enabled the researcher to discuss with participants their ideas and responses to the living history experience, and history more generally. Interviews were conducted with a range of informants, including teachers, museum staff, living history performers, and young people in small groups. Whilst group interviews were practical for ethical reasons, these also enabled an observation of the dynamics between the students, and with their teachers, and how that can contribute to the development of ideas in history. Learning takes place in a social as well as individual context and can be influenced by interaction and dialogue with others (see chapter two). Interview protocols developed for students, teachers and living history practitioners are included in appendix one.[648] Excerpts from interview transcripts with four school groups are included in appendix two.

5.3.3 Meaning mapping

Concept or meaning maps are used to understand how young people organise and represent knowledge or relationships between ideas, and can be used flexibly in response to a variety of research questions. This exercise was carried out with students before and after their living history experience. Students were asked to write the words 'Middle Ages' in the centre of a piece of paper and given a maximum of ten minutes to write down or draw the words

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[648] Protocols for museum staff are not included as they were developed specifically for each case study site.

and images that came into their minds in association with it. There were no restrictions placed on how much they wrote or how they used the paper. Most students were familiar with the process of meaning mapping and found it a straightforward exercise.[649] Ten students from School 2 completed a meaning map before and after their visit to the Museum of London, and a further three students from School 6 completed a meaning map after their visit to the Tower of London. Example meaning maps are included in appendix three.

5.3.4 A flexible approach to research methods

Research methods were purposefully kept loosely structured to overcome unexpected practical difficulties or time constraints. I took the position that the participants would be able to articulate their experiences and understandings of their experience without too much prompting, and the interview process enabled me to probe and explore issues in greater depth with participants than would have been possible by other methods such as a questionnaire. Secondary data provided by museum staff at the three case study sites, and extensive field notes taken as part of the research process, also generated useful contextual data.

5.4 Data analysis and the potential for theory building

I applied a three-stage process to analysing my data. First, the data was analysed for each 'micro' case: this was at the smallest level, each group that was involved. The data was then analysed by each 'case study', that is the museum and historic site. The third process was to analyse the data from the

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[649] See Heath *et al*, *Researching Young People's Lives,* pp120-123.

two case studies together. In the early stages of this process, an 'open-coding'

approach was taken, which Strauss and Corbin describe as the attempt to

discover concepts that 'open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and

meanings contained within.'[650] It can also be described as discourse analysis,

where the meaning is searched for in the text itself (in this case, the words of

the young people, teachers, museum educators and performers) and the

conceptual framework to describe the data is built from the data itself, rather

than imposed upon it.

Following an initial process of open-coding, I returned to my data with two

conceptual frameworks to guide the analysis process and understand what was

emerging from the data. These were Rüsen's four-type model of historical

consciousness, described in chapter two, and the Generic Learning Outcomes

(GLOs).[651] The GLOs are a conceptual framework based on socio-cultural and

constructivist theories of learning which describe learning as a process of active

meaning-making. For learning to take place, it is assumed that a change

occurs in the learner; that change takes the form of an *outcome*, such as new

facts or information, which can be captured by researchers through observation

or asking learners to articulate their experiences. These outcomes can then be

analysed into 'broad categories for the aggregation of individual learning

experiences,'[652] which enables researchers to demonstrate the impact of a

learning experience. The GLOs consist of five generic categories of learning:

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[650] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, p102.

[651] See Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education*, pp44-62.

[652] Ibid, p10.

knowledge and understanding, skills, attitudes and values, enjoyment, inspiration and creativity, and activity, behaviour, progression. Each individual GLO takes progression into account, for instance knowledge comes before understanding, and enjoyment comes before inspiration, which may then lead to the, 'creation of something new.'[653]

In the final stages of coding, the data was broken down into discrete parts (or concepts), which were closely examined and compared with other parts. Those parts which were conceptually similar or related in meaning were grouped together into broader categories. Formed from the data, these categories started life as concrete and actual but became increasingly abstract as more data was grouped together. The analysis takes place on two levels: the actual words of participants (which form the initial categories) and the conceptualisation of these words into broader categories from the interpretation made by the researcher. Those parts which did not seem to fit into any category were retained in separate, specific categories. Further sub-categories were formed by reassembling the data (axial-coding) to 'form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena.'[654] Once these categories were formed, selective coding could take place, whereby the data was organised around a central explanatory concept and a process of integrating and refining the theory took place. Relationships and patterns were looked for amongst the data, as well as instances where the data did not seem to fit into the general categories. Generally, the process of analysis is an evolving and dynamic

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[653] Ibid, p52. As well as being used to analyse the emerging data, the GLOs were also used to structure parts of the teacher and student interview protocols.

[654] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, p124.

process, producing meaning through each stage of decoding and encoding text. It is a process of selection, inference and interpretation, in which the researcher and their experience plays a critical role. The process is not finished until the writing is finally complete.[655]

Following, Strauss and Corbin, it is critical that, to be valid, any theories developed from research need to be grounded in reality, and 'should be recognisable to participants, and although it should not and might not fit every aspect of their cases, the larger concepts should apply.'[656] A check on the validity of the findings from the case studies was performed in the initial stages by sending a copy of the second-stage analysis to the schools and organisations involved.

5.5 The museums and historic sites involved in the research

The rationale for choosing the case study sites was based on particular characteristics that made them suitable for my research, rather than as a representative sample of museums and historic sites that offer living history performances. This approach is not uncommon for qualitative and small-scale research projects, where researchers may 'make the strategic decision to concentrate the investigation on one or a few cases in order to allow greater depth to their research, more attention to the dynamics of the situation, better insights that come from a detailed knowledge and understanding of a specific

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[655] Schrøder *et al.*, *Researching Audiences*.

[656] Strauss and Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, p161.

example.'[657] The focus on medieval history and the provision of living history for secondary schools necessarily narrowed the number of sites which would be applicable. Among them were Historic Royal Palaces, whose sites include the Tower of London, and the Museum of London both of whom agreed to take part in the research and became the case study sites. Full details of the sites and the schools involved are provided in chapter six.

5.5.1 Research in the real world: challenges to the process

Research takes place in a real world context and the process remained flexible in order to adapt to unexpected challenges. All research methods are underpinned by certain assumptions and the ideal context for the researcher's chosen methods does not always materialise.[658] However, overcoming barriers to the research process is rarely addressed in the research methods literature, which tends to present, according to Walford, 'a largely idealized conception […] where research is carefully planned in advance, predetermined methods and procedures are followed and "results" are the inevitable conclusion.'[659] The frequent frustrations, unexpected setbacks and compromises that can be experienced are rarely explored. This section will consider some of the challenges encountered during the research process which necessitated changes to the general model, not as an apology for poor research but rather as an explanation and reflection on why research does not always go as planned.

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[657] Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, p146.

[658] Ibid, p35.

[659] Walford, *Doing Qualitative Educational Research*, p1.

General challenges that were expected as part of the research process included finding museums, historic sites and schools that were willing take part in the research. Several contacts began promisingly but were limited because of lack of time or staff changes during the research period. The initial focus on medieval history was to address a particular research problem, but in hindsight meant that the selection of potential case study sites was far too narrow. Using qualitative research methods also meant that the researcher became intrusive in the research context; it is a well known issue of research that it can affect the behaviour of those being studied when they are aware that they are being observed.[660] Working with schools brought its own challenges, including gaining access to research sites, students and teachers. These challenges are well established in the literature.[661] The intensification of teachers' work, increased anxiety from surveillance by experts, and a general increase in the number of researchers wanting to gain access to schools can make schools wary.[662] Access had to be negotiated with the support of gatekeepers,[663] and in this research there were two sets of gatekeepers: education officers at the case study sites and teachers. Accessing the schools directly was not permitted by either the Museum of London or the Tower of London, which relied on the schools contacting the researcher if they were interested in being involved in the research. Schools were therefore self-selecting and those which were interested in taking part were relatively small, voluntary-aided, grammar and

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[660] Schrøder *et al*, *Researching Audiences*.

[661] See Pole and Morrison, *Ethnography in Education,* and, specifically to research in history education, Clark, *History's Children*.

[662] Walford, *Doing Qualitative Educational Research*.

[663] Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Good Research.*

independent schools. Without access to the booking records of either the Tower of London or Museum of London during the research phase, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this finding. It may be that these kinds of schools are more likely to undertake a visit to these sites. The lack of state-maintained secondary schools involved in the research and its implications are discussed in more detail in chapter six. Working with secondary schools, which have more constraints upon their timetables than primary schools, restricted the length of time I could spend with students.

The intention was to undertake a second period of data generation after the first two case studies, following the principles of 'theoretical sampling' whereby cases are selected on the merit of exploring and checking the theoretical categories already developed.[664] I intended to focus in-depth on historical consciousness in this second phase, and gather a greater number of responses from students using a variety of research methods, quantitative as well as qualitative. However, despite the attempt to liaise with more schools, an absence of responses and limited availability to carry out the fieldwork meant that this second process did not, in the end, take place.

5.6 Conclusion

Although there are well-established limitations to qualitative research, the use of intensive methods of interview and observation enabled the capture the thoughts and perceptions of young people in response to an experience of living history at a museum or historic site. Despite the challenges of the

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[664] Charmaz, 'Discovering Chronic Illness: Using Grounded Theory.'

research in practice, the benefits of using qualitative research were that it provided an opportunity to probe in-depth the ways in which young people responded to historically-focused experiences at museums and historic sites, drawing on the experiences of their teachers, museum and heritage workers. In the next chapter, is a more detailed description of the case study sites and the schools that took part in the research study.

Chapter 6

Research in practice: the case studies

6.0 Introduction

This chapter describes fieldwork that took place between December 2007 and September 2008, and provides contextual information for two case study sites and six schools involved in the research process. I begin by introducing the two case study sites, providing a description of each site, an outline of the research activities that took place, and, drawing on interviews carried out with staff, the approach taken by each site to history education and living history. The third section introduces the six schools and describes each one in terms of its students, location and reason for visiting the case study sites. This is followed by a discussion of the schools' approach to the teaching and learning of history: all teachers had in common a desire to ensure that their students had a range of experiences in history from using objects and role-play in the classroom, to undertaking visits to museums and historic sites. The final section gives an account of student attitudes to history and history education. These sections serve as contextual background to the analysis of their experiences at the case study sites in chapters seven through nine.

6.1 The Museum of London case study

6.1.1 Research activities

Two schools visiting the Museum of London in January and February 2008

agreed to take part in the research. Table 2 provides a summary of the

research activities that took place between December 2007 and March 2008.

Table 2: Research activities, Museum of London case study

Date	Location	Activity
04/12/2007	Museum of London	Interview with Lucie Amos, Interpretation Officer Interview with Claire Carlin, Secondary Schools Officer
28/01/2008	Museum of London	Observation of School 1 Chaucer in Context Interview with Harry Baille (performer)
13/02/2008	School 1	Follow-up visit Interview with Head of English Focus group with four students: Emily, Imogen, Ruth and Abby.
25/02/2008	School 2	Pre-visit Observation of history class Interview with Head of History Interview with History teacher Concept mapping with ten students

Date	Location	Activity
26/02/2008	Museum of London	Observation of School 2 Medieval Study Day Second interview with Harry Baille (performer)
04/03/2008	School 2	Follow-up visit Interview with Head of History Concept mapping and interview with seven students
07/03/2008	Museum of London	Interview with John Clark, Senior Curator

6.1.2 The Museum of London

Established in 1976, the Museum of London has extensive collections which tell the story of London from prehistoric times to the present day. Between 2001-2005 the Medieval London galleries were subject to an extensive re-design and re-presentation, which radically changed the way in which the Middle Ages were interpreted for visitors.[665] Many visitors to the museum are tourists or reflect Britain's changing demographic trends as a multicultural society, meaning that the museum could not presume that visitors would have any prior knowledge of medieval history. The aims of the re-development were to give audiences a broader, more meaningful sense of the medieval period,

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[665] Details of the redevelopment were provided by John Clark (Senior Curator), Claire Carlin (Secondary Schools Officer), and Lucie Amos (Interpretation Officer).

particularly those who were not familiar with its history, improve access to the gallery and reflect the results of twenty-five years of modern historical and archaeological research. Instead of representing the period as the *dark age* of popular imagination, the Middle Ages were interpreted as significant to the development of London. It was presented as a time of growing international trade and the consolidation of the city as England's capital. Modern methods of display and interactive elements were used to ensure that the gallery was accessible to all visitors and could support their understanding of medieval life and society. A light-hearted, but informative, style was adopted for the text labels used with the collections. These were written as short narratives explaining each object and its likely use, or ownership, by London's medieval inhabitants. For example, one caption entitled 'Foot sore late 1300s' next to a display of medieval shoes explained that 'Fashionable footwear might have contributed to Londoner's foot problems.' To promote intergenerational learning in the gallery, several of these text labels were made to be appealing to children with the inclusion of cartoons and an irreverent tone, very different to the detached and authoritative tone usually found in history museums. One text label shows a doctor holding up a glass vial of yellow liquid to a horrified looking woman. The text alongside reads, with the emphasis on particular words reproduced from the original label:

> **Doctors and diseases**. Can you find the '**urinal**'? Why do you think it's made from glass? Medieval doctors thought they could tell what diseases their patients had by the **colour** of their urine. **Red** wee meant the patient had a fever, **dark green** wee meant they had backache.

Aside from these cartoons, there are no representations of medieval people except for those found in contemporary objects, texts and artworks, which was a deliberate policy by the museum.

6.1.3 Approach to living history

At the time of the fieldwork the Museum of London frequently used living history to bring the past to life for visitors, usually in the form of programmed talks and performances to take place alongside activities that visitors can choose to do at their own pace. Performers were provided by Spectrum, a large, well known theatre company in London.

6.1.4 School sessions at the Museum of London

The museum offered sessions to schools looking at aspects of medieval history for students of KS3 and above (ages eleven to fourteen). The two schools involved in the fieldwork took part in day-long sessions at the museum, entitled *Chaucer in Context* and *The Medieval Study Day*. Both sessions included a living history performance, an object-handling workshop and independent research time to be spent in the Medieval London gallery. *Chaucer in Context* was designed for A-level students[666] sitting their English Literature examinations on *The Canterbury Tales:* the session aimed to set Chaucer in his historical context, familiarise students with the sound and delivery of Middle English, and encourage students to enjoy the study of Chaucer's *Tales*. In *A Host's Tale*, students came face to face with Harry Baille, who presented

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[666] A-level examinations are higher level qualifications which are typically studied between the ages of sixteen to eighteen.

himself as the owner of the Tabard Inn in Southwark and preceded to introduce the students to, 'Chaucer's London and the language of Chaucer's poetry.'[667] A quotations workshop involved students handling real medieval objects and matching them to characters from the *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Medieval Study Day* was designed for younger students to complement the Key Stage Three National Curriculum History unit, Britain 1066-1500.[668] It introduced students to medieval life and, in particular, to the devastating impact that the Black Death had on society. The living history performance, *A Survivor's Tale*, was led by the character of Harry Baille as a survivor of the Black Death. In a handling session, students encountered real medieval artefacts from the museum's collections, which they identified through discussion and investigated how they were used as part of everyday medieval life. Descriptions of the two living history performances observed at the Museum of London are included in appendix four.

6.2 The Tower of London case study

6.2.1 Research activities

Four schools were observed during their visit to the Tower of London and three of those schools were willing to take part in further evaluation. Table 3 outlines the research activities associated with the Tower of London.

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[667] *Chaucer in Context*, Support materials - AS/A2 English Literature, Teachers' resources, provided by Museum of London.

[668] Key Stage Three refers to the first three years of study in state maintained secondary schools in England and Wales known as Year 7, 8 and 9. Students are commonly aged between eleven and fourteen years old.

Table 3: Research activities, Tower of London case study

Date	Location	Activity
12/03/2008	University of Leicester	Telephone interview with David Souden, Head of Access and Learning
02/04/2008	Kensington Palace Tower of London	Meeting with David Souden, Head of Learning and Access Meeting with Alex Drago, Education Manager, Dan Ferguson, Education Officer and Alex Smith, Education Manager, Past Pleasures Interview with Chris Gidlow, Live Interpretation Manager
18/06/2008	Tower of London	Observation of School 3 Medieval Monarchy sessions Interview with Alex Drago
20/06/2008	School 4	Pre-visit to School 4 Interview with 5 students: Tom, Jonathan, George, Sophie and Olivia Interview with Class teacher
23/06/2008	Tower of London	Observation of School 4 Medieval Chest session Tour of the Tower of London Interview with Dan Ferguson

Date	Location	Activity
02/07/2008	School 4	Follow-up visit to School 4 Discussion with 5 students: Tom, Jonathan, George, Sophie and Olivia Interview with Class teacher
09/07/2008	School 5	Observation of School 5 Medieval Chest session Interview with 'Harold' (performer)
11/07/2008	School 3	Follow-up visit to School 3 Interview with 6 students: Peter, Alex, Michael, Billy, Jacob and Dean Interview with History teacher
16/07/2008	Tower of London	Observation of School 6 Medieval Monarchy session
26/09/2008	School 6	Follow-up visit to School 6 Interview with teacher and visit organiser Interview with 3 students: Hannah, Jessica and Gabriella Interview with Head of History

6.2.2 The Tower of London

Historic Royal Palaces is an independent charity, responsible for the care and

interpretation of five historic palaces, the Tower of London, Hampton Court

Palace, the Banqueting House, Kensington Palace and Kew Palace. The

Tower of London remains a working building and has been put to a number of

uses throughout history including 'royal palace and fortress, prison and place of execution, an arsenal, royal mint, menagerie, and jewel house.'[669] Described as a 'rampart built against both foreign invasion and domestic disorder,'[670] the Tower's notoriety as a prison means that it is more often 'associated in the public's mind with torture and executions.'[671] Along with the White Tower, which dates from the eleventh century, the Medieval Palace, where the sessions for the four schools took place, is one of the oldest parts of the site and it has been recreated in recent years to resemble its appearance during the reign of Edward I (1239-1307).

6.2.3 Approach to living history

Living history has been used by Historic Royal Palaces since the early 1990s. As a form of story-telling, it is not only assumed to have universal appeal for visitors to the site but, in the absence of extensive collections, living history has come to attain a greater significance for Historic Royal Palaces in conveying the history of the Tower. The backdrop of the Tower lends an air of authenticity to the performers that roam around the site. In the opinion of the Tower education team, watching a performance take place *where it actually happened* was evocative for visitors: 'Telling the story of Anne Boleyn's execution on the site of her execution, with all the original architecture around her, is […] more powerful

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[669] Thurley, Impey and Hammond (1996) *The Tower of London: The Official Guidebook,* Crown Copyright, London, p1.

[670] Samuel, R. (1998) *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain, Theatres of Memory, Volume II,* Verso, London and New York, p101.

[671] Abbott, G. (1986) *Tortures of the Tower of London*, David & Charles, Newton Abbott and London, p7.

and that's the unique effect that living history can have in a site like this.'[672] At the time of the fieldwork, the company Past Pleasures (which has an established, long-term relationship with Historic Royal Palaces) supplied costumed interpreters for the public performances and education sessions. Performers were treated as educators, rather than actors, and subsequently many were recruited with a previous background or experience in education.

6.2.4 School sessions at the Tower of London

A range of educational sessions and activities were provided for schools and colleges at the Tower of London, from reception age (before five years) to A-Level (students aged seventeen and eighteen). A high demand came from primary schools, particularly for sessions on the Tudors due to its prominence in the National Curriculum. At Key Stage Three and above, the less flexible structure of the curriculum and the limitations placed on teachers by greater rigidity in timetabling, meant that the market for education sessions was much smaller. The sessions observed during the fieldwork period - *Medieval Chest* and *Medieval Monarchy* – were aimed at giving schools groups a broad sweep of medieval history focused around the reconstructed medieval palace. School 4 had a mixture of these two sessions, which was designed to be suitable for the younger age group.   Sessions were led by performers of both sexes, dressed in costume to represent a medieval character, and were carried out in third-person interpretation. Table 4 gives a description of the two sessions from the information provided to schools.

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[672] Interview with Education Officer, 23/06/2008.

Table 4: Description of schools sessions, Tower of London

Medieval Chest	Set within the newly re-interpreted royal lodgings of King Edward I this investigative session, led by a costumed interpreter, uses a variety of sources and replica artefacts to study aspects of everyday life in the medieval period. Students will develop and enhance their skills of historical enquiry and observation as they investigate the materials and techniques used in the manufacture of objects and consider the value of a wide range of sources as evidence of the past.
Medieval Monarchy	How did medieval monarchs keep control? A costumed interpreter will help students explore the role of the Tower as both a medieval power base and a focus of discontent. Examining a variety of artefacts and documents and the surviving physical evidence of the Tower's use as a palace, court and prison, students will be guided through the newly re-interpreted royal lodgings of Edward I. They will consider challenges faced by medieval monarchs and will gain understanding of the precarious nature of medieval kingship.

At the time of the research period, in light of revision to the Key Stage Three National Curriculum, these broader sessions were being phased out for more focused sessions on, for example, the Peasant's Revolt (1381), Richard III

(1483-1485) and the Jesuits in the time of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). These *History Detectives* sessions (also described in chapter four) involved a workshop with the Education officer and a costumed interpreter performing in first-person interpretation, which replaced the tour-based format. Descriptions of the four living history performances observed at the Tower of London are included in appendix four.

6.3 The schools

Six schools were involved in the research, their students aged from ten to seventeen years old. A brief description of each school is provided below. The schools were atypical state schools, independent or grammar schools. With all the schools having specific entry requirements, most students were likely to have been of higher academic ability than the average secondary school student. The groups were predominantly white British, although Schools 2 and 5 had a greater diversity of students in terms of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Not all the visits by the schools to the Museum of London and Tower of London were tied into curriculum work, and some of the young people therefore, were not studying medieval history at the time of the fieldwork. However, all the students interviewed were at least familiar with some details of the period.

School 1 was a group of students from an independent boarding school for girls located in Berkshire. The majority of the students at the school were British, or British nationals living abroad, with smaller numbers of students from outside the UK. The students in the group were aged between sixteen and seventeen

years old. The visit was directly connected to an A-level in English Literature and aimed at providing the historical context for their work on the Canterbury Tales. The students were used to visiting museums and took part in a range of different cultural experiences with their families and through their schooling. School 2 was a group of around twenty Year 7 students, aged between eleven and twelve who attended a smaller than average voluntary-aided Church of England secondary school for girls, located in an inner-city borough of West London. The visit to the Museum of London was directly relevant to the history curriculum and students were learning about the impact of the Black Death on medieval life and society. School 3 was a group of forty-six Year 7 students, aged between eleven and twelve, who attended a grammar school for boys in Lincolnshire. The visit to the Tower of London was part of a week-long residential and activity trip in London and was not linked to curriculum work. It gave students, many of whom had not previously been to London, the experience of being in a large city. School 4 was a group of Year 6 pupils, aged nine and ten, who attended a family-run, co-educational independent school for children aged from two to thirteen years. The pupils were studying medieval society in their lessons and the visit to the Tower of London was designed to help the pupils write a report on the theme of castles. School 5 was a group of students from Years 7, 8 and 9, from a voluntary-aided, Catholic, comprehensive school for boys in Middlesex. This group of students, aged between eleven and fourteen, was the most diverse group in respect of age and ethnic background. The visit to the Tower of London was part of a week of activities with the theme *Wider Horizons*, which included trips to sites of cultural and historical interest, chosen by the students. School 6 was a small group of

ten students, aged fifteen, from a private school for girls in Jersey (part of the Channel Islands). The visit to the Tower of London was part of an activity week in London which had no direct links to the curriculum.

6.3.1 Approach to teaching history

From interviews with the teachers from four of the schools it was possible to gain an overview of their approaches to teaching history. Students took part in a range of experiences and activities to augment their learning in the classroom, for example teachers described the use of visual images, artefacts, role-play, visits to museums and historic sites and, for the older students, lectures and conferences. This bias towards teachers who were keenly involved in developing engaging history lessons for their students was influenced by the self-selecting nature of the research: by approaching schools through the museum it was not surprising that they were keen users of museums and heritage sites. Additionally the schools involved were not average state schools. The context within which history was taught at these schools must therefore be considered, to some extent, atypical. Class sizes tended to be smaller than average, which (according to the teachers) enabled a closer relationship to be developed between students and teachers. The selective nature of the schools (on the grounds of religion, gender and ability) meant that students tended to be of higher ability. In terms of the curriculum, schools 2 and 3 followed the National Curriculum with its emphasis on British history. For the History department of School 2, there was a concern to keep history relevant to the student's experiences of living in a multicultural city and incorporating the leading trends in terms of how history is interpreted. The

Head of History was studying for an MA in historical interpretation and this seemed to influence her views on how students should understand history, not as a literal story of *what happened* but the result of a process of selection and interpretation by historians and curators. The teacher at the independently-run School 4 took a much more traditional, chronological approach to the history curriculum, which she preferred to the thematic approach in the National Curriculum: this teacher suggested that within a chronological approach, pupils could see how a period, event, or person fitted into the wider temporal framework, which made history more manageable for them.

Teachers understood the value of history being critical to young people's sense of identity and could see the value of helping them to develop the skills of critical thinking and historical enquiry, what the Head of History from Jersey called a 'sceptical, critical mind and not to take things at face value.'[673] With reference back to the first two chapters, these views accorded closely to the abilities and competencies expected of students in the history education literature. Also relevant were the general challenges that teachers from the schools described when teaching history, which included the pressures of finding a balance between learning content and skills, the limited resources available to schools to bring history to life and ensuring that visits to museums and historic sites could take place within a rigid secondary curriculum.

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[673] Interview with Head of History, School 6, 26/09/2008.

6.3.2 The importance of providing *real* experiences of the past

The nature of the schools involved in the fieldwork meant that most of the teachers had the freedom to provide a range of cultural experiences for their students in history; these were also young people who were (in the main) experiencing similar cultural activities with their families. Teachers utilised a range of activities to stimulate students' curiosity and support their understanding of the past. School 2 used museum visits, historical objects in class (where available), visual resources including cartoons and posters, web-sites, presentations and classroom displays alongside textbooks and other written resources. The aim was to make history interactive and stimulating for students. Visiting museums and historic sites was important for bringing students into contact with real historical artefacts and experts who could explain those artefacts to the students. Returning to ideas addressed in chapter three, giving students the opportunity to handle artefacts, or to try historic costumes on, including armour, could help to cement their understanding of previously abstract ideas. The museum environment could be transformative for students, inspiring them to respond in new ways or benefit from different styles of learning to the classroom. The Head of History from School 2 explained that, 'it allows you often to see a different side of your pupils,' and in particular, for 'students who might struggle with literacy or be particularly shy, it offers them an opportunity to shine or to fill a slightly different role.'[674] Similar benefits were articulated by history teachers from Schools 3, 4 and 6. Museums and historic sites could be used to demonstrate the process of historical enquiry: to encourage young people to ask questions and use the available evidence to

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[674] Interview with Head of History, School 2, 04/03/2008.

'figure out about how people lived, defended the territory and why they were built in the first place.'[675] Such experiences made history more vivid and memorable. For the teacher from School 4, who was not expert in history, having access to experts from a range of cultural organisations gave her greater confidence to address the gaps in her knowledge. Whilst all teachers were supportive of activity-led history lessons, there was concern from one teacher that the need to incorporate experiential learning opportunities was based on some misconceptions about history, in particular, 'the one that history is dull and boring and so we need to make it all whizzy.'[676] This teacher considered that history was, for most students, an interesting subject, and he had not encountered any concerns from his students about history being irrelevant.

6.3.3 Challenges to teaching medieval history

In chapter one, I referred to the idea that the distant past can be less relevant to students than modern periods of history. With less surviving material and textual evidence, even for historians understanding the distant past can be fraught with challenges. As Beard explains, it is 'at best […] as much about *how* we know as *what* we know.'[677] For the Middle Ages, this is further complicated by historical discourses that characterise the period as 'a mediocre interlude, an intermission in the great pageant of history, a trough in the wave of

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[675] Interview with History teacher, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[676] Interview with History teacher, School 2, 25/02/2008.

[677] Beard, M. (2007) *The Roman Triumph*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, and London, p5.

time.'[678] For Le Goff, the purpose of historians (such as himself) is to re-present the Middle Ages, not quite as a 'gilded' age but as a period from which emerged the beginnings of modern civilisation. These include 'the city, the nation, the state, the university, the mill and the machine, the hour and the watch, the book, the fork, underclothing, the individual, the conscience, and finally, revolution.'[679] In the popular imagination, however, medieval history continues to be portrayed as 'obscure, difficult, strange, alien.'[680]

For the schools involved in the research, teachers considered that there were some specific challenges when teaching medieval history. The limited resources available made it difficult for teachers to study the Middle Ages without using role play, visual resources, museums and historic sites to bring it to life. From Schools 2 and 3 there was evidence that students would approach aspects of medieval life from the perspective of a *deficit* view of the past, described in chapter two as the tendency for children to view the past negatively from the vantage point of the present. Although the History teacher from School 2 was reluctant to concede that his students had any especial difficulties in understanding the medieval past, he did suggest that it was necessary to be careful that they were not condescending about past societies. He did not want his students to think that, 'everybody in the medieval period

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[678] Le Goff, J. (1980) *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, translated by Goldhammer, A., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, pviii.

[679] Ibid, px.

[680] Patterson, L. (1990) 'On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies,' *Speculum*, 65 (1) p92.

was stupid and they were not as advanced as we were scientifically.'[681] For

another History teacher, the challenge was countering the propensity of

students to be interested in the more gory and dramatic aspects of history. In

particular, this teacher mentioned the appeal of *Horrible Histories*, a series of

books written by Terry Deary which have the strapline 'It's history with the nasty

bits left in!' [682] As the teacher explained, exposure to this kind of history meant

that the students were, 'into all the interesting facts and gory details that they

can get their hands on.'[683] Although the teacher did not explicitly suggest that

she was pressured by these different readings of history, she admitted that, 'I

do teach them all the facts as well but you've got to highlight the more exciting

bits.'[684] The risk was that the 'more exciting bits' could give students a distorted

and 'fake view of history.'[685] However, the teacher seemed determined to

counter this less acceptable approach to history by looking for examples

whereby the past could provide alternatives to some of the negative perceptions

that young people held in the present. The teacher gave two examples of this

in action: positive gender examples in history concerning women and positive

examples of minority religious or ethnic groups. These examples illustrated the

potential use of history for drawing parallels between the past and present, in

this case almost as a form of *moral* education.

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[681] Interview with History teacher, School 2, 25/02/2008.

[682] Deary, T. (1996, 1999) *Measley Middle Ages*, Scholastic, London.

[683] Interview with History teacher, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[684] Ibid.

[685] Ibid.

The challenges encountered in teaching the medieval past were not only specific to that period, but can also be seen as general challenges experienced in history (as described in chapters one and two). When looking at the aims of the education sessions at the Museum of London and Tower of London, it seems evident that the education teams at both sites were seeking to alleviate some of the problems associated with the teaching of history. They attempted to do this by: providing an *authentic* perspective on the Middle Ages through the use of surviving material culture and remains; encouraging young people to ask questions of that material culture and develop skills of *enquiry*; and providing a broader context in which to locate their knowledge of specific events and historical figures. How these aims corresponded with the impact of the sessions will be looked at shortly: however, before that I will give a survey of the students' perspectives on history.

6.4 The young people's views on history

In seeking to understand how the historical consciousness of the students might be inferred from their responses to their living history experiences, it was important to gain some broad ideas about their attitudes and opinions of history.[686] Most of the students were conscientious, articulate and confident about the subject. These young people, most of whom were aged between ten and twelve, were, however, seeing the past through their own experiences in the present. This shaped what they wanted to learn about and gave most of them a *deficit* view of the past. This perspective appeared to be rooted not only

[686] This was possible from all the schools except School 5 who did not want to participate in a pre-visit or post-visit interview, although the longer period of time for interview at schools 3 and 4 meant that students' opinions could be explored in greater depth.

in their awareness of social and material changes over time, but also in the assumption that the present was superior to the past. It is an assumption that is reflective of the Whig interpretation of history (as described in chapter one), and a way in which, according to Lee, many students in England understand the notion of historical change, which manifests as 'with reservations - a story of progress.'[687]

For the pupils from School 4, history was an exciting subject that fascinated them as much as they struggled to understand why people in the past behaved as they did. Exposed to a range of experiences at school, these were confident, precocious children who were able to demonstrate a great deal of knowledge about the past. They had the advantage of family backgrounds that enabled them access to cultural experiences, and the way in which they learnt about the past at school seemed to suit them with its mix of active experience and focus on content. They demonstrated the propensity towards a deficit view of the past, encouraged by their interest in the more gruesome aspects of history, which seemed to exert a part fascination, part repulsion for them. This *deficit* view, however, did not seem to affect adversely their understanding of the past, and their use of historical knowledge to support their ideas suggested a sophisticated level of thinking for their age. There were some differences that could be attributable to gender. Tom, Jonathan and George expressed a fascination with history. They liked exploring the contrast between life in the past and present, and comparing how different it would have been without modern conveniences like electricity and medicines. These pupils considered

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[687] Lee, 'Walking Backwards into Tomorrow,' p18.

their interest in history was something that marked them out as different from other pupils because, as George explained, 'most people find [history] boring these days.'[688] Sophie and Olivia did not seem to have the same enthusiasm for learning history as a personal interest, however together the pupils demonstrated an extensive knowledge about the past, often bringing examples from across different periods of time to support or challenge points that they made during the conversation, as well as making comparisons with the present day. The pupils had experience of living history prior to their visit to the Tower of London when a group of medieval re-enactors came to their school; they had enjoyed trying on examples of armour and making medieval versions of medicine.

From the interview with students from School 3 it was clear that their views on the past were strongly influenced by their interests and experiences in the present. Their opinions on gender rigidly defined what, as boys, they should find interesting about history, which was predominantly war and weapons. They demonstrated a deficit view of the past, linked to the idea that because the past lacked modern comforts and technology, life would (logically) have been more difficult, as Peter explained: 'because like nowadays […] you've got mobile phones and PSPs [Play Station Portables] and all that and in them days there was nothing […] well they didn't even have electric.'[689] Whilst they showed some interest in social history, what they called *proper* history was the dramatic events and larger-than-life characters that interested them. Their

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[688] Interview with students, School 4, 02/07/2008.

[689] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

deficit views, it seemed, were the result of dwelling too much on the gruesome aspects of the past, which seemed to give them the view that it was a far more dangerous time than the present-day. This view was evident in the words they used to describe the medieval past such as 'scary', 'cruel' and 'gory.'[690] In contrast, the students from School 6 were interested in learning about the social, and personal, aspects of history, more so than remembering specific dates and events. Whilst they did not have such strong deficit views influencing their perspective on the past compared to the younger students, they were much more critical of history as a subject, preferring to learn about the past in a very visual and tangible way that had not always been possible in school. As Hannah explained, she preferred to see the evidence of the past rather than learn about it in the classroom: she described how she enjoyed 'going to visit the Tower of London and getting a feel of what it's actually like, how that's affected things rather than sitting in a classroom just having to learn about medicine through time.'[691]

6.5 Conclusion: making the most of historical remains

In this section, I have described the sites and the schools involved in the two case studies and provided a description of the way in which four of the schools approached the teaching and learning of history. Interviews with the students demonstrated that whilst most of the young people enjoyed learning about history, their views of the past were strongly influenced by their experiences and opinions in the present. Their personal interests appeared to influence the

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[690] Ibid.

[691] Interview with students, School 6, 26/09/2008.

types of history they were interested in, and there were some differences

attributable to gender with boys clearly citing their interest in the 'gorier'

elements of the past. Through their school experiences, all of the students

were familiar with using museums and historic sites to learn about the past.

The ways in which the Museum of London used its collections and the Tower of

London used its buildings in their education programmes responded to the

appeal of these experiences for young people. Both sites drew on the local

aspects of their history in order to provide the content for tours, workshops and

performances, at the same time nesting that local history in broader themes and

issues relevant to national and global studies of the past. For instance, the

broad sweep of history presented in the *Medieval Monarchy* session used the

Medieval Palace as an example to illustrate wider issues of medieval kingship,

power and control. The Museum of London tells the story of London's past and

how it has shaped the present, reflecting issues that are still relevant to the city

today, such as the diversity of its population. At both sites, students were

brought into contact with the remains of the past, whether through the built

environment or though surviving material culture. From the learning

programmes of both the Museum of London and the Tower of London can be

ascertained the importance that is attached to an embodied, and authentic,

experience of the past. This was being in the place where history happened at

the Tower of London or encountering real artefacts from the Middle Ages at the

Museum of London. The local narratives of history that these experiences

create were connected to the broader national and international context of the

medieval past, to further reinforce their significance (for example Harry Baille's

experience of the Black Death was placed in the wider context of medieval

society in London and its trade links with Europe and the rest of the world).

Living history fits into this pedagogy because it too creates an embodied

experience of the past. In the next chapter I turn to the analysis of the living

history experience at the two case study sites, to explore the question, how

does the construction of characters from the past impact on young people's

learning of history, and do different performance techniques have different

impacts?

Chapter 7

How does the construction of characters from the past impact on young people's learning of history?

7.0 Introduction

Having established the context for the schools involved in the case studies, in this chapter I examine the way in which the approach taken to living history at each site had an impact on the learning experiences of the young people. As discussed in chapter four, living history performers create knowledge about the past through the embodiment of a historical character: by representing an individual's manner, voice, language, gestures and body movement, they seek to convey their experiences, attitudes and life story to the audience, whose response can also become part of the performance. The living history performances at the two case study sites took very different approaches to the portrayal of historical characters. At the Museum of London, Harry Baille appeared to the young audiences as a tavern keeper located in a specific place, Southwark, and specific time, the 1390s. In contrast, the performers at the Tower of London were dressed in medieval costume but did not represent a specific character or a specific time. Whereas Harry Baille was a performer, at the Tower the London they were less performers than educators, engaging the students in dialogue, finding out what they knew and building on their

knowledge of the medieval past to explore the development of the Tower. Whilst the Tower of London provided an authentic backdrop to the history revealed on the tour, augmented at times by the reconstruction of the medieval palace and replica objects that might have been used by Edward I and his court, Harry Baille was surrounded by a contemporary gallery and the background noise of other school groups exploring the museum. One experience was an attempt to get into the mindset of medieval society, the second experience was akin to a history lesson outside the classroom. Despite both these experiences falling under the category of living history, they could not have been more different.

The case study sites offer a comparison to be made between the use of first-person and third-person interpretation and to explore the impact of two distinctive approaches towards learning. From my analysis of interviews, and observation of performances, from the two case study sites, it was the format which seemed, in both cases, to impact upon the learning outcomes of the students, rather than the content of the sessions. This supports Jackson's assertion that the *framing* of a performance plays a significant role in the quality of the engagement and extent of the learning that takes place. As described in chapter four, the *frame* consists of the intangible ideas, expectations and meanings which cluster around a performance. These meanings can be influenced by how it has been scripted, its content and how it is performed within a space. The way in which a performance is *framed* can influence how the audience 'reads' it, the meanings they take from it, and the connections they

make with other experiences.[692] Here, I will examine how the *framing* of each performance at the two case study sites - in the light of assumptions made by educators and teachers about the suitability of first- and third-person interpretation with different age groups - affected the outcome of the experience for the students. Finally, there are the views of the students, who differed in their opinions about the appropriateness of the sessions for their age group, and some of them were fairly critical about the performance techniques used by the performers.

This chapter therefore seeks to answer the question: when living history works, when it is effective and engages young people in the illusion that they are being addressed by, and interacting with, someone who lived in another time, what is it that makes it effective? I begin with the first-person performances at the Museum of London, before moving onto the third-person sessions at the Tower of London. When thinking about the impact of living history it was not always possible for the young people to disentangle the impact of the performance from the rest of the visit to the case study site, therefore I will refer to other parts of the sessions where appropriate.

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[692] Jackson, 'Engaging the Audience,' p16.

7.1 First-person interpretation: creating a plausible historical character

To begin his performance for School 2, *Harry Baille* walked up to the group of young people waiting expectantly in the medieval London gallery and introduced himself as the innkeeper at the Tabard Inn in Southwark. He explained that he wanted them to, 'imagine you have taken a journey […] a journey back in time, more than 600 years to be precise.'[693] Asked to imagine that they were living in 'the year of our Lord 1377,'[694] in reality, the students remained seated in the modern galleries of the Museum of London. In front of them a middle-aged man, dressed in dark blue woollen tunic and homespun trousers overlain with a beige jerkin, had the task of convincing them that he was a survivor of the *great pestilence*. Over the next thirty minutes Harry Baille explained to the students that he had experienced life through two outbreaks of the plague in the fourteenth century, telling the group he had lost his father, mother, and six brothers and sisters to the disease and had seen London ravaged by looters and villains seeking to profit from the disorder. At the end of his story, he answered questions from the young people before leaving them to return to 'his own time.' Here was a man who was clearly pretending, yet, when questioned about the experience the young people enjoyed hearing about medieval life, and were interested in the differences between the medieval and modern perspectives of the Black Death. What was it about the illusion that engaged them?

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[693] From the script for *The Survivor's Tale* supplied by the Museum of London.

[694] Observation of performance, 26/02/2008.

In this section, I will outline how the first-person interpretation used at the Museum of London was successful at engaging two groups of young people, of very different ages, despite the concerns of using this approach to living history with secondary school-age students. At both case study sites, museum professionals and performers referred to the assumption that first-person interpretation is more effective with younger children, who are seen as more susceptible to suspending their disbelief and entering into a relationship with the performer. Students of secondary school-age (from twelve to sixteen years) were regarded as less willing to suspend their disbelief and more sceptical about becoming involved, partly because, it was suggested, they are more self-conscious in front of their peers.[695] For students visiting the Museum of London, this scepticism or self-consciousness was far less apparent. The appearance of the character, in costume, and with extensive knowledge of the period was an important element of the acceptance of Harry Baille by the students, however I will argue that the context of the performance was an important element of this acceptance. The holistic nature of the museum experience meant that the performance combined with the other activities encountered over the day-long session: within this, the character acted as a vehicle to convey wider ideas about the medieval past reinforced through the collections and object-handling workshop. Together these experiences created a visual picture in the students' minds of what it might have been like to live in the medieval past; and because the performance was enjoyable for most of the students it stimulated further learning outcomes, such as the acquisition of new

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[695] Interview with Education officer, Tower of London, 23/06/2008. Such comments are supported by the literature, see chapter four.

knowledge and understanding of the Middle Ages. I will explore each of these elements in turn.

7.1.1 The *framing* of the performances at the Museum of London

In chapter four, the use of *framing* was introduced as a means of understanding how performance can create particular conventions and expectations for their audiences. This section uses Jackson's terminology of the *cultural frame*, *theatrical frame* and *internal frame* to examine how the two performances at the museum of London established the relationship between the performance and the young people, the first stage in beginning to understand the potential impact that these *frames* had on the student's responses.

For both schools, the *cultural frame* incorporated both the wider visit to the Museum of London and the way in which the living history performance was introduced to the students. These were young people who were familiar with museums and had been introduced by their teachers, whether explicitly or tacitly, to the role of material culture in producing knowledge about the past. Their teachers made a direct link between the living history performance and their classroom learning. For School 1, the performance was part of a session introducing them to the historical context of *The Canterbury Tales*, a requirement of their A-level examination in English Literature. For the students of School 2, it was directly linked to their study of the Middle Ages in history and, more specifically, a lesson on the causes of the Black Death.
For both schools, the performance was one aspect of their visit to the Museum of London, along with an object-handling session and a self-guided tour of the

museum galleries.[696] Through being embedded within a day-long session for both groups of students, social and cultural aspects of the medieval period raised in the performance were reflected and reinforced through encounters with the museum displays and collections. The placement of the performance within this wider context, therefore, appeared to give the performance an aura of authority.

For both performances, the students were seated in a 'horseshoe' of chairs positioned at the back of the Medieval London gallery.[697] This formed the *theatrical frame*. It was open to the rest of the gallery and the noise and distraction of other school parties and the public visiting the museum. The schools were seated prior to the appearance of the performer, who utilised the space within the 'horseshoe' to deliver his performance. Throughout both performances, he used his body to cover the space within the 'horseshoe' to ensure that he kept in eye contact with the entire group. The performer noted that it was important the students paid attention to him - he wanted the students to think about what he was saying and to make up their own minds about the topic from the information given to them[698] - and he tended to stay very close to the group rather than keep them at a distance. How the relationship was established between the two audiences, however, was very different. For

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[696] Falk and Dierking suggest that every activity connected with the museum visit, from exploring the collections to the seemingly banal aspects such as travelling to and from the museum and buying a souvenir in the shop, are interconnected in visitors' minds. See Falk and Dierking, *The Museum Experience*.

[697] See appendix four for a further description of the space used.

[698] Ibid.

School 1 there was no formal introduction to the performance or the performer; Harry Baille entered the space quoting from *The Canterbury Tales* at length in its original prose before he introduced himself to the group. The performer described how the purpose was to use 'shock tactics' to provoke the student's interest. The intention of his sudden entrance was, therefore, to get the students to sit up and listen.[699] The end of the performance was denoted by the performer 'coming out of character' for a question and answer session, which enabled the students to reflect on any issues raised by the performance. School 2, a younger group of students, had a much more formal introduction to their performance. Seated in the space, the performer entered and introduced himself to the group. A fairly conventional device was used to create the illusion that the students were engaging with a historic character; they were asked to close their eyes and imagine that they were 'going back in time' to the year 1377. Harry indicated the end of the performance by telling the students that he was 'going back to his own time.'

In terms of *internal frames,* there was the extensive use in both performances of what Jackson calls the *narrative frame* whereby '[e]vents, background and issues of the drama are recounted by [the] narrator or facilitator.'[700] The focus was on the life and society of the Middle Ages, to give a flavour of the period to provide the 'real' context for *The Canterbury Tales* or the devastating impact of the 'Great Pestilence.' For the most part, students were listeners to the narrative and had no influence over it. There was a limited use of the

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[699] Interview with Harry Baille, performer (out of role), 28/01/2008.

[700] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p166.

involvement frame (where students interact with performers in 'real time') when students from School 2 took part in a small activity to demonstrate the impact of the Black Death on medieval society. For *Chaucer in Context*, the use of language, the switch from Medieval to modern English, was an important element of the performance. It was designed to accustom the students to the sound of medieval English, but also to attract their interest and curiosity. From the initial shock of the performer's entrance, humour was used to establish the character of Harry Baille and his relationship with the poet Chaucer. First-person interpretation was maintained throughout, with the exception of the question and answer session at the end where the performer 'came out of character' to discuss the performance with the students. By contrast, the performance themed around the Black Death took a suitably sombre tone, established from the beginning with the formal introduction to the students. As Harry Baille, the performer's delivery was solemn compared to the humorous, slightly anarchic, tone taken in School 1's performance. However, twice during the performance the performer's manner and tone changed as he took on different characters of the period. He used masks and different body language to convey first a brigand, and secondly, a medieval doctor. As the brigand, for example, his body language was very intimidating towards the students, getting very close to their chairs and (as one student described) 'in their faces.' Unlike *Chaucer in Context* the performer did not 'come out of character' during the performance, retaining his character for a question and answer session at the end. This reinforced that people who lived during the Middle Ages had a very particular view on the Black Death which is very different to the modern perspective the young people had learnt about in the classroom.

Having examined the *frames* used at the Museum of London in both performances, I now turn to an examination of their impact on the historical understanding of the young people.

7.1.2 A vehicle to convey wider ideas about the Middle Ages

The success of *A Host's Tale* and *A Survivor's Tale* at the Museum of London was predicated on the creation of a plausible historical character whose personification of wider issues into a focused drama helped to consolidate more abstract ideas that the young people held about the medieval past. For School 1 he was the outraged innkeeper, concerned that his inclusion in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a 'rag bag of vulgar tales,' would ruin his reputation, until, having thought about the *Tales* at length, he comes to realise that Chaucer, 'has paid me the greatest compliment a poet can pay […] He has made me immortal!'[701] For *A Survivor's Tale* the character was far more subdued; as a survivor of an unknown pestilence he questioned the reason why he had been saved when his family, and much of London, had been taken. The performer described the character of Harry Baille as less of an authentic character than a vehicle to engage the young people in the content of the session and the ideas that the education team want to convey about the period. In both sessions, the character of Harry Baille came to be revealed over the course of the performance in relation to wider themes or information of which the students were previously aware: this helped to give credence to the new ideas that Harry Baille introduced. The students from School 2, therefore, had extensive

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[701] From the script for *The Host's Tale* supplied by the Museum of London.

knowledge of the Black Death in terms of modern scientific knowledge. However, the performance enabled the students to understand the *great pestilence* from the perspective of the Middle Ages, something which teachers could not always address in the classroom.[702] The students from School 1 were in a different position; they were just beginning to learn about Chaucer. As a dramatic performance, *A Host's Tale* seized their attention from the performer's entrance when he started to address them in Middle English. Although this was perplexing to the students at first, the effectiveness of the session was that the performance of the medieval text, interspersed with modern English, helped them to understand how the language should be spoken and developed their confidence in reading Chaucer. Abby and Imogen discussed the benefits of this: Abby explained that, 'it got your ear in for what it sounded like,' and Imogen explained that this helped because, 'when you read it now you know exactly like, well not exactly, but you have a better idea of how it's meant to sound.'[703] Whilst they could have learnt this in the classroom, the combination of the performance and costume provided an evocative memory of how the words sounded when spoken by Harry Baille, which the students could draw on to develop their ideas of the medieval context.

7.1.3 An illusion that makes the past seem real

As described in the fourth chapter, living history is associated in peoples' minds with bringing the past *to life* or making the past seem *more real*. This need for historical experiences, for authentic encounters was described in chapter one

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[702] Interview with Head of History, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[703] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

as precipitated by a feeling of loss; the realisation that some organic or authentic connection with the past has disappeared. This sense of loss creates the need to make the past familiar; Ankersmit describes the historical experience as one which creates an, 'element of recognition, the suggestion of something coming to life again that we had known all of the time but were no longer aware of.'[704] This feeling, however, is a myth: 'nothing is lost that had ever been in our possession… what is lost is *not* the past.'[705] The past may become *real*, but in reality it is only an illusion. Living history performances are not only an illusion in that they purport to represent the past, but they support the myth that the past can be known more intimately through its re-creation, leading to the concern that audiences are susceptible to believing living history is an *authentic* recreation of the past. The concept of *aesthetic distance,* however, challenges the notion that engagement with living history *inevitably* leads to the adoption of a non-critical stance towards its representation of the past. What then, can the experience of the two schools do to illuminate the meaning of *real* in the context of a living history performance?

Through observation the young people at the Museum of London appeared to be engaged with the performance at the museum: they listened patiently, they responded to the performer's questions and visibly reacted when he altered the pace or introduced humour or poignancy. However, in creating an illusion of the medieval past, it was not a straightforward process and the performer was reliant on his ability to evoke a suitable atmosphere in the imagination of his

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[704] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p152.

[705] Ibid, p160.

young audience. The performer had to work hard to fill the space, particularly since the surrounding noise from visitors in the galleries threatened, at times, to compromise the atmosphere created by the performer with only his costume, bodily movements, voice and a minimum of props.

Despite the lack of visual stimulus in the performance that was directly connected to the medieval past, the way in which the students articulated how it made the past seem more real for them was, conversely, through the creation of visual images. In Western culture, sight is conventionally prioritised as the most important of the senses, associated with a 'dominantly objective, linear, analytic and fragmented mode of thought.'[706] The students seemed to reflect this prioritisation in their responses to the performance: despite the multi-sensory nature of the performance what was uppermost in the students' minds was the visual images it evoked. It was the performer who provided a visual example of a medieval character upon which the young people could draw. Through his descriptions, he seemed to support the development of visual images of the medieval past in their minds. For the students of School 1, the images the performance evoked were related to the contextual information necessary for their reading of *The Canterbury Tales*. One student, Abby, described literally how the performance, 'made it [the medieval past] more approachable, the tale, you could see it in your mind.'[707] It was a means by which to spark the imagination, in this respect the performer could provide a template for any medieval figure, even Geoffrey Chaucer, as Abby described: 'I

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[706] Classen, C. (1993) *Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures*, Routledge, London and New York, p6.

[707] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

actually see him [Chaucer] as the actor because he was in the outfit and you have something to visualise talking.'[708] This use of the performer as a source of visual images for the medieval past - and perhaps additionally drawing on their experience of the medieval artefacts in the museum gallery and workshop - was also significant for the young people from School 2. The Head of History explained how the students could, 'sometimes [find it] hard […] to visualise different aspects of life in that period.'[709] The museum experience therefore provided students with the means to develop their ideas of the medieval past: the more they could imagine it, the, 'more believable' that past seemed to them.[710] In developing these ideas of the past, the students pointed to the importance of seeing the performer in costume, the information he provided about the medieval past would not have had the same impact if he had been dressed in modern-day costume. The visual stimulus provided by the costume was therefore a critical element in the illusion created by the performer: it gave him authenticity with the young people. These examples therefore provide an interesting example of *visualism* (the priority given to the visual sense) in practice, which appears to be manifest here even at a relatively young age.

In discussion with the students, there was no explicit concern about the method of representation and the value of performance in representing the past, although not all the students were able to immerse themselves in the illusion created. One student in particular, Jenny, responded in a way which in her own

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[708] Ibid.

[709] Interview with Head of History, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[710] Interview with students, School 2, 04/03/2008.

mind was inappropriate. The nature of the performance, the actions and presence of the performer, had caused her to laugh rather than give the sombre response she considered the performance required: she was, 'supposed to be in remorse.'[711] For this student, feeling what she considered to be the *wrong* emotion in response to Harry Baille's story disrupted the illusion for her. It seems clear that for Jenny, immersion in the performance meant emotional engagement, however it had to be the *right* emotion. I will return to the idea of emotional engagement in a later section. For now I will conclude that for these young people the meaning of *real* when applied to the performance was that it enabled them to develop their imaginative ideas about the medieval past. It was the potential to use the performance as a basis for creating visual images of that past in their minds. Returning to Ankersmit, the use of the term *real* in relation to a historical experience is one which I consider deserves greater interrogation, not least in the idea that students and teachers describe a more *real medieval past,* yet, 'can never check these conjectures against the past itself.'[712] However, it was not possible to explore this aspect further at the time of the fieldwork and remains a point of interest for future research.

7.1.4 Engagement as a catalyst for learning

Enjoyment is regarded as an important element for learning in museums and historic sites, particularly in acting as a catalyst for other learning outcomes,[713] and enjoyment was clearly a part of the young peoples' experiences at the

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[711] Ibid.

[712] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p113.

[713] Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums* and Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education.*

Museum of London. However, when exploring their responses further, the reasons why they enjoyed the performance uncovered other emotions which could potentially be masked by the overall sense of enjoyment. For the students of School 1, their engagement with the performance was connected to it providing them with contextual knowledge that they regarded as vital for their studies. These were conscientious young women whose attitude can be exemplified through the following comment made by Emily, 'Things become so much more interesting when you're educated about them.'[714] It meant that they could be rather dismissive of experiences which did not fulfil their expectations for learning, such as the object-handling workshop which they considered was targeted below their level of understanding. The performance however brought them into contact with an *expert* on Chaucer, who was not only informing them of the history but who embodied the very characters they would be learning about. The performer appeared and spoke to them in an *authentic* medieval manner. Describing the performer as an expert on Chaucer seemed to crystallise in the students' mind the authority of the history presented to them at the museum; it became a history that was valuable for them to learn.

The students from School 2 agreed that they enjoyed the session at the Museum of London. However, exploring their responses to *A Survivor's Tale* there was a greater mixture of reactions to the performance in terms of its emotional impact. This ranged from describing the performance as 'scary' or dismissing it as 'silly,' to a feeling of poignancy from the realisation that the drama was based on a real event during which, as Helen said, 'it was anybody

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[714] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

who died.'[715] The encounter with the performer appeared to be instrumental in enabling the young people to develop their understanding of the social history of the Middle Ages which, as the Head of History explained, it was not always possible to cover in history lessons.[716] One student, Natalie, described the difference thus: in lessons they learnt about *what happened* but at the museum they learnt about, 'how people felt.'[717] In particular, Natalie referred to the performance and drew attention to how Harry Baille, 'was really scared.'[718] As will be explored in chapter eight, the lives of medieval people can often be obscure to young people studying the period: for these students, the performance supported their understanding, they began to, 'think that they were really people.'[719] However, the differences between the medieval and modern perspectives remained confusing for the students because they did not realise that Harry Baille (as a historical character) would not understand *their* perspectives on the Black Death. The different perspectives became confused in some students' minds, and they had different versions of the Black Death depending on whether the information came from their textbook or from Harry Baille. I will explore the implications of this in the next chapter.

7.1.5 Conclusion

In summary, despite the assumption that secondary school age students may face barriers to engaging with first-person interpretation, the experiences of the

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[715] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[716] Interview with Head of History, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[717] Interview with students, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[718] Ibid.

[719] Ibid.

two schools at the Museum of London suggest that it can be effective as part of a wider exposure to activities connected to the medieval past which reinforce and support the learning that takes place through the performance. This was the purpose of the museum, which had devised the performance to be embedded as part of a wider study day. It is therefore difficult to identify the effectiveness of the performance *in itself*. However, the narrative introduced by the performer and his embodiment of a medieval character *in the flesh* provided the young people with an insight into the medieval mind that was new to them, but which were contained within familiar contexts of *The Canterbury Tales* (School 1) and the Black Death (School 2). That both groups of students were female and attended single-sex schools, were conscientious and willing to learn should also not be overlooked. They were willing to be engaged with the performance and their engagement with it stimulated their interest in the historical knowledge being imparted. Their experience can be contrasted with the students visiting the Tower of London, to which I turn next.

7.2 Third-person interpretation: an overview of history

In contrast to the focused drama of the performances at the Museum of London, the sessions observed at the Tower of London used third-person interpretation to provide an overview of the Anglo-Norman history of the site. This covered a period of two hundred years from the reign of William I (1066-1087), when the fortress was built, to the reign of Edward I (1272-1307). Taking the form of a guided tour of the Medieval Palace and its environs, led by a costumed interpreter in the persona of a medieval character, the session content focused on themes of kingship, power, and authority, and how these

were reflected in the development of the historic site. The format of the session was therefore very different from the performance at the Museum of London; it was far less of a performance than a history lesson outside the classroom, set against the historic buildings of the Tower of London. I will present the evidence in this section for the impact that these sessions had on the students, who were far more ambivalent in their responses to the living history performances than the students of Schools 1 and 2. I will examine the reasons for this ambivalence in the following sections, which partly can be attributed to a set of expectations in the minds of the teachers and their students of what a living history experience *should* be.

It is important to note that the education staff at the Tower of London were aware of some of the disadvantages of the third-person performances and were phasing these sessions out towards the end of the fieldwork period. In particular, it was considered that the sessions were too broad to be useful to schools in light of the then (about to be) revised National Curriculum. New *History Detectives* sessions for 2008-2009 were designed to focus more specifically upon historical events and themes, for example the Peasants Revolt, and incorporate first-person interpretation in a structured workshop focused on historical enquiry.[720] It had been intended to observe some of these sessions as part of the fieldwork, however the lack of response from interested schools meant that it was not possible to take advantage of the opportunity to compare the impact of first and third-person interpretation directly on site.

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[720] See chapter four for an overview of the *History Detectives* programme.

7.2.1 The framing of the performances at the Tower of London

The *cultural frame* for schools visiting the Tower of London was the Tower itself. The surviving historic remains provided a compelling, authentic backdrop for the costumed interpreters to draw on when supporting young people in their learning about the medieval past. Ensconced in the context of a medieval building, the physicality of the built environment could be used to demonstrate to students the places *where history happened*; the Tower itself was, 'an artefact to engage with and look at.'[721] Furthermore it provided what one of the performers, Harold, described as the, 'raw materials' to engage students.[722] Steeped in the 'aura' or 'charisma' of the *real thing*, the Tower represented, in the words of one of the history teachers, 'the true history of London and what it was really like.'[723] Certainly, the young people I interviewed were fascinated by the historic building and appreciated the depth of history associated with it. They talked enthusiastically about the parts of the Tower they had visited, and how it was the historic building itself which created vivid images of the medieval past in their imagination. Students from School 6 described how visiting the Tower was akin to being removed from the modern world; one, Jessica, commented, 'I feel like if you went into the Tower of London for a day and you completely shut it off from the world and if everyone dressed up you could be in the medieval times.'[724]

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[721] Interview with Harold, live interpreter (out of role), 09/07/2008.

[722] Ibid.

[723] Interview with History teacher, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[724] Interview with students, School 6, 26/09/2008.

The way in which students were introduced to the living history performance by their teachers as part of the wider *cultural frame* was different to that for schools visiting the Museum of London. Only one performance was directly linked to the curriculum (School 4); the other three visits were part of a week of activities where students visited a variety of different cultural experiences in London (Schools 3, 5, 6). This established very different expectations for the performance as part of a leisure visit to the Tower of London, and the emphasis for these schools was on enjoyment rather than learning.

The *theatrical frame* at the Tower of London had few clear boundaries in terms of space; however, its educational function was clear. From the perspective of Harold (one of the live interpreters), the session was less about 'living history' than making the past accessible at the same time as communicating specific objectives to students.[725] The space in which the session took place was the exterior and interior of the Medieval Palace, with the costumed interpreter meeting the group in an external location. The public nature of the site and other factors such as the weather or specific interests of the group meant that the scope of the 'performance site' could vary from group to group (for instance the wet weather on School 5's visit meant that the session had to take place indoors). The performer typically chose four or five different vantage points during each session, finding a place to stand or sit and gathering the students around them (similar to a guided tour, this was the place which afforded the best view or association with the topic under consideration). Inside the Medieval Palace, the performer often went 'behind the rope' to draw attention to

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[725] Interview with Harold, live interpreter (out of role), 09/07/2008.

significant elements of the reconstruction. There was little demarcation

between the site of the performance and the public, who often joined in with the

session, tried to take photos or talk to the interpreters during their delivery.

Harold commented that it could be challenging asking the students to focus

because of the 'people wandering around.'[726]

The *internal frames* of the performance concerned the creation of a suitable

context for learning, established by the costumed interpreter as an authoritative,

teacher-like figure. The historical focus was a broad perspective on the Middle

Ages, comparing the reigns of William I, who built the White Tower as a

defensive structure, and Edward I, who developed the Medieval Palace with

'conspicuous' displays of wealth and power. Whilst students were asked about

their knowledge of people and events, an emphasis was placed on social and

cultural aspects of history and (for some sessions) the role of material culture in

representing ideas about the medieval past. According to Harold, the ideal

session was a balance between education and entertainment: for each session,

there were learning objectives to be covered and costumed interpreters would

structure the session according to the responses and needs of the group.

Characterisation was limited to the adoption of a 'teaching persona.'[727]

However, the tour was not as didactic as this description suggests. Referring to

Jackson's notion of frames, the *investigative frame* with its emphasis on

students being presented with evidence to analyse and interpret was a close

approximation of the approach taken by the costumed interpreters. The

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[726] Interview with Harold, live interpreter (out of role) at the Tower of London, 09/07/2008.

[727] Ibid.

costumed interpreter entered into a dialogue with the students, they were encouraged to interpret the evidence around them, to answer, and to ask, questions about the site and medieval history more generally, and to apply their own understanding of medieval history within a new context. Humour was frequently used to enliven the tour; one popular anecdote used with school groups was the knight who was obliged to perform to the King, 'a leap, a whistle and a fart' in exchange for his lands. As one of the performers (Isabella) commented, such anecdotes could suggest to students, 'the lighter side of life' in the Middle Ages.[728]

The living history performances at the Tower of London were therefore very different to those at the Museum of London. These were far less concerned with the aesthetic value of performance as opposed to fulfilling particular educational objectives in the context of an historic site. How did the students respond to the *framing* of the performance as (essentially) an educational tour of the Tower?

7.2.2 Young people overwhelmed by the amount of history

During the sessions observed at the Tower of London, the students appeared to be engaged by the living history performances. They answered questions, engaged with the performer in discussions about the history of the Tower and the Middle Ages, and seemed eager to demonstrate their knowledge of the period. Teachers were also keen to point out that most of their students had enjoyed themselves at the Tower of London and had vivid memories of the day.

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[728] Observation of living history performance, School 6, 16/07/2008.

However, upon reflection both teachers and students agreed that they would have preferred a living history session with a historical character working in first-person interpretation, which would have represented a more interactive experience. From the teacher's perspective, the third-person approach at the Tower of London was not engaging enough for their students, and they considered that first-person interpretation would have been more effective. At almost an hour long, the living history sessions at the Tower of London were felt to be over-intensive, and the information given by the performers covered too broad a time-span to be manageable for the students. The approach taken by the performers was information-dense and left the students with too little to do except listen, which was not seen as appropriate for visits which were not tied to the curriculum (Schools 3 and 6) or for students who were used to more active learning opportunities (School 4). Although the History teacher from School 3 respected the knowledge and expertise of their performer, she felt that there was too much information to take in, 'as an adult' and did not expect her students to be able to concentrate for the full hour.[729] Whilst the session challenged some of the student's perceptions about the way in which the Tower has been used throughout the past, without a purpose for learning the history many of the students felt overwhelmed by all the information given to them. As Michael explained, 'it was a lot to take in [...] it went on for ages and we couldn't remember it all.'[730] Even the pupils from School 4, whose visit was directly linked to their school-work, struggled to make the information provided meaningful to their studies. Used to learning independently, it was clear that for

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[729] Interview with history teacher, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[730] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

some of these very able children it was difficult for them to listen to the performer when they wanted to go out onto the site and learn for themselves. With the performance as the single, organised session at the Tower there was nothing to reinforce or compare with the performance in the young people's minds and, although many young people said that they enjoyed the performance and learnt from it, they were disappointed by the format.

7.2.3 A dissonant experience

The term 'cognitive dissonance' was coined by Festinger to describe how 'a recognition of sharply contradictory cognitions, of two sets of knowledges that are clearly incompatible, will produce a sense of dissonance or psychological discomfort.'[731] Here the term 'dissonance' is used as a means of describing the confusion experienced by the teachers and young people whose expectations of the living history sessions at the Tower of London did not match the reality. Teachers and students expected a historical figure to use first-person interpretation and, when this did not occur, it was difficult for them to know how to properly engage with the performer. Should they react to them as a serious teacher-like figure or a light-hearted medieval character? At times the performer appeared to be both. The young people visiting the Tower were familiar users of museums and historic sites and many of them talked about other sites they had visited where costumed interpreters had used first-person interpretation, which presumably accounts for their tacit assumption that this would have been the case at the Tower of London. Although most of the students found the costumes interesting, in their opinion there was no real

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[731] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p142.

benefit to the performers being in costume if they were not taking on a specifically medieval persona: modern clothes would have made the intention of the performance more evident. For School 4, the use of historical costume even reduced the authority of the performer for some students, Jonathan describing the performer as an, 'entertainer for little kids,' although others did enjoy the story-telling aspect of the session.[732]

7.2.4 Young people would have preferred an interactive experience

Previous experiences of living history influenced how the students would have preferred a more interactive, immersive experience at the Tower which would have made them feel more involved in the past, rather than keep them at a distance. Despite the use of an *investigative frame* by the interpreter, students from School 3 readily agreed that they would have preferred a session with more practical activities or challenges, one student, Alex, explaining, 'You want hands-on stuff to make history fun.'[733] They spoke enthusiastically about sessions they had participated in at other museums, including a historic house museum in their home county, where they had taken part in a living history experience built around a 'real-life' scenario: should local greenbelt land be given over to building houses to relieve local population pressures. It was effective because it involved several performers and the students had an identifiable 'problem' to solve; they enjoyed the opportunity to debate and discuss the issues and to give their own opinion.[734] Similarly the students from

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[732] Interview with students, School 4, 02/07/2008.

[733] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[734] Ibid.

Schools 4 and 6 would have preferred a session format which would have given them greater control over their learning rather than the more passive experience of the tour. An immersive experience might also have been effective: students from School 3 and School 6 spoke favourably of the use of first-person interpretation at other visitor attractions in London where they moved around the site to meet the characters *in situ*. In particular, Hannah described how the use of first-person made her feel much more involved in the experience: 'it was like you were part of the time […and they] treated us as though we were in that time era as well.'[735]

7.2.5 Conclusion

The tour-based format of the sessions observed at the Tower of London appeared to represent a compromise between covering a broad sweep of history in a single session, and incorporating a costumed character as Historic Royal Palace's preferred interpretation method (as described in chapter six). However, demonstrated by the evidence presented here the format worked against the effectiveness of having a costumed interpreter in an authentic historical space: young people wanted to be more involved in the history, to be enthused and entertained. However, the hour-long session proved too didactic even for those students who were interested in history. Similar to the concerns raised by the Australian students in Clark's study,[736] these young people would have preferred an interactive, discussion-led format, a problem-solving activity, or an immersive experience which would have involved them more in the

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[735] Interview with students, School 6, 26/09/2008.

[736] Clark, *History's Children*.

performance. Whilst the young people were (on the whole) willing to take part, the format of the session diminished their enthusiasm. In the next section I will draw on both case studies to explore the suggestion by the students at the Tower of London that a more immersive approach to living history, using first-person interpretation, would have made the experience more engaging for them.

7.3 Making the past meaningful: engagement versus distance

As discussed in previous chapters when making the past *meaningful,* opinion is divided between the need for engagement, the finding of relevance, in history, and the need to retain *distance* in order to understand the past outside the context of the present and to reflect critically on the evidence provided for history. As Ankersmit describes, the historian's task has been to turn (messy, complex) experience into (tidy, organised) language, 'to translate somehow the blood and the tears, the joys and pains of human existence itself into the controlled and disciplined language of the historian.'[737] Thus, what we know about the past has tended to dominate how 'we *feel* about the past.'[738] For engagement carries the risk of diminishing the historian's critical and cognitive faculties in return for an ecstatic rush of closeness and familiarity with the past (what Ankersmit calls the *sublime historical experience*). Similarly, the idea of *aesthetic distance* in performance draws attention to the concern that *immersion* can disrupt the capacity to separate the 'real' from 'art.' Yet, the notion of *under* and *over-distancing* (a concept which describes the aesthetic

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[737] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p80.

[738] Ibid, p10.

tension in art between the extremes of 'total empathy' and lack of empathy, taken from Bullough) suggests that too much *distance* may be as problematic as being too involved. Art (including performance) may only achieve its 'fullest impact […] when there is a satisfactory balance' between the two extremes.'[739] The notion of *over-distancing* seems to reflect the experiences of the students at the Tower of London, who wanted to be far more involved than the session allowed. As Jackson suggests, such '[o]ver-distancing of the teacherly kind carries the risk of undermining the provocative power and imaginative richness of the metaphor.'[740] Instead, finding an effective balance between the two positions of *engagement* and *distance* may be an appropriate goal for living history performers. As Jackson argues, aesthetic engagement and critical reasoning do not have to be mutually exclusive but can be compatible.[741] For example, the later work of Brecht suggests that art 'often functions more effectively through a complex distancing process - one that acknowledges the need for closeness, or engagement, and at the same time for a degree of critical and emotional separation.'[742] This balance appeared to be reached through the performance at the Museum of London, which enabled the young people to engage with the experiences of Harry Baille through the drama of his performance, but at the same time, they retained their awareness that they were watching a performance. Having looked at the importance of engagement and distance from an historical and performance perspective, how important were these two positions from the perspective of the teachers and students?

[739] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p144.

[740] Ibid, p152

[741] Also see Gregory and Witcomb, 'Beyond Nostalgia.'

[742] Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, p143.

From the teacher's perspective, engagement with the performance was not identified as necessary if there were more important objectives to fulfil. For those students who were using the museum experience in connection with the curriculum or an assessment, teachers were more concerned about the content of the sessions and how students developed their understanding of the medieval period. As noted in the second chapter, Rüsen's model of historical consciousness implies that the more developed types (*critical* and *genetic*) demonstrate the importance of a critical relationship with the past. The sessions at the Museum of London and the Tower of London were intended to support the development of critical skills of enquiry, analysis and deduction. Harry Baille described his role as facilitating the students in developing their understanding about the medieval past: he described the process as, 'here are the facts - now what do you think?'[743] Similarly, the object handling sessions tested the students' skills of deduction and reasoning in relation to the naming and understanding of historical artefacts. These were the important outcomes for the teachers: there was perhaps no further need for further forms of engagement in order to understand history. However, where the *opportunity* for engagement seemed to be missing at the Tower of London, teachers were much more open to the need for students to be engaged through their emotions and imagination, as well as through their cognitive faculties. However, with the exception of School 4, these were visits that were not directly linked to the curriculum and that may have made a difference to the expectations of the teachers and students.

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[743] Interview with Harry Baille (the performer out of role), Museum of London, 28/01/2008.

From the discussions of the students, it seemed that some form of engagement *with* the past was necessary to spark their interest, whether that engagement was achieved through participatory experiences or emotional engagement such as enjoyment, anticipation or even uncertainty (as when Harry Baille launched into Middle English). For the schools at the Museum of London, evidence of their engagement in the performance was described by the young people as those elements which captured their attention. Their emotional response to the performance set the tone, it seemed, for their developing ideas about the medieval past. For School 1, the 'dramatic' nature of the performance and exaggerated humour of the performer supported a positive view of the Middle Ages, which was expressed in their desire to know more about everyday lives and culture, particularly from the realisation that medieval people had a sense of humour and told jokes.[744] For students from School 2, the darker and sombre tone of the performance (described by the students as 'scary' and 'sad') reinforced negative views of the Middle Ages as a time of disease and death. For the schools visiting the Tower of London, the format of the session meant only limited emotional connection could be made with the content of the session: in response young people reverted to prior ideas they had about the medieval past, ideas that had been formed through popular representations of that past. These are responses to the performances which will be explored at length in the following chapter, where I examine the impact of the performances on the young people's understanding of the medieval past.

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[744] Interview with students, School 1, 04/12/2007.

7.4 Conclusion

From the evidence of these two case studies, the way in which the performances were structured and *framed* is critical to understanding their impact. A number of factors problematise the drawing of direct comparisons between the two case study sites (including the different intentions of the school visits). However, the strength of the Museum of London session was that it provided a dramatic performance which engaged students in the life of an historical character. Rather than being told *what happened* in the past, students at the Museum of London were invited by the performer to piece together the implications of the Black Death, or understand the social and cultural world which Chaucer drew on for his literature, from the narrative they were presented with. The use of drama, humour, and horror provoked the student's curiosity and encouraged them to watch intently*.* Whilst a similar attempt was made verbally by the performers at the Tower of London, to discuss and draw out the knowledge of students at the same time as applying that knowledge in a new historical context, the young people did not feel that they were in control of their learning. Expecting to engage with the performer as a historical character, the didactic approach and information-dense content was too *distancing* for the students, who were expecting a session that was much more involving than was the case.

Living history provision for secondary school age students therefore presents something of a quandary. On the one hand, older students can be reluctant to engage in an *immersive* performance: this was exemplified by some of the students suggesting that costumed interpreters were for a younger age group

than their own (Schools 4 and 6). On the other hand, third-person interpretation was too *distancing* for students at the Tower of London, who did not know how to respond to a historical character that treated them like a teacher would have done. They knew that they wanted to be active and engaged in an activity that tested their understanding and enabled them to draw on their own experiences. This was possible for the students at the Museum of London, who could draw on their prior knowledge of the Black Death and of Chaucer to put into context the experiences narrated to them by Harry Baille. Whilst it was new information for most of them, they were confident that they could use their knowledge to resolve the questions asked of them. For the students at the Tower of London, their background knowledge could not serve them in the same way. Perhaps some of the younger ones thought they already knew most of the information they were being told: for the older students, without a curriculum link or reason to retain the information they were given, it came across as excessive, and it was not the kind of history that they found interesting on a personal level. As high achieving students, they wanted to be seen to do well and behaved impeccably during the sessions, answering questions when prompted by the performer and taking part when necessary. However, given the opportunity to talk about their experiences after the visit, some of the young people voiced their disappointment that the session was not more engaging and provided examples of sessions that did engage them.

From the evidence presented here, it seems that living history does benefit from a consideration of the aesthetic dimension through the characterisation of the performer, rather than being a straight-forward 'teacher-pupil' relationship as

established at the Tower of London. However, this is likely to have an impact on the student's historical understanding. With both of the sessions at the case study sites being themed around medieval history, it was possible to explore the impact that the case study sites had on young people's understanding of this period. Did the living history performances at the Museum of London and Tower of London help to make medieval history more relevant and accessible for young people?

Chapter 8

Young people and the Middle Ages

8.0 Introduction

Living history, it was suggested in the previous chapter, can be a means by which it is possible to further young people's understanding of the medieval past. This was most effective where the performer used first-person interpretation to create a strongly defined, believable character who built on the young people's contextual knowledge of the Middle Ages to provide them with the *medieval* perspective. Whilst this was not successful for all students, some of whom muddled the medieval and the modern perspectives in their minds, the benefit of encountering a historical character was to impress upon them that medieval people experienced feelings. Here I will argue that, despite concerns that historical experiences instinctively lead to the past becoming more familiar in the present, when young people think about people in the past they do not seem to think that they are 'the same' at all. Rather, the students involved in the fieldwork were more likely to have a *deficit* view of the past where people in the past were *logically* different (and disadvantaged) from people in the present because they did not have modern-day technology and social structures. Despite the attempts of the two case study sites to present alternative views of the Middle Ages to the school groups, the prior conceptions that students held about the medieval past, and the strategies that the young people used to make

the medieval past more meaningful to them, seemed to reinforce these views. The students may have learnt more information about the Middle Ages as a result of the experience at the case study sites, but this information was incorporated into existing schemata which framed their thinking when they articulated their ideas back to the researcher.

The particular difficulties of understanding the medieval past were raised briefly in chapter six in relation to how it was taught in the case study schools. In this chapter, I start with a deeper reflection on the challenges that anyone approaching medieval history, which includes historians and teachers as well as students, may encounter when attempting to understanding the Middle Ages. This provides a rationale for understanding why, when confronted with alternative perspectives on the Middle Ages, young people may revert back to prior conceptions that may be formed through popular, collective imaginings of the period. This provides the context for the second section of this chapter, which examines the impact that the living history at the two case study sites had on the young people's understanding of the medieval past. I will also consider why it might not have been as radical as might have been expected despite the explicit intentions of the two case study sites to challenge popular conceptions of the medieval past. The final section explores the strategies that the young people used to make the medieval past meaningful and relevant, which further draws attention to the role that prior conceptions and knowledge play in shaping learning experiences.

8.1 Can we really understand the Middle Ages?

Whilst medieval historians differ as to the extent to which we can, in the present, truly understand the medieval mindset, the general consensus is that, as Dyer states, the 'past fascinates us because it was different, and the Middle Ages were very different.'[745] Conversely, the difference which appeals to historians such as Dyer can also prevent our understanding of medieval society and culture: Maurer pessimistically suggests that 'it is only through a persistent effort of intelligence and imagination that we can […] see it as it really was.'[746] Efforts to bring to life medieval personalities have been obstructed by the lack of 'detailed personal information needed to understand their motives and actions,'[747] and historians have to be guided by their skills of deduction and inference, particularly where 'the sparser and more problematic the sources become.'[748] As Bloch notes, 'the historian is in no sense a free man. Of the past he knows only so much as the past is willing to yield up to him.'[749] Also problematic is seeking to assign motivations and behaviour to historical personalities. Garrison writes convincingly of the difficulties of 'understanding past individuals and grasping both the particularity of their emotional experience

[745] Dyer, C. (2002) *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London*,* p1.

[746] Maurer, A. A. (1974), 'Medieval Philosophy and its Historians,' in Murdoch, V and Couse, G. S. (eds) *Essays on the Reconstruction of Medieval History*, Mc-Gill Queen's University Press, Montreal and London, p82.

[747] Baldwin, D. (2002) *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower,* The History Press, Stroud, pxii

[748] Mason, E. (2005), *William II: Rufus, The Red King*, Tempus, Stroud, p8

[749] Bloch, M. (1962), *Feudal Society: Volume I The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, second edition, translated by Mayon, L. A., foreword by Postan, M. M. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley, pxxi.

– their inner worlds – and setting those insights into an informed view of the emotional context of their external worlds.'[750] Furthermore, those texts which do survive are imbued with a *way of seeing* that is unique to the medieval context.[751] Seemingly straightforward modern-day concepts such as selfhood and personality can seem unfamiliar where the actions of medieval individuals are cast in the light of an anachronistic or moral example.[752] To modern eyes, medieval art and illustrations betray little humanity 'and less individuality,' people appear, 'solemn and soulless.'[753] Developing an understanding of the individual can therefore be very limited in 'an age of remarkable indifference to recording details of personal appearance.'[754] In seeking to bridge these gaps, Bradbury draws attention to how 'even historians tend to […] mould a personality in their minds. To shift this mind-image takes a major effort.'[755]

In this respect, the Middle Ages as we know it in the present is largely the creation of historians, writers, philosophers and scholars of later ages, who have inscribed it with their own ideas and assumptions. These form the

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[750] Garrison, M. (2001) 'The Study of Emotions in Early Medieval History: Some Starting Points', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10 (2), p243.

[751] Kenny, A. (2005) *Medieval Philosophy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pxii

[752] Spiegel, G. M. (1993) *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth Century France*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford pp103-104.

[753] Steane, J. (1993) *The Archaeology of the Medieval English Monarchy*, Routledge, London and New York, p15.

[754] Garrison, 'The Study of Emotions in Early Medieval History,' p244.

[755] Bradbury, J. (1999) 'Philip Augustus and King John: Personality and History,' in Church, S.D. *King John: New Interpretations*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, p347.

enduring images of the medieval past that leap out from the hundreds of years of what Fossier describes as,

> […] a vast plain with uncertain contours in which collective memory sets into action kings, monks, knights and merchants placed somewhere between a cathedral and a castle with a keep, all of them, men and women, bathed in a 'medieval' atmosphere of violence, piety, and occasional feast days.[756]

Many of the popular ideas of the medieval past originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was common to represent the medieval period, according to Patterson, as 'universalistic, institutional and deeply conservative […] a time when an harmonious society was held together by bands of common faith and an unquestioned social order.'[757] This perspective is familiar in school textbooks as the 'closed, rural, small-scale stable and intensely local society inhabited by lords and peasants,'[758] a view which, according to Dyer, tends to 'assume in a patronizing way that medieval people were primitive and ignorant.'[759] Another familiar view of the Middle Ages is as a *dark age,* inscribed with notions of 'violence and disorder.'[760] Images of the Middle Ages

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[756] Fossier, R. (2010) *The Axe and the Oath: Ordinary Life in the Middle Ages*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, pix

[757] Patterson, *Negotiating the Past*, p9.

[758] Husbands, *What is History Teaching?* p76.

[759] Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, p6.

[760] Arnold, J. (1998) 'Nasty Histories: Medievalism and Horror', in Arnold, J., Davies, K. and Ditchfield, S. (eds) *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*, Donhead, Shaftesbury, p40.

therefore range along a continuum from 'sublime horror' to 'picturesque delight.'[761] Patterson argues that the endurance of these images of the medieval past in the popular imagination 'wipes out not merely the complexity of medieval society but the centuries of struggle by which medieval men and women sought to remake their society.'[762] Historians and archaeologists such as Pryor argue for a reassessment of the period, to represent it in its complexity and forge a more realistic understanding of how the medieval people contributed to the development of modern world.[763]

These concerns about the representation of the Middle Ages are not only important for medieval historians; cultural perspectives on the medieval past can have important consequences for how it is understood and taught in the classroom. Strategies used by teachers to make the medieval past more meaningful for their students can, unintentionally, promote the simplified and primitive views of the medieval past criticised above. In order to compensate for the *strangeness* of the medieval past, history teachers can, according to Planel, attempt to bridge the gulf by presenting it to students as part of their heritage. However, this 'interpretive framework […] does not help them understand medieval people, as the profound differences of life in another place

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[761] Sweet, R. (2004) Antiquaries: *The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain*, Hambledon and London, London and New York, p232.

[762] Patterson, 'On the Margin,' p97.

[763] Pryor, F. (2006) *Britain in the Middle Ages: An Archaeological History*, Harper Press, London, pp16-17.

and time - so obvious in the material culture - are not emphasized.'[764] The complexity of medieval society is thus reduced to a simplified version of what Nelson calls 'Camelot and the Ladybird books,'[765] or what Shanks describes as the 'familiar stories of Norman conquest and feudal barons, lords and peasants.'[766] Without a proper understanding of the society in which they lived, medieval people become, according to Planel, 'reduced to caricature or, worse, they are portrayed as just like us, except that they dressed and ate differently, and lived in different kinds of houses.'[767] To summarise, the problem lies, as Seixas explains, in mistaking 'the contingent cultural constructions of our own time as transhistorical.'[768] The implication is that for the schools involved in the research, there is a strong likelihood that the representations of the medieval past being taught would be imbued with potentially anachronistic notions and misconceptions about medieval life and society. It is not possible to give a detailed view of the ways in which medieval history was taught by the schools involved in the fieldwork. However, from the evidence available it suggests that a basic and straightforward view of the period was taught in most schools, with a focus on key events such as the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the Black Death of the fourteenth century, and aspects of medieval life such as the feudal

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[764] Planel, P. (1994) 'Privacy and Community Through Medieval Material Culture,' in Stone, P. G. and Molyneaux (eds), *The Presented Past: Heritage, Museums and Education*, Routledge, London and New York, in association with English Heritage, p207.

[765] Nelson, J. L. (1990) 'A Place for Medieval History in the National Curriculum?' *History Workshop Journal,* 29 (1), p105.

[766] Shanks, *Experiencing the Past*, p150.

[767] Planel, 'Privacy and Community Through Medieval Material Culture,' p207.

[768] Seixas, P. (1996, 1998) 'Conceptualising the Growth of Historical Consciousness,' in Olsen, D. R. and Torrance, N. (eds) *The Handbook of Education and Human Development: New Models of Learning, Teaching and Schooling,* Blackwell, Malden and Oxford*,* p776.

system, the role of religion and castle-building. It was not until A-level that a more challenging approach would be taken, where students would be expected to interrogate taken-for-granted concepts such as monarchy.[769]

8.1.1 Young people and their prior conceptions of the medieval past

To find evidence for young people's prior conceptions of the medieval past, the meaning maps completed by a group of ten students from School 2 provided a snapshot of their pre-existing ideas about the Middle Ages.[770] I say a snapshot because, between them, these ten female students built a clear picture of the stage at which they appeared to have reached in the curriculum prior to their visit to the Museum of London. The Head of History noted that, due to the constraints of the curriculum, the social elements of medieval history were covered in a more limited way than the events of history. However, it seems that the students had picked up enough information to be able to create a vague idea of how medieval society was structured, and their ideas reflected a simplified version of that society. What was less obvious to them was what it *meant* to live in the medieval period: in the interviews, students suggested that although they learnt *what happened* in the classroom they did not always learn what they referred to as the cultural or social aspects of history. The way in which history was taught at school, with its focus on significant events and elite figures, meant that it was difficult to grasp what the culture or the society of the Middle Ages was *actually* like, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, the living history performance seemed to achieve.

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[769] Interview with History teacher, School 2, 25/02/2008.

[770] Examples meaning maps are included in appendix three.

What do the ten meaning maps tell us, therefore, about this particular group of young people's views on the Middle Ages?[771] There was evidence that they had a strong foundation in the factual history of the period, expressed through dates and key events, as well as some emerging ideas about the social history of the period. In terms of social history, students did not seem to think much about medieval life mentioning it was 'dirty, smelly - no clean streets,' (PD1) medieval people were 'not very clean' (CW3), there was 'poverty' (CW5) and 'bad living conditions' (CW4). Crime was mentioned as well as sewers, disease and 'some laws were quite strict' (CW3). Identifiers of medieval society included the, 'feudal system' (PD3, CW1, CW2 , CW4), 'knights' (PD1, PD4, PD5, CW5), 'kings' (PD1, PD3, CW4, CW5) and 'peasants' (CW4, CW5). Ideas around religion were important to all the meaning maps. Students mentioned how 'the church was very powerful and most people went to church' (PD2), people were 'very religious' (PD1, PD4, PD5) or 'big followers of the Church' (CW3). Medieval people believed in 'Heaven' (PD1, PD2, PD5, CW3), 'Hell' (PD1, PD2, PD5, CW3) and 'Purgatory' (PD1, PD2, PD5, CW2, CW3, CW5). The Black Death (which the students had studied in their lesson directly prior to the completion of the meaning maps) was mentioned frequently; ideas connected to it included rats (PD1-5, CW1, CW2), boils and buboes, the signs of the disease (PD4, PD5, CW2). It was described as a, 'plague that spread through humans through fleas' (PD1) and students supplied gruesome details

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[771] During analysis of the meaning maps, each student was given a numerical identity based on the initials of their history teacher (PD or CW) and a number in sequence starting from 1. This meant that pre and post visit maps could be matched without compromising the identity of the student.

such as describing buboes as, 'lumpy eggs that burst and black liquid comes out' (PD4). In terms of defining the location of the period in time and place, the period 1000-1500 was cited most frequently by the students, and all the events and signifiers referred to could be located in English medieval history. Key events mentioned by all ten students apart from the Black Death included the Norman conquest of England and the murder of Thomas Becket, events they had recently been studying in class. Medieval figures mentioned by the students were exclusively kings and churchmen, including William I, Edward the Confessor, Henry II and Thomas Becket. Two students wrote in detail about the murder of Thomas Becket. PD4 wrote how the 'knights killed Becket by mistake' and Becket had '4 blows to the head when he died.' PD1 wrote that the murder was caused by 'Henry's rages' and 'Becket's provoking.' Relating these to common tropes of the Middle Ages, there appeared to be a propensity to understanding the period as essentially negative, a place of dirty cities, dirty people, disease, conflict and warfare.

It could be argued that by focusing on the significant events of the Middle Ages, which include the Norman Conquest, the Black Death, King John and the murder of Thomas Becket, it is not surprising that students view it as a period soaked in blood and calamity. However, there was clearly some attraction to this view of the Middle Ages for students from several of the schools, although it was much more pronounced in the responses of the male students. As stated in the introduction, although differences between the sexes in their ideas of the past was not a focus of this study, it was striking how appealing the male students found the gorier aspects of medieval history to be, whilst most female

students took the opposite view. The students from School 3 thought it was obvious that as boys they would be interested in the more horrible aspects of the past; as Alex said, 'Gory is what boys like.'[772] The boys from School 4 similarly enjoyed talking about what Jonathan called, 'the gory stuff.'[773] In some cases, coexisting with these very negative views of the Middle Ages was a strong belief in progress and the benefits of living in the present. Ideas of progress regularly surfaced in the students' conversation concerning the Middle Ages being less advanced in terms of technology and ways of thinking. One student, George, explained that although there was not, 'much improvement back then', the Middle Ages were an interesting period to study because, 'it basically shows us progressing from ancient times.'[774] This sense of progress was not only manifest in technological terms but also extended to intellectual ability: students tended towards a *deficit* view of medieval social behaviour, particularly when they did not understand why people behaved the way they did. Logically as a consequence of their views, the students agreed that they would not want to live in the Middle Ages, as Sophie explained, 'We'd probably be dead by now!'[775]

8.1.2 Conclusion

Although it was difficult to draw any detailed conclusions about the approach to medieval history that was being taught in the classroom, evidence from the young people gave a strong impression of their views of the medieval past. It

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[772] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[773] Interview with students, School 4, 02/07/2008.

[774] Ibid.

[775] Ibid.

was a time of battles, invasion and disease, where life was dirty, poor and difficult. This deficit view of the Middle Ages, which reflects popular conceptions of the period as a *dark age* of violence and precarious living conditions, was compounded by an interest in the more gruesome aspects of history, which in turn was reinforced by nascent ideas of technological, intellectual and social progress through time. These four elements seemed to be interconnected to a stronger or lesser degree in the responses of the students.

Museum professionals at the two case study sites were aware of the negative perceptions of the medieval past in the popular imagination and used interpretation throughout the sites, including the living history performances, to challenge what they held to be misconceptions about the period. In the next section I turn to assess the impact that these less conventional approaches had on the historical understanding of the young people.

8.2 New perspectives of the Middle Ages

The education sessions at the two case study sites sought to present alternative perspectives on the medieval past through the narratives, events and dates they chose to define as significant. At the Tower of London, the education and interpretation team had chosen to reflect a positive representation of the medieval past wherever possible to counter conventional views which tend to focus on the negative aspects of the period, as demonstrated in the views of the students. Living history was the predominant means of communicating this to visitors, reminding audiences in a very visual

way that whilst many aspects of the medieval period might have been different

from the present, there was an opportunity to reflect on what the Education

manager called the universal themes of, 'human values and human nature.'[776]

This focus on universal attributes was an attempt to bridge the apparent gulf

created between the past and present by social and technological changes that

create *deficit* views of the past in the minds of young people. The potential of

living history as an embodied, subjective, and experiential form of learning

meant that instead of conceptualising the past in terms of physical changes and

objective facts, young people would be encouraged to look at the common

human emotions and feelings that can transcend the differences presented by

society and culture. Drawing on the human stories at the Tower of London was

one strategy for the Education team, which could provide for visitors 'an

emotional and psychological resonance' as opposed to the 'cold facts of

history.'[777] As an example of the approach to medieval history taken by the

Tower, performers drew attention to the evidence that King Edward I gambled

and played games with his servants, highlighting that there were much closer

relationships between monarchs and their subjects in the medieval period than

might be imagined. The characters that the young people met during their

sessions were intended to *humanise* medieval history, and they identified

themselves as coming from a particular strata of medieval society. However,

rather than feeling involved with the character and seeing the past 'through their

eyes', students were detached, even *distanced* from this history. Did this lack

of connection between the performers and their young audiences represent a

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[776] Interview with the Education manager, Tower of London, 18/06/2008.

[777] Ibid.

missed opportunity to explore medieval society at the Tower from the perspective of an historical character? The *humanisation* of the medieval past did not seem to occur in the same way as at the Museum of London.

The Museum of London also presents medieval life and society with a different perspective from that of the popular view. The collections are framed in relation to events that the museum has decided are significant to London's history and explicit parallels are made with the contemporary city, drawing attention to the similarities, such as it was a centre for international trade with a very diverse population. However, the differences are equally made clear, including the significance of religion to medieval society. The galleries focus as far as possible on conveying the perspective of the ordinary medieval person (how they might have lived, the clothes they wore, the objects they used) and the character of Harry Baille himself was an ordinary Londoner who could have emerged straight out of the exhibition, as the description provided by the museum states:

> This character lives in medieval London in 1390s. He is a stout hearty man in his early fifties. He will talk about life in Chaucer's London and talk about (or in) the language of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.[778]

Conveying medieval life and society through the perspective of a medieval character seeks to overcome some of the distortions that can occur when

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[778] *Chaucer in context: brief for Gallery actor at the Museum of London*, unpublished document, Museum of London

looking back on the past from a modern perspective. For instance, the role of rats and fleas in spreading bubonic plague was not known in the medieval times, and Harry Baille feigned ignorance whenever the students tried to tackle him on this issue.

8.2.1 Alternative ideas of the medieval past: the teachers' perspective

For the teachers whose sessions at the case study sites were linked to the curriculum, both the Museum of London and Tower of London were successful at providing an alternative perspective of the medieval past for their students. These teachers were aware that they were unable to address the nuances of the medieval period in the classroom and looked to the case study sites to give a more complex view. At the Museum of London, the focus of the galleries on medieval life and society was valued by teachers from Schools 1 and 2. For School 2, this could be placed within the broader context of 'big events' learnt in the classroom.[779] Specifically related to the Black Death, teachers had attempted to address in the classroom the differences between the medieval understanding of the disease and the 'scientific explanations' in the present. However, the personification of this difference through the way in which the character of Harry Baille was *framed* by the performance made it much more immediate for young people according to the teachers. The use of first-person interpretation was critical here because it became clear to the young people that this was the *only* perspective that Harry Baille had. That this was a challenging idea for the students to come to terms with was exemplified by their continuing struggle to reconcile the medieval and modern perspectives after the

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[779] Interview with Head of History, School 2, 04/03/2008.

visit, and the Head of History suggested that she would continue to explore these differences in the classroom. Yet the Head of History was certain that the students had obtained a more complex view of the Middle Ages. The object-handling workshop in particular had exposed the students to a range of ideas about the medieval period, some of which were unexpected. Not only were the students, in the words of the teacher, 'amazed that [the objects] have survived,' artefacts such as a medieval ice skate demonstrated to the students that, 'people did have fun in the Medieval period, it wasn't all gore and death and disease.'[780] The skill of *The Medieval Study Day* for the Head of History, therefore, was to incorporate elements that were understandable to young people, for instance the fear of losing one's parents (Harry Baille) and the use of objects in the handling session connected to, 'games and sport and ice skating.'[781]

Discussions with teachers and students who had visited the Tower of London were dominated by the format of the sessions rather than its content. However, two of the teachers identified several elements from the experience that would benefit their students. The History teacher from School 3 valued that the Tower presented what she considered to be a more *truthful* representation of the medieval past, compared to other visitor attractions which tended to exaggerate and sensationalise the past. Whilst the latter type of attractions would continue to be appealing to her students, the teacher considered that the experience at the Tower was likely to have countered some of their preconceptions about the

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[780] Ibid.

[781] Ibid.

site and act as, 'a good eye-opener to what the building was actually there for and how it was used day to day.'[782] The teacher from School 4 reflected that the Tower represented a positive view of the medieval past, exemplified by its role as a palace and the significant role it played in history. The focus on the Medieval Palace and the medieval king's lifestyle of 'conspicuous consumption' (highlighted by the performer) had exposed her students to the, 'high life in the Middle Ages', which was very different from the social history they had learnt about in class where they had looked at ordinary people 'living in little huts and farming the land.'[783] By depicting a more 'glamourous side' to the Middle Ages, the teacher considered that it could convey to students that the period was an 'exciting time to live.'[784] Similarly, the teacher who accompanied School 6 talked about the performer's emphasis on the medieval monarchy and the displays of wealth and power at the Tower, a perspective that she considered was likely to have been incorporated into the student's ideas about the Middle Ages.

8.2.2 Changing perceptions of the medieval past: the young people

From the six school groups who visited the two sites during the fieldwork period, students from School 2 and School 6 showed evidence that the living history performances had altered their perceptions of the medieval past. In the case of the students from School 2, the change in their perceptions would not have been identified if it had not been for the meaning mapping exercise: when

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[782] Interview with History teacher, School 3, 11/07/2008.

[783] Interview with the Class teacher, School 4, 02/07/2008.

[784] Ibid.

asked about it in the interview context, most of the young people did not consider that their perceptions of the Middle Ages had changed. Some students considered that the visit had *reinforced* what they already knew about the Middle Ages, others thought it was the same as they had learnt at school, what Sarah called 'normal history.' Another student, Misha, considered that whilst she felt they 'didn't really learn more,' the students had 'experienced a different side' to the Middle Ages, and the information they had encountered at the museum, 'said different stuff to what we learnt in school.'[785] The meaning maps, however, appeared to show that whilst the visit *had* reinforced some of their ideas about the medieval past, they were thinking about that past in a different way.[786] In particular, they were attempting to think about the period from the medieval perspective, which had not occurred in the meaning maps completed prior to the visit. Taking the Black Death for instance, instead of a list of ideas their conceptions of this event were directly related to how it impacted on medieval society. For example, PD4 wrote that the 'Black Death killed 1/2 [*sic*] the population in Britain' and CW2 wrote, 'if you were rich you had the same chance of getting the Black Death as a poor person,' ideas which came directly from the performance.[787] Students were much clearer about the social consequences of the Black Death, writing that, 'There were many different beliefs as to what the black death [*sic*] was and how it spread' (PD1) and 'peoples' wages increased a lot' (PD4). Some students used the language of Harry Baille when describing the causes of the Black Death, which included

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[785] Interview with students, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[786] Examples are included in appendix three.

[787] PD5 and CW3 also wrote very similar ideas on their meaning maps.

'pestilence' (CW1, CW3), poisonous air (PD5) or 'miasma' (CW2, CW4) and one student wrote that 'the medieval people thought the Black Death started when snakes and toads fell from the sky' (CW4). Whilst it is difficult to completely disentangle the impact of the museum visit from subsequent lessons and any exposure that the pupils have had to the medieval past outside of school, the drama, *framed* from the perspective of a 'historical character,' appears to have directly influenced these student's ideas of the medieval past. The session at the museum enabled them to see that medieval people, as the students described, 'were really people.'[788]

Three GCSE students from Jersey completed a meaning map of the Middle Ages after their visit to the Tower of London.[789] Whilst no comparisons could be made to their pre-visit understanding, in discussion it was revealed that, as a result of their experience, they seemed more disposed to frame the Middle Ages through ideas of life and society rather than think about it in terms of significant events and dates. Similar to the students from School 2, their ideas appeared to be influenced by the way in which the medieval past was *framed* in the performance. This included elements of the palace discussed by the performer such as 'decorations in rooms' (JC1) and coats of arms (JC3). All three students remembered William I, the Black Death and the Norman Conquest of 1066 from the session: one student remembered that medieval 'kings traveled [*sic*]' (JC3). The students referred to the social structure of

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[788] Interview with students, School 2, 04/03/2008.

[789] Students were given a numerical identity beginning JC followed by 1, 2, or 3 to indicate that the maps were completed by students from Jersey. Meaning maps completed by the three studnets are included in appendix three.

medieval life through references to 'social class' (JC1), 'hierarchies' (JC2) and the feudal system (JC2, JC3). Like the younger students, their concept of the medieval past also inclined towards the negative, including ideas such as 'beheading' (JC2), 'disease' (JC1) and 'men's superiority' (JC1 - an interesting point made by a student at a single-sex school). It does appear from the meaning maps that for these three students their ideas about the medieval period were influenced by the visit to the Tower of London, and this was supported by the students themselves, who claimed that their attitudes towards the medieval period had changed after visiting the Tower. All of them considered that the medieval period was a much more significant period in history than they had realised, and Gabriella commented that, 'People don't think about it being a particularly important age,' although it was hard for her to explain why this might be.[790] Another significant idea that the young people had learnt about the Middle Ages was the 'sense of greater community in medieval life.'[791] This idea came directly from the performance and the information provided about the life of the itinerant medieval monarch, who would have taken his entire court around the country. This had interested them because it was very different to the monarchy in the present-day.

Out of six groups therefore, two groups explicitly reflected changes in their ideas and understanding of the Middle Ages. They may not appear to be substantial but for the young people it reflected a subtle, but significant, change of emphasis from viewing the medieval period through the perspective of the

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[790] Interview with students, School 6, 26/09/2008.

[791] Ibid.

present, to attempting to view it from the perspective of a medieval person. For other young students, it continued to be evident that negative views of the Middle Ages endured in their minds, whether their focus was on the Black Death, the dirty conditions of London, the rigid structure of medieval society, or the battles and catastrophes which continued to define the period, a subject I turn to in the next section.

8.2.3 Enduring images of the medieval past

Some images of the past are enduring and the negative ideas that most of the young people held in connection with the Middle Ages proved durable despite the alternative interpretations offered of the medieval past at the two case study sites. These negative views of the past persistently surfaced when students compared the Middle Ages with the present day. When asked if they would have wanted to live at the same time as Harry Baille, students from School 2 were unanimous in rejecting this idea. They complained that it would have been dirty and they would have died from the plague: life would also have lacked the material and technological comforts that they have now. Although the young people were attempting to think about life from the perspective of the Middle Ages, this had not changed their essentially negative view of the period, framed by their experiences of life in the present. In their meaning maps written after the visit, the students continued to connect ideas of dirt, disease, crime and violence with the Middle Ages, with only one student (CW3) advancing a more balanced view of medieval life. Although CW3 wrote that 'many people died due to lack of hygine [*sic*],' and medieval people were 'not very clean,'

these ideas were balanced by the idea that they were, 'hardworking' and 'quite clever as they knew how to build things.'

The younger students from School 4 were much clearer about how the visit had reinforced their negative views of the Middle Ages following the visit to the Tower of London. Sophie and Olivia in particular considered that the representation of the past at the Tower, with its displays of weapons and violent history, made the medieval period seem even more 'depressing and gruesome' than before they had visited the Tower.[792] For Tom, Jonathan and George, who enjoyed this aspect of history, the visit to the Tower had reinforced their views that the past was a violent and dangerous time. The ideas about the past they remembered from their visit all seemed to involve 'gory' deaths and prisoners, a contrast to the more positive views of the medieval past that their teacher expected them to assimilate. The students from School 3 also had strong prior beliefs and perspectives about the themes that they were interested in medieval history, themes which they actively sought out at the Tower. In their discussions, they focused on the armour, weapons, the torture chambers and dramatic stories that they encountered. There was an appeal to this kind of fascinated horror amongst the boys, who considered that 'proper history' dealt with warfare and larger than life events than the everyday minutiae of life.[793] Their interests in gruesome and more sensational elements of the past framed their experiences at the Tower: ideas that could be incorporated into their pre-existing schemata were retained and ideas that challenged these views were

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[792] Interview with the students, School 4, 02/07/2008.

[793] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

either modified or rejected. These views endured despite the organisation's expressed aim to engage visitors with the complexity of the past. Another question to ask is where did these ideas about the past come from? According to the teachers at Schools 2 and 3, these are ideas that young people bring into the classroom, and seem to support the findings of Lee and Seixas (described in chapter two), that popular conceptions of the past developed in the everyday can resist attempts to modify them. Whilst their teachers considered that the Tower of London did present a different, more positive perspective, the younger students tended towards finding, during their visit, those elements that supported their prior views of the medieval past.

However it is not to say that the young people had a simplistic view that the past 'was bad' and the present 'was good', although their tendency to talk in narratives of progress affirmed that in many respects the present was a better place. In chapter two, it was described how people in the present use the past as a means to express their anxieties, concerns and fears for the present; in particular the work of Merriman suggests that different groups of people in society frame their relationship with the past based on what they are lacking or would like to have.[794] It is interesting to speculate why the more gruesome and horrific themes in the past were compelling to many young people in this study. There were gender differences: boys were much more likely to actively seek out what they referred to as 'gory' history and the girls claimed they did not like to learn about this aspect of the past because it was 'scary' or 'depressing.' These differences, interestingly, seem to reflect those of adults towards horror

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[794] See chapter two.

films revealed by Bennett *et al* in their national survey of cultural dispositions. Whilst women stated that they did not like horror films because of 'the scariness of horror films - their blood and gore,'[795] men's dislike of horror films stemmed from their make-believe, or 'unreal' aspect. Violence, however, was acceptable because for these men it made films and documentaries seem real: 'For many men […] dislike of horror, fondness for the documentary form, and a fondness for war movies, expressed in terms of an interest in history, all go together.'[796] Without further research, it is only possible to speculate that the male students involved in this study were drawn towards the more violent and gruesome aspects of history because it made the past seem more 'real' to them. Their views of progress and the superiority of the present certainly reinforced to them that the past was a more dangerous time. It might also be that exploring the negative elements of the past provides an opportunity for young people to confront the more challenging aspects of the human condition in a safe way: features seemingly common to human societies such as violence, disease, and death are possibly safer to deal with when they are contained in the past.[797] As Arnold reflects, '[s]omehow "history" can make violence safe, particularly, perhaps, medieval history.'[798]

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[795] Bennett *et al*, *Culture, Class, Distinction,* p148.

[796] Ibid, pp148-149.

[797] Ziegler, H. (1998) 'Anarchy and Order: Re-inventing the Medieval in Contemporary Popular Narrative', in Arnold, J., Davies, K. and Ditchfield, S. (eds), *History and Heritage: Consuming the Past in Contemporary Culture*, Donhead, Shaftesbury, pp27-37.

[798] Arnold, 'Nasty Histories,' p40.

In the next section, I return to the issue raised in this, and previous chapters. Considering that the relevance of the medieval past for young people in the twenty-first century is a questionable notion, what strategies did the young people use to make the Middle Ages more relevant and meaningful to them?

8.3 Making the Middle Ages *meaningful*: young people's strategies

In making the medieval past more meaningful and relevant, a number of strategies were used by the young people. Returning to my understanding of *meaning*, I refer back to chapter one and Heller's description of making meaning, which is 'to transform the unknown into the known, the inexplicable into the explicable, *and* to reinforce or alter the world by meaningful actions of various provenance.'[799] In this section, I seek to demonstrate the ways in which the young people involved in the fieldwork assimilated the ideas about the medieval past they encountered at the case study sites into their prior conceptions and schemata which are associated with history. Already some of these strategies have been referred to, such as the propensity for students to respond to those elements of medieval history which reflect their personal interests. Here I reflect on these strategies in greater depth and draw some conclusions as to how they influenced the historical understanding of the young people. In my approach, I am taking the view that the making of meaning is a very personal and subjective process, although some general tendencies can be illustrated across the case studies. This is a process that is increasingly recognised in contemporary culture, as Ankersmit describes we are, 'moving

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[799] Heller, *A Theory of History*, p65.

away from comprehensive systems of meaning to meaning as bound in specific situations and events.'[800] I am conscious therefore that the meanings generated about the medieval past by the young people reflected a specific response to the time and place in which they were made, and are therefore capable of development and evolution. I am also conscious that the students may not always be aware of, or might not be able to articulate, the implications of their processes of meaning-making. Referring back to section 8.2.2, for example, although the meaning maps of students from School 2 suggested that their perceptions of the Middle Ages had changed from an events-based view of history to a greater consideration of medieval life and society, the students said in discussion that their ideas had not changed.

8.3.1 Strategies of assimilation

For the students visiting the Museum of London, the appropriation of language and ideas from the two performances with Harry Baille seemed to indicate that the students regarded the information they learnt at the museum as authoritative. The museum was accepted as a place to learn about the past. For the older students from School 1, it was providing background information to their (more important) study of *The Canterbury Tales*. The A-level students did not have the same prior knowledge on which to draw as the Year 7 students when making sense of the new information they received about Chaucer. However, they realised that medieval texts such as Chaucer's *Tales* were not immediately accessible to young people; as well as the language differences and the medieval perspective on the world, the historical context to which the

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[800] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p1.

Tales belonged was relatively unfamiliar to them. The A-level students recognised that not only did they need to have Chaucer explained to them, but they also needed to make it meaningful for themselves. Unlike other works of literature, which can be read without knowing the context, *The Canterbury Tales* was perceived to be different in the minds of the students. Abby explained that, 'I think you have to be able to relate to it otherwise you can't study it.'[801] How did the students make Chaucer relevant to them? One way was for them to make links with other subjects, as Imogen explained, 'You can link it with Virgil because it talks about […] classical references.'[802] Another important aspect was the way in which the museum visit was seen to confer value on their learning of Chaucer. The students were pleased that their experience at the museum had brought them into contact with individuals (including the performer and museum staff) that they considered to be experts on Chaucer. They placed importance on the idea that they were learning something of relevance that other people (or society) valued outside of the school context. Whilst the students were not entirely convinced that the *Canterbury Tales* had relevance for modern society, they recognised its place within a rounded education. The idea that Chaucer was historically and culturally significant, and as Abby said, 'the root of all our […] language,' appealed to the young women, and it gave them a sense of value and confidence that they were tackling what they perceived to be a challenging work.

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[801] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

[802] Ibid.

While *A Survivor's Tale* helped to create a link between the Year 7 students and the medieval past, there remained challenges to perceiving the past through their newfound medieval perspective. The new information they learnt about the Black Death was incorporated into their existing knowledge, however this could lead to conflict when the ideas they learnt in the classroom conflicted with what they learnt from Harry Baille. In response to this conflict of ideas, the students attempted to reason out the answer by coming to a compromise position rather than recognising that, as one student (PD1) wrote on her meaning map, 'there were many different beliefs as to what the black death [*sic*] was and how it spread.' As the two teachers had anticipated, this seemed to be a difficult position for some students to adopt because, in their opinion, there could only be one *right* answer. Although some may have struggled to reconcile the different causes of the Black Death, most of the students were confident that they knew more about medieval society. They reflected this in the language they used, which had been appropriated from the session at the museum, including such words as 'cutpurses' (PD1, CW2), 'spurs' (CW4), and 'pestilence' (CW3). It was noticeable that despite their discussion over his views on the Black Death none of the students questioned the authenticity of Harry Baille as an expert on the medieval past. However, they made the clear distinction that Harry Baille was not real, only that his character made medieval people *seem* more real. This important distinction (reflecting the concept of *aesthetic distance* discussed in chapter four) allowed the students to identify that the performance had an impact on their ideas of the medieval past. However, at the same time they were tacitly pointing out that they were aware he was a performer rather than a real character from the Middle Ages.

As detailed in previous sections, the living history performances at the Tower of London covered two hundred years of history and exposed the young people from the four school groups to a large amount of information. On reflection, some of the students admitted that they struggled to assimilate the amount of information given to them during the tour, and had simply stopped trying to remember it all (School 3) whilst other students complained that the information given was the *wrong* kind of information and did not suit their purposes (School 4). As part of their strategy of making the past meaningful to them, these students filtered out the information they did not need and retained that which seemed to be the *proper* history of the Middle Ages. For the students of School 3 this was information about the dramatic events that had taken place in the Tower and the gruesome details of murder, torture and weapons they found so fascinating. Similarly, students from School 4 remembered the details about the Tower of London which they found interesting or had reflected previously held ideas about the medieval past. Neither group of students recalled much detail from the living history performances: when they did recall information, it was either very specific - such as in building part of the Tower of London, 'William the Conqueror claimed land off the Thames,'[803] - or it became confused in the retelling. Without a purpose to remember the information (for example if the visit had been directly relevant to their history learning at school), and their lack of connection with the performance, the students either recalled what was either interesting to them (based on their conception of 'proper history') or what fitted in their already established views of the medieval past.

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[803] Interview with students, School 3, 11/07/2008.

8.3.2 A complex response to the *real* illusion that is living history

In this section I want to explore in greater depth the idea that living history can make the past seem *real* and what it means when students and teachers refer to this aspect of performance. More than any other group, the museum experience supported the A-level students to understand the medieval period from the perspective of the people who lived at the time, and it is their experiences which I will examine at length here.

The barriers to understanding the medieval past were no less significant for these older students than for other groups. As their teacher explained, to understand Chaucer the students would have to 'be open to the language and the people in the *Tale*,' and make 'an imaginative leap' into the past.'[804] Coming to understand the perspective of the Middle Ages was expected to be challenging for the young people, 'because you've got the barrier of the different ways of thinking and the different ways that they express themselves.'[805] As discussed previously, the performance at the Museum of London helped to make the *imaginative leap* for students because it presented the past in a multi-sensual, embodied way. As the teacher described, in the original text, 'Chaucer's voice is giving us real people who had real emotions,' and the ability of Chaucer to sketch those characters, and the performer's ability to bring them to life, combined to produce vivid images in the minds of the young people.[806] As Emily, one of the students, commented, 'I think [Chaucer] was in the history

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[804] Interview with Head of English, School 1, 13/02/2008.

[805] Ibid.

[806] Ibid.

book when we went there [to the museum] but now [...] he's walking and talking.'[807]

What made Chaucer come to life for these students? As described in chapter seven, one important element was the realisation that medieval people experience feelings and emotions, exemplified for the students by the use of humour in the performance. The students were keen to learn more about this aspect of history, exemplified by the personal and emotional elements which, for Emily, were typified by Harry Baille's disrespectful attitude to his wife as someone who, 'keeps [him] tied down.'[808] These small details, part of the *internal frames* used in the performance, helped to 'humanise' the medieval past. Prior to the visit the period had been an abstract concept to the students; time and cultural distance, as well as the way in which they had been taught history, made it difficult for them to conceive of medieval people in anything but alien terms. However, the performance helped the young women to become closer to people who were not that different from 'them' in the present. However, it was not a simple case of the museum making medieval people 'real' and 'the same' in the students' minds. Although they referred to the medieval people in those terms, the students kept reverting to their conception of the medieval people as utterly different from people in the present, and therefore the impossibility of understanding their motives. The four students were continually working through these differences in their dialogue with each other and the implications these different positions of same/difference would

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[807] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

[808] Ibid.

have for their understanding. They recognised that people from the Middle Ages were removed from them in time, so far in time that there is very limited existing evidence for what they looked like (which they would usually rely on). However, learning about their lives in the museum and coming into proximity with artefacts that might have belonged to them helped to narrow the gap between 'us' and 'them,' if only imperfectly: this seemed to be the gist of their conversation. For example, Emily started by saying that, 'You always think of them as so different, I don't really know why', which was countered by Abby suggesting that because in a museum, 'you see things like a comb,' it is possible to see the similarities: 'you're like 'oh yeah I've got one of those.'[809] It was not only the museum's collections that stimulated discussion about the perceived similarities and differences of the medieval past. The students also wrestled with the notion that whilst some ideas held by Chaucer seemed very modern, in particular his ideas on women (the discrepancy of which were explained away as being unconventional for the rest of medieval society), other ideas expressed in the *Tales* appeared 'stupid' and 'weird', such as the view of romance and courtly love. Whilst the tendency towards a *deficit* view of medieval people in the past (that they were 'stupid' because they were different from us) was countered by the realisation that such views were conventional for the time, it revealed how relatively *easy* it is to fall into the deficit trap. Even for these young women who are aware that the medieval perspective is different from the present. The need to compare the past and to understand it through the eyes of the present is a strong inclination. As Collingwood writes, 'what we

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[809] Ibid.

perceive is always the this, the here, the now.'[810] Where the students reached

an impasse with no point of compromise between the two positions of

same/difference - such as attempting to explain medieval behaviour and ideas

about the world - they usually defaulted to the explanatory concept that they did

not have to understand the medieval perspective because (as Abby explained),

that is what medieval people 'were supposed to be like [...] That's just normal

for the period.'[811] In that way they remained on the boundary between the two

positions, reflecting, Ankersmit's contention that historical experiences always

exist in the 'space enclosed by these complementary movements of the

discovery (loss) and the recovery of the past (love) […] *The sublimity of

historical experience originates from this paradoxical union.*'[812] The

'complementary movements' identified in this study are the notions of 'same'

and 'difference' which are applied by the young people to the past and where

the tension implied between the two are never quite resolved.

8.4 Conclusion

In providing an alternative and humanised view of the medieval past compared

to that which could be achieved in the classroom, the Museum of London was a

means by which the students could become accustomed to more nuanced

ideas around the two extremes of 'sameness' and 'difference' in history. The

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[810] Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p233.

[811] Interview with students, School 1, 13/02/2008.

[812] Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, p9, emphasis in original. A similar paradox is highlighted in the concept of *aesthetic distance*, where the audience can be engaged in the 'reality' of the performance whilst at the same time knowing it is 'art' or 'fiction'; Jackson *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings.*

students from Schools 1 and 2 at times demonstrated an emerging realisation that societies in the past had different cultures and ways of life to theirs, and that this does not make them 'stupid' or 'weird' or otherwise lesser people. They were coming to terms with understanding the past as a different place to the present. However, an equally significant finding was the enduring nature of young people's *deficit* views about the past. Whilst the Museum of London and Tower of London presented alternative perspectives on the medieval past, most students demonstrated persistently negative views. These co-existed with, and were reinforced by, ideas about social and technological progress in the present: the lack of these comforts in the medieval past (logically) condemned it for many students as dirty and squalid. The study revealed some differences between the genders in the approach to the medieval past, for which more research is needed to explore the simplified distinctions made here. Although students of both genders discussed the gorier aspects of the medieval past, the male students were actively fascinated by these and purposefully sought out information that would fit into their predetermined interests. They considered that *proper history* dealt with dramatic and larger-than-life events rather than the everyday minutiae of life. Alternatively, the female students focused more on the social aspects of medieval life and discussed the experiences of medieval people in terms of their emotions and ways of thinking.

History as learnt in the classroom has to compete with exaggerated and sensationalised perspectives on the past, encountered through history books aimed at young people and popular, immersive visitor attractions. Both museums, however, had some impact on the historical understanding of the

young people. Whilst not all the young people had been enthusiastic about the medieval-themed sessions they experienced, it was interesting that none of the young people questioned the authority of the performers that they encountered. There was a tacit respect for their knowledge and expertise, and although some of the younger students complained that they did not get the information that they wanted or were given too much information, they did not question the *content* of the information that they were given.[813]

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[813] Schechner draws attention to how performances work on (at least) three levels. Level one is the literal content. Level two is the relationship between the performers who communicate to each other they are part of a performance. Level three is the experience of the spectators in response to the performance (individual and collective). Schechner describes how a performance may be accepted or rejected on any level; however, this tends to be at levels 2 and 3 rather than 1, the content. See *Performance Studies*, p104.

Chapter 9

Conclusion: Living history and historical consciousness

9.0 Introduction

This final chapter outlines the conclusions from an experimental study which draws attention to the significance of the interaction between the frameworks of meaning (*schema*) through which young people understand the past, and the way in which a living history performance is *framed*, for understanding how students respond to a living history performance. Whilst there is a need for further research to understand the connections between these two elements, this research has shown that living history, when it is effective at engaging young people in the performance, can have an impact on young people's ways of thinking about the past. The effectiveness of the living history was understood in this study to be related to a change or development in the ideas of the young people about the Middle Ages. In this final chapter, I explore how the responses of the young people to their living history experiences can be analysed in relation to Rüsen's model, and what this can reveal about the types of historical consciousness that are present in their ideas about the past.

The first section in this chapter provides an overview of the findings from previous chapters, detailing how this study contributes to an understanding of the impact of living history on the historical understanding of young people. In

the second section, I return to Rüsen's model of historical consciousness (introduced in chapter two) to elaborate on the implications of living history performances for the development of historical consciousness in response to the experiences of the students at the two case study sites. Reflecting on this evidence, the third section will address the question of whether living history offers museums and historical sites an effective way of engaging young people with history. Finally, I explore ways in which this research might be developed in the future and build on the evidence presented from the two case study sites.

9.1 Young people, living history, and historical understanding

This aim of this research study, to explore the impact that living history techniques (as used in museums and historic sites) might have on the historical consciousness of secondary school age students, was contextualised as part of a wider concern about the state of history education in England. The contested nature of history has resulted in debates that have become 'over-dichotomized and polarized.'[814] However, the discourse that history is a challenging subject that needs to be 'brought to life' through concrete and multi-sensory experiences that encourage students to learn actively about the past remains compelling. Furthermore, it is suggested that as much attention could be given to the emotional and affective implications of learning history for children and young people, as to focusing on the cognitive domain, in order to understand why some young people can find learning history irrelevant and 'meaningless.'[815]

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[814] Cannadine, Keating and Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History*, p230.

[815] Chapters one and two give an overview of these debates.

The research was restricted to living history used by museums and historic sites as an educational medium for secondary school age students. The particularities of the research context at the two case study sites (the Museum of London and the Tower of London) resulted in an over-representation of students that came from atypical state and independent schools across the South and East of England. Aged between ten and seventeen years old, these students attended smaller than average schools which provided them with varied experiences both in and outside the classroom. Their history teachers described the importance of developing young people to be independent and actively engaged learners. Although most teachers focused on the importance of encouraging a critical, questioning engagement in history, focusing on cognitive engagement with the past, where the *opportunity* for emotional engagement appeared to be missing from living history performances, teachers were equally explicit about the need for students to be engaged through their emotions. It helped to sustain their interest and stimulate their imaginations.

Most of the students were personally interested in history and were confident, articulate and conscientious learners. When learning about the past, they preferred interactive, discussion-led formats, or problem-solving activities which would engage them with the subject emotionally as well as cognitively. These characteristics had a significant impact upon their engagement with living history, their ability to articulate their opinions and thoughts on the value and purpose of history, and their ability to demonstrate different types of historical thinking. Any generalisations drawn from this study, therefore, are couched in very careful and speculative terms. However, at the same time many of the

points made in the literature about the development of historical thinking in children and young people were reflected in the experiences of the students, and parallels could be drawn, therefore, with this wider context. In particular, the disposition towards active learning experiences when thinking about the past supports findings from research undertaken with young people and adults in a number of Western countries including the UK, North America and Australia.

This study revealed that the interaction between the performers and their young audiences, and the way in which the performances were structured as part of a wider learning experience, was significant for the impact of the performance. Many of the students said that they enjoyed their visits, learnt new information about the past or reinforced information already known, and saw abstract ideas about the medieval past become more concrete. However, delving deeper many of these positive responses obscured subtle differences around the *framing* of the performances.[816] The students did not want to be told *what happened* in the past, they wanted to find out for themselves, and these conditions were met more effectively at the Museum of London where the performance was contained within a wider context in which the young people's learning was reinforced and supported.

The study illuminated some of the different ways in which teachers and students use terms that are familiar in connection to living history; 'bringing the past to life' or 'making the past seem more real.' For students, it was connected

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[816] See chapter seven.

to the opportunity that living history provided for the creation of visual images of the medieval past in their minds. For teachers, the term 'real' was used in two distinct ways: firstly, to refer to living history's potential to make abstract notions of the past become tangible, to assist the 'imaginative leap' that is needed to create the past visually in one's mind, and secondly, to refer to the creation of an authentic version of the past. It is important to make these distinctions rather than assume that 'real' is used in relation to the performance itself. Students were very clear that they had watched a performance, but one which had caused their understanding of the past to develop.

In their presentation of the past, both case study sites sought to convey the complex realities of medieval life and society in a way that would be accessible to young people: through their interpretation, and either their collections (Museum of London) or the historic environment (Tower of London). To some extent, the concrete experience with a 'medieval person' enabled most students to develop an understanding of how medieval people lived and experienced their world. In the words of the students from School 2, they were beginning to, 'think that they were really people.' In developing their ideas, students used various strategies to make the medieval past more *meaningful* to them. They related the new information they learnt to existing schemata or frameworks of understanding; framed the medieval past through the perspective of the present as a means of understanding it; used the experiences at the museum holistically from which to draw ideas about medieval society; and they appropriated words and ideas from their museum experiences. Students were discriminating about their learning and took what they needed from the sessions

to suit their purposes. Where sessions were content-dense or young people lacked a clear purpose for their learning, the new information about the past was not always manageable, and students could feel overwhelmed.

However, although three groups of students (all female) came to have a greater understanding of medieval life, for all groups it remained a time of violence, dirt and disease. Discussions with, and meaning maps completed by, the students revealed how their *deficit* views of the medieval past co-existed with, and were reinforced by, ideas of social and technological progress that made the present (*logically*) a better place to live. These enduring images also seemed to be related to a tension between a pedagogy which valued active and independent learning for students but which, at the same time, required students to learn specific historical ideas, skills and attributes. Students tended to seek out elements of history that fitted into their pre-existing schemata. Anything that challenged their views was either rejected (the students from School 4 who considered that the living history performer gave them the 'wrong' information for their projects) or left them confused (the students from School 2 who could not come to terms with Harry Baille not comprehending their modern understanding of the Black Death). Yet the experience of the older, A-level students suggested that these *deficit* views of the medieval past could be overcome. They were beginning to understand that interpretations of the medieval past change over time. Rather than thinking that medieval people were the same as 'us,' which made them appear 'stupid' or 'weird' because of their different beliefs and social structures, these students were starting to come

to terms with this difference, and to try to understand *why* medieval society was different.

Having given an overview of the main points which emerged from this study on the development of young people's historical understanding following a living history performance, I turn in the next section to drawing some conclusions about the impact this had on their historical consciousness.

9.2 Historical consciousness: what evidence is there?

My research was framed by the theories of historical consciousness which have emerged from German pedagogical tradition, but which are increasingly being adopted by researchers in the West. Historical consciousness is predicated on the idea that an orientation to the past, present and future is innate, but the everyday orientation to the past is manifest very differently to that of (academic) history. Historian Jörn Rüsen's model of historical consciousness provides a means of combining these approaches in a single conceptual framework, which describes the ontogenetic development of historical consciousness through four distinct types. These are the *traditional* and *exemplary* types, which are closest to memory and use the past as a means of informing the present, and the *critical* and *genetic* types, which are closest to history and challenge the other two ways of thinking about the past. There are limitations to the model: at present, there is insufficient understanding as to how students progress between the four types, and whilst these types are assumed to exist in complex ad-mixtures, there is limited evidence as to the way in which the types may be manifest in different contexts. Furthermore, it is not clear which types are the

most advantageous for students to demonstrate, especially since Rüsen's

model is imbued with particular notions of what constitutes 'proper' history.

This research demonstrates that Rüsen's theory, despite its limitations, can be

used successfully to identify both changes and continuities in students'

historical consciousness following a living history experience. It was possible,

through the analysis process, to detect different *types* of historical

consciousness in the ways in which the young people described their

relationship with history through the interviews and the meaning maps. A

precedent for using Rüsen's model in this way was provided by the European-

wide *Youth and History* study, introduced in chapter one. The study found that

across Europe there were broad patterns in the types of historical

consciousness indicated by students. A tendency towards *critical* types of

historical consciousness was found amongst students in 'the most modernized,

secularized, individualized, and wealthy countries,'[817] of Northern Europe whilst

those from countries which were more 'traditional, religious, collective, and

poor,'[818] generally in the South, tended to reflect the *traditional* and *exemplary*

types. As von Borries points out these are normative expressions of historical

consciousness and as such 'may simply reflect distinctive national cultures and

conventions […] Nevertheless it is obvious that history is most commonly used

to reinforce traditions and provide examples.'[819] How far the evidence found in

this study reflected this use of history will be explored in the following section.

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[817] von Borries, 'Methods and Aims of Teaching History in Europe,' p254.

[818] Ibid.

[819] Ibid, p256.

9.2.1 Young people and historical consciousness: the evidence

From analysing the evidence from the two case studies, students appeared to incorporate elements of the *exemplary* type of historical consciousness when expressing their ideas about the past. As described in chapter two, this type of consciousness uses the past as an example for the present or to determine a set of laws or rules which are ahistorical and apply equally in the present. One enduring law of history, for example, is the idea of societal progression through time and its culmination in the present. It is a didactic view of history, assuming that history is a source of lessons for the present and future.[820] Based on the evidence here, this type of history found its most fullest expression in the comparison the young people made between the past and present. As Seixas describes, the *exemplary* type casts the present in the superior position: 'we,' at the end of time, are better placed to judge the past because of our distance from what happened:

> Historical progress confers on us (in the modern era) the broad, universal vision that allows insight into the more, limited, particularist, parochial views of people in the past (and the 'people without history' in other parts of the world).[821]

This moral aspect of the judgement made by the *exemplary* type was not always strong in the discussions of the students. However, the perspective of the present strongly influenced their views of the medieval period, casting it,

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[820] Rüsen, 'Historical consciousness.'

[821] Seixas, 'Historical consciousness,' p146.

inevitably, into the shadow created by the *deficit* view of the past. It is striking the extent to which some categories of thought were so abstract that the young people did not think to furnish them with details: in particular, the category *medieval people.* It did not seem to occur to the young people that people in the past had feelings like theirs until this was made evident through the performance at the Museum of London.

The *critical* type of history, which is suggested by von Borries to be more prevalent in Northern Europe, did not seem to surface in the responses of the young people. This is potentially because, as will be suggested in the following section, the case study sites were presenting alternative views of the Middle Ages, whereas the young people tended to be quite conventional in their views of history. New information from the performance that did not fit into their schemata of the medieval past seemed to be rejected (most strikingly by the students from Schools 3 and 4) rather than modified or questioned by them.

The A-level students displayed elements of the *genetic* type of historical consciousness in their discussions of the medieval past. The difference between this and the *exemplary* type is that the *genetic* type recognises that all perspectives are 'temporalized,' even the present, and different perspectives are accepted because they can be understood within the framework of historical change.[822] The A-level students were, at times in their discussion, coming close to this way of thinking, realising that it was not always appropriate to judge medieval society through modern perspectives of the past because, to

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[822] Rüsen, 'Historical consciousness,' p76.

return to Abby's comment, 'that was the thing at the time so they were supposed to be like that [...] That's just normal for the period.' Although the young people did not advance any further reasons as to why medieval people thought and acted the way they did, their comments reveal an acceptance of difference in the past which seemed to transcend the *deficit* view detected in the younger students. These students were close to articulating the *historicist* principle at the core of the *genetic* type: that societies change over time, not for better or worse, but because that is what societies do. To return to Rüsen, change is the essence of history and gives the past its meaning.[823] The group of Year 7 students from School 2 also expressed some elements of the *genetic* type regarding their understanding of Harry Baille's perspective on the Black Death: some of them realised that his view was different because medieval people had alternative ideas about disease in the Middle Ages. Their *deficit* perspective of the Middle Ages conveyed through the meaning maps, however, suggests that the *exemplary* type of historical consciousness was more enduring for these students.

Since relatively little is known about the way in which the *types* of historical consciousness co-exist, it may be possible that this evidence demonstrates how students can move between elements of the different types, and express them in different ways depending on the context. It might be possible that students can express the *genetic* type of consciousness in their response to the living history performance - by identifying the specific views that Harry Baille held as specific to the Middle Ages and different to now because of change over time -

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[823] Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness,' p76.

without hinting at any underlying *exemplary* type of belief in the superiority of the present. This, and the differences recorded in the meaning maps compared to the interviews, suggests that Billmann-Mahedra and Hausen are correct in their assertion that a mixture of research methods is needed to explore historical consciousness. Different research methods may privilege the capture of particular types.[824]

What were the aims of the teachers in developing the historical understanding of their students? History teachers from Schools 2 and 3 were clear that they were seeking to develop particular types of historical understanding amongst their students: they sought to encourage in their students a *critical engagement* with the past. The teacher from School 4 seemed less clear about historical understanding as a concept, but she was clear that history needed to be interactive and engaging for her students. Suitable activities involved discussion, debate, and the use of historical skills of enquiry and deduction was important. These teachers were aware of the importance of engaging students in history through their emotional and affective domains. All the schools involved in the research did not only use textual sources in history but provided a range of stimuli for their students. As far as possible, teachers used visual images, material culture and physical activities, such as role play, to bring the past to life for their students. Teachers were aware of the propensity of the students towards the *deficit* view of the past and strove to challenge their preconceptions and encourage their students to try and think from the

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[824] Billmann-Mahedra and Hausen, 'Empirical Psychological Approaches to the Historical Consciousness of Children.'

perspective of the past. The History teacher from School 3 used examples from history to help her students examine their assumptions in the present. From their discussions, it could be suggested that the aim of these teachers, particularly those from School 2, was to encourage the highest levels of historical thinking, which in Rüsen's model are the *critical* and *genetic* types.

9.2.2 The case study sites and historical consciousness

The Tower of London and the Museum of London appeared to promote in their representations of the past different combinations of all four types of historical consciousness. The Tower of London was *critical* in that the education and interpretation team were seeking to challenge conventional views of the medieval past, and establish counter-narratives to the *deficit* view of that past. It was *genetic* in that the content of the living history performance presented the history of the Tower as ever-changing over time to suit the needs of the monarchs that used it. The performers were also careful not to make judgements about the medieval society through their performance but presented it as inevitable that medieval society would be different to contemporary forms of society and culture. However, elements of the *exemplary,* and possibly the *traditional,* type seemed to be present in the understanding that human nature provides an ahistorical category through which to understand the past. To use the words of the Education Manager, 'human values and human nature' transcend historical time to provide a universal category of understanding, which corresponds with the way in which

the *traditional* type looks to the past to provide depth to the present and sees people in the past as 'the same.'[825]

The Museum of London displayed elements of the *critical* type in the counter-narratives of the Middle Ages it had established in the Medieval London galleries, challenging conventional views of the period as a *dark age*. The performance of *A Survivor's Tale* could also reflect the *critical* type because the medieval perspective of the Black Death is less well-known than modern-day theories, for example that it was a pestilence sent by God rather than caused by rats and fleas.[826] There are elements of the *genetic* type in the approach taken across the museum, which shows change over time and the specific characteristics that can be identified from each period of history.[827] However, the *exemplary* type can be seen in idea that parallels can be drawn between the contemporary city of London and its counterpart in the medieval period. The impression of the city given in the galleries is that of a diverse and cosmopolitan city, which is remarkably similar to that in the present. Furthermore, there is none of the messiness and complexity of change in the museum. The visitor walks through an apparently seamless development from early tools and agriculture, to the splendour of medieval trade. However, such inferences are implied rather than explicitly stated. Whilst neither the Museum of London or the Tower of London overtly make judgements about the nature of change,

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[825] Seixas, 'Historical Consciousness,' p146.

[826] Platt, C. (1996) *King Death: The Black Death and its Aftermath in Late-Medieval England*, UCL Press, London.

[827] At the time of the research this was specifically between the Prehistoric, Roman and Medieval London galleries.

there is the sense from their interpretation that change is essential to history, but there is also continuity, which makes it possible to compare past and present. Neither the *exemplary* nor the *genetic* type of historical consciousness adequately describes this approach.

9.2.3 Living history and historical consciousness: a discussion

Having speculated on the types of historical consciousness that reflect the experiences of students visiting the two case study sites, I will now make some further points about these findings in relation to the ideas about living history raised in chapter four. The *framing* of living history was described as significant to understanding the impact that it can have on audiences, a point that was supported by the research at the two case study sites. Living history has the potential therefore, by being open about its performative, experiential, multi-sensory and embodied aspects - as opposed to focusing on the attempt to recreate the past authentically – to appeal to the development of *genetic* and *critical* types of historical consciousness, the types implicitly suggested by Rüsen to reflect higher levels of historical thinking. The work of Gregory and Witcomb around interpretive schemes that harness the emotional and affective domains in tandem with the cognitive and the rational, combined with Jackson and Kidd's focus on living history as *performance,* with its antecedent *dialogic* possibilities, appeared to support the view that these 'higher' levels of thinking could be encouraged through critical engagement with the past.[828]

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[828] See chapter three, section 3.1.3 and chapter four, section 4.4.

The performances experienced by the students at the two case study sites did seem to respond to some of the elements highlighted by these authors. In the performances at the Museum of London, Harry Baille did not explicitly talk about 'facts' or authenticity but presented the medieval perspective as part of 'his' experience and the students were encouraged to respond to him in the same way. As part of a wider session at the museum, the format enabled the students to 'discover' the medieval past for themselves, and they were encouraged to critically engage with that past by asking questions and investigating the material culture of the time. More significantly, the emotional and affective engagement of the students with the performance was critical not only for provoking (and retaining) their interest but for supporting their historical thinking. Was this directly linked to the use of first-person interpretation and moments of dramatic tension in the two performances (launching into medieval English, conveying the horror of being a 'survivor' of the Black Death) which created the right balance of *aesthetic distance*? It seemed that the emphasis on Harry Baille's experiences was expanded by the students into a greater appreciation of the human dimension of the medieval past. It was this aspect which also seemed to influence their developing ability to understand the medieval perspective. Furthermore, this sense of engagement with the content of the session was conspicuous by its absence at the Tower, where the performance seemed to be *too distancing* for many students. However, this did not prevent the older, female students from School 6 having a greater appreciation for the social aspects of the medieval past, which they derived from the content of the session. It points to a complex number of variables which contribute to an effective living history performance.

Other aspects highlighted in chapter four were not evident in the responses of the students. It was not clear if the students regarded history as one 'truthful' story about the past or a series of interpretations which co-exist, although at least one teacher (School 2) was interested in how history was interpreted in museums. Interestingly, the sessions at the Tower of London did draw attention to how the Medieval Palace had been reconstructed to show how it *might* have looked in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, and it was made clear to the students that it was an interpretation. Unfortunately, the format of the session and its impact on the young people dominated the discussions and this aspect of the session was raised by only one of the history teachers.

It is interesting, therefore, that whilst all groups of students reflected the *exemplary* type of historical consciousness in their responses, it was the groups at the Museum of London which, to varying degrees, did reflect the *genetic* type in some of their responses. Students were beginning to understand that the medieval perspective could be different to theirs, without it being regarded as 'stupid' or 'weird:' from the discussions with the students, this did seem to be a substantial change in their thinking. Further research is necessary to understand how the *framing* of the performance contributed to this development of historical understanding; however, in the immediate context it did appear to have the effect of changing their thinking about the medieval past.

It is not the purpose of this research to highlight which types of historical consciousness are the most suitable for students to develop, however it is difficult to ignore the assumption raised in chapter one that there is a right and a

wrong way to understand the past. The *genetic* type of historical

consciousness is regarded as the most sophisticated type in Rüsen's model,

representing the ideal way of thinking about the past from the point of view of

the academic, empiricist historian. However, von Borries asks if it is appropriate

to expect secondary school students to demonstrate this ability: 'Real genetic

thinking has a complicated and elaborated structure; it may be a lofty goal for

schools to strive for.'[829] Without more research into historical consciousness it

is difficult to state how typical the types of historical consciousness

demonstrated by the students in this study are: except it is important to reiterate

that they are not typical secondary school students.

Having speculated on the types of historical consciousness demonstrated by

the young people reached through this study, I discuss in the next section on

the basis of this evidence whether living history offers museums and historic

sites an effective way to engage young people with history.

9.3 Does living history offer museums and historic sites an effective way to engage young people with history?

From the evidence presented in this study, a picture emerges of three distinct

contexts in which students encounter ideas about the past. These are the

education context, the museum or historic site, and the living history

performance. Whilst there are similarities between the three - for instance, all

contexts are concerned to some extent to develop the students' historical

knowledge - there are variations between the three contexts which have a

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[829] von Borries, 'Methods and Aims of Teaching History in Europe,' p256.

potentially different impact on the types of historical consciousness they promote. As described in chapter six, education staff were keen to harness the power of affective engagement with the past for educational ends and, as Jackson and Gregory and Witcomb have suggested from both a performance and a museological perspective, the aesthetic or affective domain does not have to be regarded as separate from the educational or cognitive. Rather, emotional engagement seemed to enhance historical understanding, which was demonstrated by the role of the performance at the Museum of London in supporting two groups of students to better understand the Middle Ages from the medieval perspective. However, did the responses of the students and teachers support this view?

9.3.1 Responding to concerns about living history

Although living history is valued for its *immersive* potential and ability to engage young people bodily in 'the past', there was the concern mentioned anecdotally by education staff at both education sites that *immersion* was less appropriate for young people of secondary-age, particularly because it could make them feel self-conscious and disengaged. Neither museum therefore directly involved students in their performances, although there was a limited use of role-play. Yet there was a difference in the relationship established between the groups at the two case studies. Whereas the performer at the Museum of London used moments of surprise, humour and drama to draw the students into his narrative, the students at the Tower of London were disengaged by their *lack* of involvement and the *over-distancing* effect created through the 'teaching persona' adopted by the performer. Perhaps these students were more

confident or used to costumed interpretation and therefore less embarrassed or self-conscious? However, that does not mean that the Museum of London performances were engaging for all students. At least one student felt uncomfortable with the performer's use of the space, and the focus on the 'medieval mindset' created some confusion when it came to deciding the details of the Black Death. There are disadvantages to each method and the purpose of a performance needs to be clearly understood by both the performer and their audience. The discrepancy between the expectations of the schools visiting the Tower of London and the reality of the performances is a case in point.

As explored in the first section, it seemed that engagement in the past was important to gaining the student's interest, and the performance at the Museum of London was more effective at provoking that interest. It seemed to create the right balance of *aesthetic distance* that enabled the students to enjoy the performance and enable them to reflect on new aspects of Medieval life and society. They were aware that it was an *illusion* but that the performer could convey to them the experience of *living in the medieval past*. The most significant element for the students at the Museum of London was grasping the idea, through the performance, that people in the medieval past experienced feelings such as sorrow, anger, fear. This element humanised the Middle Ages and gave students an alternative perspective from the types of history they learnt about in the classroom. Students from Schools 1, 2 and 6 highlighted the uses of humour, pathos and other incidental details about ordinary medieval life which gave them an alternative perspective from the events and dates they had

learnt at school. Whilst there are concerns that living history creates a narrow focus on the past, when combined with a series of activities at the museum, living history can potentially contribute to building a (more) concrete and evocative picture of the past. It provides the 'leap of imagination' described by the Head of English from School 1.

Living history seemed to be most effective therefore when, following the learning theories of Claxton,[830] it provided a *spotlight* on an individual's experience of the past, which could be contextualised in the wider context of the museum or historic site environment, and the prior learning experiences of the students. At the Museum of London the combination of the performance, the contact with medieval artefacts, and the museum's displays of everyday medieval life provided a template onto which ideas of medieval society could be projected and compared with the present. The experience at the museum therefore provided a spotlight onto the *darkness* of the medieval past, illuminating a corner from which can spark a floodlight of imagination. Returning to the notion of *aesthetic distance* this metaphor also relates to the ideal orientation to living history: the individual has a *spotlight* on the performance happening in front of them but they are also aware of its *performative* nature, which keeps them aware of the wider context (the *floodlight* attention) in which this single experience takes place. This is what Hughes describes as 'seeing double,' where the audience is aware of the performance taking place but is, at the same time, 'actively believing in the

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[830] Claxton, G. (2001) *Wise Up: The Challenge of Lifelong Learning, Learning to Live the Learning Life*, Continuum International, London.

fiction.'[831] It is the decision of the audience to become engaged with the performance, to read the characters' intentions and emotions and to (potentially) embody the emotions themselves.[832] As suggested by the experiences at the Tower of London, the lack of opportunity for involvement and the 'teacher-pupil' relationship between the performer and the groups appeared to be *too distancing*, and students did not feel engaged with the history presented to them.

9.3.2 Living history and the study of history in the classroom

Museums and historic sites were valued by teachers for providing a dimension to history that was not available in the classroom. They provided an embodied and visual experience of the past, bringing young people into contact with the concrete evidence of the past and the places *where history happened*. Teachers emphasised the value of an enquiry approach to history, which was supported by the education programmes at both case study sites. Asking questions about why buildings were designed in particular ways, or how and why historic objects were used, was a means of understanding past society and culture. Above all, it was the concrete nature of the historical understanding that comes from physical evidence of the past that was valued by teachers because it complemented and reinforced the learning that took place in the classroom. Encountering the remains of the past created atmosphere, coupled with the uniqueness of their survival, and the preservation of these sites and

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[831] Hughes, 'Mirror Neurons and Simulation,' p192.

[832] Ibid.

their collections (some of which the students were invited to handle) gave them a powerful significance which the teachers communicated to their students.

It was essential, however, that the students were kept engaged by purposeful activity; it was not a case that they could look at a medieval building or object and be expected to understand it. Their ideas and understanding had to be developed through thinking about and questioning what was in front of them. The performance was an important part of this, although the session at the Museum of London was more effective at engaging the interest of the students and encouraging them to think in a different way about the medieval past. This means of enquiry, of discovery-based learning, was an important pedagogical disposition that was familiar across the schools and education teams that I interviewed. Students were not merely soaking up knowledge: it was important for them to work out the *meaningfulness* of historical evidence for themselves. However, this *openness* to the young people's ways of thinking did lead to the young people reinforcing their own views about the past, incorporating the ideas which were relevant and meaningful into their own, pre-existing schemata. Depending on the purpose of history learning, if schools, museums and historic sites want to develop young people's historical thinking then greater understanding of interpretive methods such as living history, and their impact on historical consciousness, is vital. It is not enough to assume that young people will change their ideas about the past from exposure to *critical*-type interpretations. The way in which living history is *framed*, its use of *distance* and *immersion*, and the relationship that is maintained between the performer and their audience, appear from this study to be important variables in the

development of young people's historical understanding. More research is needed to understand these.

Living history, when effective, can support an experiential, enquiry-based approach to learning, because it can be used to generate a critical emotional engagement with *people who did live and who may have lived in the past.*[833] From the evidence presented here, this seems to work best when there is a balance between drama (aesthetics) and historical content (learning), which enables students to have their interest and curiosity provoked by an 'historical character' who draws them into a narrative of (their) medieval life. The information is not given to them directly but is deduced from the performance and the performer. The young people I observed expected to be given the choice over how they engaged with the past: used to independent learning, they therefore did not enjoy the more didactic approach of the third-person sessions. As the discussions with students demonstrate, they preferred their experiences of the past to be combined with an enquiry-based approach to learning. Potentially such an approach can develop young people's historical understanding at the same time as their critical thinking skills. However, this must be an objective that is built into a session.

9.4 How this research can be developed in the future

This study has built on the use of theories of historical consciousness in history education to develop an understanding of how students respond to living history

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[833] Other terms for this might be rational understanding or historical imagination, it is the means by which historians engage with the experience, motivation and feelings of those people they study but yet retain a critical distance by which to understand their actions in the wider context.

performances. It has raised many questions which can be developed into further exploration of the ways in which living history might impact on the historical consciousness of young people, in particular the significance of the performance *frame*. A second phase of fieldwork was planned to be carried out as part of this study in order to collect and analyse more data in order to potentially build a theory of historical consciousness that would be relevant to museums and historic sites. However, as detailed in chapter five, circumstances meant that this second phase was not carried out. In the present study it was possible, therefore, to make only speculative conclusions about the types of historical consciousness demonstrated by the young people. In this section I will detail some of the issues which this research has raised and how these might be taken forward.

9.4.1 Testing theory

Future research would focus on testing the findings from the first phase of research which point towards the development of a theory of historical understanding, or consciousness, following a living history performance at a museum or historic site. Key emerging ideas include the role of living history in: supporting a change in student's ideas of the past from historical 'facts' to an emphasis on society and culture; providing a visual 'picture' of the past upon which students can draw; fleshing out abstract historical concepts;[834] and developing notions of same/difference in relation to the past. Considering this last point, the data suggests that young people's enduring ideas of the past draw upon negative ideas of *difference*, otherwise expressed as the *deficit view*

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[834] Which includes the concept of 'people in the past.'

of the past (for example people in the past are stupid or weird). However, by drawing attention to the *same-ness* of people in the past, living history (and material culture) appear to support the revision of these negative views to a more positive view of difference: 'that was how it was then' or 'people were like that then.' Students may not always know why the past was different but they are starting to appreciate that *difference* is not always negative. It may be that this is related to the age and ability of students. For instance, this study shows that the oldest students (School 1) were more capable of reaching the *genetic* type than the younger students. Although it might be that older students are able to think in the more sophisticated ways that the *genetic* type seems to demand, the movement between *exemplary* and *genetic* they exhibited might also be conventional for students of their age. Some of the younger students were showing signs of being able to think about the Black Death from the medieval perspective, although the *deficit* view remained their 'default setting.' There is therefore a need to examine more deeply the connections between the four *types* of historical consciousness: it might be that two seemingly unconnected *types* (such as *exemplary* and *genetic*) might co-exist in the responses of students without causing 'cognitive dissonance.'

A second period of research would also need to examine more closely how the performative aspects of living history might be analysed in relation to its impact on historical consciousness. As suggested in chapter four (section 4.3.1) there are many potential variables which will affect student responses to a living history performance. These include elements connected to the three *frames* of the performance (external, theatrical and internal), as well as the personal

attributes of the students (age, gender, ability, interest in history). Further study would need to explore these variables and how they interact, in particular the interaction between student's ideas of the past, the way in which the performance is *framed*, and the subsequent types of *historical consciousness* demonstrated by students in their responses. Inter-disciplinary connections need to be made with the field of performance studies in order to explore the relationship between the development of these types of historical consciousness and the living history performance.

9.4.2 Choosing the case studies

In order to increase understanding of how living history impacts upon historical consciousness, future research studies would need to take the findings from this study and test their veracity in a greater range of contexts and with attention to specific variables. These include applying the research model with a range of schools and, in particular, state secondary and comprehensive schools, which were absent from this study. Testing the findings with a wider range of museums and historic sites that cover different historical periods would change the focus from medieval history, however this would enable the exploration of student's relationship with more recent periods of history. Are the challenges of understanding the Middle Ages reflected in other periods of history – or are they unique to the Middle Ages?

Despite the challenges encountered in its use, I would keep to the four-stage model for each case study (taking into account the specific circumstances of each school) because of the potential for generating richer data and evidence of

change in student thinking. I would be more careful to communicate to teachers the value of the model for generating in-depth research data when approaching them to take part in the research.

A different approach would be taken to finding schools to take part in the research, for example rather than simply working with the museum or historic site I would try and contact schools through their local education authorities or the Historical Association, who support history teachers. A future research phase would ideally include more 'typical' secondary and comprehensive schools in order to reach students with a range of ability and interest in history, not only the high achieving students.

9.4.3 Research methods

Whilst interviews and meaning maps were effective for the purposes of an experimental study, the extension of the fieldwork to include a greater variety of schools, and the need for a greater quantity of data to 'test' emerging theories, means that mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative, would be utilised. Whilst continuing to use the in-depth methods of interviews, observation and meaning mapping, some changes would be made in the attempt to capture evidence of the relationship between the living history performance and the subsequent impact on young peoples' *historical consciousness.*

Observation would take a wider range of factors into account, including the quality of planning and delivery of the living history by the museum or historic site, and how it meets the needs of schools. In order to capture evidence of the

performance *frames* I would develop an observation sheet for each living history session to ensure rigorous capture of data (timings, position of audience etc.). Where possible (and with the agreement of the school and museum) video recording would be used to capture the performance and enable an in-depth analysis after the event. Interviews with performers would provide an opportunity to explore the *frames* that they use and why.

Working with a wider range of students means that different research methods may need to be used as interviews may privilege those students who are able to articulate (confidently) the meanings and interpretations they attach to an experience.[835] Communication with teachers would ensure that suitable methods would be devised, for example students could be asked to act out or draw their favourite (or least favourite) aspects of a performance. They could take photographs (or short video clips) on site and use these as a stimulus to talk about their experiences during the interviews. The research literature on historical consciousness will be helpful for the development of short activities or exercises that would help students to articulate their ideas about history to the researcher.

A broader means of collecting data would be used to collect information from larger numbers of students in the form of a questionnaire.[836] The questionnaire

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[835] Walford, *Doing Qualitative Educational Research*.

[836] Furthermore, it became clear during the fieldwork period that there was limited formal evaluation of living history sessions by museums and historic sites apart from anecdotal evidence collected by education staff or short questionnaires completed by teachers. Therefore a questionnaire may be of interest to museum and heritage practitioners as a means of collecting this information.

in Figure 1 asks teachers to carry out a meaning mapping experience with their students prior, and subsequent, to the performance. Students also answer questions about their experience, which are designed to capture evidence of their historical understanding. Although it is desirable that as much information is collected from students as possible, the practical constraints of working with schools has been taken into account in the questionnaire design. The meaning mapping element can therefore be omitted if time is limited. This questionnaire would be piloted prior to any fieldwork phase to 'test' its effectiveness in collecting useable and rigorous data on students' historical understanding.

Figure 1: Draft Quantitative Questionnaire

Capturing the Impact of Living History Experiences
Information for Teachers

We [the museum or historic site] are carrying out research into the impact of living history experiences on the historical understanding of young people. We are interested in finding out about any changes that living history can make to students' ideas about the past or if it affects their enjoyment and interest in history. This will help us to understand what can make living history experiences more effective for young people learning about the past.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. It involves a short meaning map exercise before and immediately after the living history experience with students, followed by some questions about the experience. It should not take more than 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Name of School: _____

Year group / age of students: _____

Before the living history experience
Please ask students to spend 10 minutes writing or drawing their ideas about the "Middle Ages" using the attached student questionnaire (*NB This can be substituted with whatever period, event or historical figure the school is studying*).

After the living history experience
Please ask students to spend 10 minutes writing or drawing their ideas about the "Middle Ages" on the attached student questionnaire (*NB This can be substituted with whatever period, event or historical figure the school is studying*).

There is a short series of questions to follow the meaning map exercise, please ask your students to complete these questions once they have finished their meaning maps.

Whilst your students are completing their questionnaires, please take the time to answer the following question:

Why do you think history is important to learn?
_____
_____
_____
_____

Once the questionnaires are completed please hand them back to a member of staff. Thank you very much for your, and your students', time.

Capturing the Impact of Living History Experiences
Student Questionnaire

We [the museum or historic site] are interested in finding out your ideas about
the living history experience you have taken part in. This will help us to
understand what can make living history experiences more effective for
young people like you when they are learning about the past. We are going
to ask you to complete two short meaning mapping exercises and answer a
few questions about your experience. This is not a test and there are no right
or wrong answers. Thank you for helping us find out about your experiences.

Name: _____
Age: _____

Before the living history performance
Please write or draw your ideas in the space below about the 'Middle Ages':

Middle Ages

After the living history performance

Please write or draw your ideas in the space below about the 'Middle Ages':

Middle Ages

Please answer the following questions by ticking one of the boxes.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
I enjoyed the living history performance			
I learnt something new about the Middle Ages			
It helped to make people in the past seem more real			
I learnt something that will be helpful for my studies			
It made me more interested in the medieval past			
I would like to have more experiences like this			

Do you think that history is an important subject to learn?
Please circle your answer

Yes   No   Don't know

Please explain your answer:

9.5 Concluding remarks

To conclude, on the basis of this research, living history's potential lies in enabling young people to encounter, ideally through first-person interpretation, perspectives on medieval society which (as far as possible) come from *within* that society. More research is needed to understand how the interaction between students and living history performances leads to particular *types* of historical consciousness. However, understanding living history as a *performance* and, and how that performance is *framed*, is essential for understanding how it can potentially support the four *types* of historical consciousness identified by Rüsen. As a dynamic experience, it was revealed that when living history was effective at engaging young people emotionally and cognitively it could contribute to the development of their historical thinking. Engaging all the senses in an interpretation of the past which gives the illusion of bringing the past into the present, it simulates the *real-ness* of the past, and makes its differences more concrete for students who are used to thinking about periods like the Middle Ages through more abstract concepts such as significant events and dates. However, depending on the purpose of history learning, if schools, museums and historic sites want to challenge young people's ways of thinking about the past then this study reinforces the need to understand how forms of interpretation like living history can impact on a student's historical consciousness.

Appendix 1

Interview protocols

A1. Interview protocol for students

The museum or historic site visit

- Describe / recap the visit and what they did
- What did they think about the visit?

Probe about learning – thinking about learning very broadly, what did they feel they learnt from the visit, if anything?

- Did it help them understand the topic? If yes, how?
- Did they learn any new information / increase their knowledge?
- What did they like and dislike about the visit?
- Did they find anything enjoyable or inspiring?
- New skills? (This might include specific historical skills)

Did they change their mind about anything as a result of the visit?

- Did their opinions change? How?

Living history performance

First, see if the students mention the actor as something they enjoyed

- If yes, probe to see why they liked that element of the session and why

If not mentioned by the students ask:

- What did they think of the historic character?
- How did it compare to other activities they did?

Have they seen characters like this before in museums / heritage sites?

- Do they think it is a good idea?

Did the students think that the historic character made the history more accessible to them? Why / why not?

How it fits into their school work

Describe what they are doing at school

What impact do they think the museum visit will have on their work at school?

- How will it have – or not have – an influence on their work?

What do they think of the topic they are studying?

- Did the visit to the Museum change their opinion?

Do they think that the work they did help them with any other subjects?

The Middle Ages

What do they think about Medieval history / the Middle Ages?

- If I was to say 'Middle Ages' or 'Medieval' what images would come into their minds?
- How much do the students think they need to know about the Middle Ages?

History

Do the students think that learning / knowing about history is important?

- If yes, why do they think it's important?
- If no, why not?

If not interesting / relevant… How can it be made more relevant or interesting?

If the students had to explain to someone outside school why they should learn medieval history, what would they say?

Context – visiting museums / heritage sites

Have they been to the Museum of London before?

- What they think about the museum? Would they go back?

- Do they visit museums / heritage sites with their school?
- Do they visit museums / heritage sites with their families?
- How often do they visit museums / heritage sites?

Do they like visiting museums / heritage sites?
- What do they like about them?

Context – the school and the young people

Ask the students about their school
- Subjects they are studying (A-level)
- What things do they like doing / what are their interests?

A2. Interview protocol for teachers

The school

Type of school
- Where the school is – local area, students who attend the school
- Number of pupils
- Subjects studied
- Do they follow the National Curriculum?

Context to the museum visit

How did they hear about the museum visit?
- Have they been before?
- Arranging the museum visit through the museum – how much input did the school have into the session?

What appealed to the school about the session? (Probe to find out if the living history element was important)

What are the pupils studying?

Medieval history connection?

At what time did the work take place in their studies? E.g. was it an introduction or have they already started studying / finished studying the topic?

The museum visit

Describe the session – recap what the students did

The aims and objectives for the teacher – describe what these were

- What did they want to get from the session?
- Did they think the session met those needs?
- Did it bring anything unexpected or extra to their expectations?

What links did it have with the curriculum followed at school?

- Does it fit in with what students are doing?
- Will the teacher be doing any follow-up work?

Impact on the students

What does the teacher think the pupils learnt from the session?

- Will it help them in their studies? How?

Thinking broadly about learning – what does the teacher think that they have learned?

- Knowledge and understanding (facts and information)
- Skills (include historical skills, being an historian, weighing up evidence…)
- Attitudes and values (e.g. attitudes towards the past)
- Enjoyment, inspiration, creativity
- Action, behaviour and progression (e.g. short term or longer term impact?)

How did it help them in their understanding of medieval history?

- Their understanding of the topic?
- Appreciation of the period?

- Different interpretations?

Focusing on the costumed interpreter / actor / living history practitioner…
- What impact do they think interacting with someone in costume will have on the students?
- What does it bring to the session? Anything extra compared to other activities?
- Would it have been different if the actor had not worn costume?
- How did the students react to the character?

School ethos

Does the school have a policy of taking students out on trips?
- How many a year? (Average)
- What kinds of trips do they take?
- Kinds of places…
- School ethos and approach to cultural organisations – are they an important part of learning?

Do the pupils generally have parents / families that take them to cultural organisations?

A3. Interview protocol for living history practitioners

Background

Description of involvement in 'living history' and re-enactment / costumed interpretation
- What they do
- How long they have been a costumed interpreter
- What their interest in living history / re-enactment is
- Who they work with (e.g. museums, historical sites, schools…)

Relationship with the museum

- Who they work with

- What periods of history they cover

- What characters they portray

The character

- How would they describe the character(s) that they portray e.g. in the museum session / re-enactment

- Who are they?

- Are they real or fictional?

- Are they well-known, famous, ordinary…

- Is the interpretation first-person or third person?

- How is/are character(s) developed?

- How much research is done into a character

- How much freedom is given to create a character

- How 'authentic' do they think the character is

The session at the museum / historic site

Description of the session – its aims and objectives

- Are there links with the National Curriculum?

- What do they think the participants (e.g. pupils) will get from the session?

Evidence of what they have learned (thinking broadly here e.g. facts, knowledge, skills, attitudes, enjoyment)

- About medieval history?

- Their understanding of the topic?

What impact does interacting with someone in costume have for the participants?

- What does it bring to the session?

- Would it have been different if there was no character in costume?

- How do participants react to the character?

- Would they (the practitioner) adapt the character to suit the group? How? Does age matter for instance?

Appendix 2

Excerpts from the interviews

A2.1 Three students from Jersey describe their reaction to the costumed interpreter at the Tower of London

Researcher: Ok. That's really great, thank you. So what did you think about her being in costume? Do you think that was helpful?

JC1: I guess it would have been better for younger children rather than-

JC2: Yeah

JC1: Like by the time we got to our [Unclear – 05.30] she started pretending to be in character, I can't remember.

JC2: She might of, she might have had an accent, did she put on an accent or anything? I can't remember.

JC1: I just remember us all being like um what is that?

Researcher: You thought it was a bit odd?

Pupils: Yeah

Researcher: Coming across her-

JC3: I do remember what she looked like though from the costume, I don't remember her face, I remember she had a thing on her head.

JC1: I remember her saying it's the only age where like girls and boys wore the same clothes and all that.

JC3: Yeah, that was quite helpful; it kind of gives you more of a visual image.

Researcher: It was quite memorable, from what you're saying. But it didn't really help the overall excitement of the tour?

JC2: I thought how hot she'd be! [All laugh]

JC3: We were all sat there boiling; she's wearing how many layers!

Researcher: I suppose that must tell you something about mediaeval life! [All pupils laugh] Do you think it would have been more effective if she'd pretended to be someone from the Middle Ages? Or do you still think that's more suitable for younger-

JC1: I think it's suitable for younger...children.

Researcher: Right

JC3: I think we would have found that slightly odd!

Researcher: So you wouldn't have really responded to that?

JC3: No.

Researcher: Ok.

JC1: Thinking back to when we did the tour of the..... [Unclear]...the dun, what was it?

JC2 & JC3: The dungeons.

JC1: I remember a lot of that, they were like, have you been to the London Dungeons?

JC2: It was the London Tombs.

JC1 & JC3: Oh the London Tombs.

JC1: They said, they did the whole thing in character, like through the different ages. And I remember that and that was very good, like.

JC2: You were very much moving around, like from room to room to room.

JC1: It was different people, like each person was a different character, and acted as that character itself, they were like informing you about different events and stuff as though you were part of the experiencing it, and that was a good way to...

Researcher: Ok. So that was more effective?

JC1: Yeah.

JC3: Yeah it was like...

JC1: You were more involved, it was like you were part of the time as well, rather than them just being like, rather than the woman just being the one person from the time, but he treated us as though we were in that time era as well.

Researcher: Oh right, so you felt like you were more back in the past?

Pupils: Yeah

JC3: More involved.

JC2: I mean it was more, it was down in the dark sort of so they could, [Unclear –7.41], you didn't have any daylight or anything, so

JC1: Yeah

JC3: So they could intimidate you!

[General laughter]

Researcher: So you had, you were forced to be involved.

JC3: Pretty much! Which was actually good though, everyone did enjoy it.

Researcher: Ok, so that was better than sort of the Tower of London approach? Which is perhaps a bit too, sort of more educational do you think?

Pupils: Yeah

Researcher: And you just wanted to have a fun time.

JC3: Yeah

JC1: But we still did learn a lot from the Tower. It was a lot more, we thought it was just going to be scary but there was a lot, it was very educational as well. It got a lot of information into, in a fun way.

Researcher: Ok, so it wasn't a complete waste of time then?

Pupil: No

[General laughter]

A2.2 Four pupils from School 4 discuss their knowledge of medieval history before their visit to the Tower of London

Researcher: So is this your impression of the medieval times then? Lots of horrible stuff?

George: Well some of it's good and some of it's bad, there's like erm, well most of it is horrible, there's like the prosecution of Catholics near the end of it.

Researcher: Uh-hum.

George: The burning of people who were innocent in the arts of witchcraft, the torture, for instance if you're trying to get someone to confess to witchcraft, you'd often throw them into the water.

Researcher: Right.

George: If they floated they were a witch and if they did not they'd drowned but they'd be innocent.

Tom: Umm, so it didn't really work!

Researcher: Exactly.

Jonathan: It's kind of die or you die!

Researcher: Yep.

George: I thought it should be, I thought it should be the other way round,

Tom: Yeah because then if you're a witch you'd die.

George: The innocent float and the guilty drown-

Tom: But-

George: - not the guilty float but the innocent drown.

Sophie: The people just, they could accuse somebody of witchcraft if they wanted them to die.

Male pupil: Yep.

Researcher: Umm and then they'd die either way wouldn't they?

George: Another way, another stupid way, they were also not very clever. Because also another stupid way to see if it was a witch was to see if they were heavier than the bible.

Researcher: Right! [Laughing]

Tom: Yeah!

Researcher: I suppose it depends on whether you've got the pocket edition or the [unclear] version.

Male pupil: Yeah!

George: Bibles could be pretty heavy books back then!

Tom: Yeah they didn't have pocket editions!

Researcher: Didn't they?

Tom: Yep.

Researcher: No I was joking!

George: Also the, and also, like well technology they didn't have much improvement back then for, I mean like most people had converted to

Christianity by then, but there was some people who were like pagan like possibly the Vikings,

Researcher: Ok are we talking about early medieval?

George: Yeah I'm sure I've head of people worshiping like pagan gods like Thor.

Researcher: Uh-hum.

George: But then maybe like the man who built the tower, I think he was like a genius possibly, I think he started the proper medieval age.

Jonathan: It was William the Conqueror.

Researcher: Yes?

Jonathan: Yeah.

Researcher: So you know an awful lot about medieval times!

Female pupil: Yeah, because we've been doing it for quite a long time.

Jonathan: All year.

Researcher: You've been doing it all year?

Jonathan: Yeah.

Researcher: Ok.

George: Been learning about the monks, been learning about religion.

Jonathan: Yeah, everything!

A2.3 Six students from School 3 discuss their opinions of the living history performance at the Tower of London

Researcher: Ok shall we concentrate a bit on the session then? Because that's one thing you haven't really talked about much so I'm guessing that, did you like it?

Pupils: Yes.

Billy: Did I like what?

Researcher: The session. [Laughter] The random lady!

Michael: [Unclear -12.12] the ravens?

Jacob: Err yeah but erm when we went in one of the rooms she just dragged on a bit -

Pupil: Yeah she did go on!

Pupil: It did go on a bit.

Jacob: - where was I, all the decorations, we don't need to know about that

Pupil: We do!

Peter: We just need to know about the history not the decorations.

Researcher: So you didn't see the decorations as part of the history then?

Pupil: Kind of yes.

Researcher: Kind of.

Pupil: Because it was what it would have looked like.

Alex: Or it might have been.

Researcher: That's not the history that you're interested in?

Pupil: No we like battles and like proper history.

Billy: She told us a lot,

Pupil: Yeah.

Billy: like about um, Sir [Unclear -12.45] stood on like the outside of castle when it was raining, to show that he was brave and nothing could hurt him and something like that.

Teacher: That's right; do you remember the name of that king?

Billy: No, Alex might know.

Alex: Edward 1st?

Pupil: I was going to say Edward perhaps. [Unclear -13.03]

Teacher: Because he had his apartments built on the outer bit of the castle didn't he, she was telling you.

Pupil: Oh yeah.

Pupil: And that's when he had those shutters with the lions on.

Teacher: Uhum.

Pupil: Inside not on the outside.

Pupil: Did I miss everything? [Laughter]

Researcher: Did you have the session where you got to hold um different objects and things.

Pupils: No.

Researcher: Sorry I've been to so many recently they're all kind of blurring into my head! So she just kind of spoke to you, yeah I'm remembering now.

Teacher: Yeah, she was dressed up in medieval clothes wasn't she? And she took you through Edward 1st old apartments.

Alex: I was trying to see if she had medieval shoes on as well.

Pupil: No she had high heels, black boots, black leather.

Pupil: How can you have boots and heels at the same time?

Researcher: What's he looking...

Alex: She had brown shoes,

Pupil: Yeah and [Unclear -13.47]

Researcher: Do you think it made it more interesting that she was in costume?

Pupil: Yeah coz it like told us what them times would have worn.

Pupil: What they would have worn.

Researcher: Umm, do you like seeing what they wore?

Pupil: I already knew what they wore.

Pupil: She could have been dressed up normally and showed us pictures of what they would have been dressed like as well. All she talked about was what the ladies were wearing.

Alex: Or she could have dressed up in it and then pretended to actually have lived in that time.

Pupil: Yeah done like a little performance.

Pupil: I think they should have had a random man as well!

Pupil: A random man!

Pupil: [Unclear -14.18] just got an interactive board.

Researcher: So it wasn't interactive enough, did you say sorry?

Pupil: There should have been a random man.

Researcher: There should have been a man as well?

Pupil: To show you what like knights would dress up in at that time.

Pupil: And the normal men.

Alex: When they weren't in armour.

[Talking in background, hard to make out 14.33]

Researcher: Right.

Pupil: I say [Unclear-14.36]

Researcher: So would you like to have tried on a helmet and stuff like that?

Pupil: Yeah.

Pupil: Yeah.

Alex: You want hands on stuff to make history fun.

Researcher: Ok, that's cool. So it was just a bit, coz it was quite a long time wasn't it, just sitting there-

Pupil: Yeah.

Researcher: - listening, but do you feel you got something useful out of it?

Alex: Yeah.

Michael: But it was a lot to take in because like when we went into the bedroom it was like, it went on for ages and we couldn't remember it all.

Pupil: Let me think, it was about half an hour or more.

Pupil: Yeah about that.

Alex: And she spent most of that time explaining coats of arms to us.

Pupil: She was talking about the wallpaper.

Pupil: My coat of arms would be like a star in the middle.

Pupil: Yeah, I didn't see the point in the wall paper!

Pupil: Three times!

Pupil: This wallpaper was in there...but now it's in here.

Pupil: Three times!

Alex: How interesting!

Researcher: So the wallpaper-

Pupil: That is not, and that rug was never going to be there. It's just a rug, we just put it there.

Teacher: What stuff did you like Dean? Because you said you enjoyed it didn't you.

Dean: I just liked erm finding out loads about the bedroom because everything had a meaning-

Teacher: Yep.

Dean: - and erm just like the weapons and all the gory stuff.

Pupil: Huh, gory stuff again!

Peter: I didn't see any weapons in the bedroom.

Pupil: I did.

Alex: Not there.

Peter: Oh are we talking about the bedroom still?

Alex: He did said [unclear] he and weapons.

Researcher: I mean you mentioned before Alex that you thought it would have been more in, did you say you say you thought it would be more interesting if she'd been as a character from the Middle Ages?

Alex: Yeah.

Researcher: What do you think that would have-

Pupil: It would have been good if she'd put on like a performance,

Researcher: Right yeah.

Pupil: Like a play.

Pupil: Yeah that's what I thought was going to happen.

Alex: Instead of just saying like,

Pupil: Instead of saying,

Alex: Erm,

Pupil: William the Conquer built this, he made this come in,

Alex: and this happened, she could have pretended and said in this year William the Conquer has just built this.

Researcher: Right.

Pupil: And then talk about how you, how William the Conquer claimed land off the Thames, you could have actually done a play of that.

Researcher: Right.

Pupil: Could you?

Pupil: Yeah.

Alex: Like we had [Unclear-16.34]

Peter: [Unclear-16.35] stage and like William the Conquer going, and,

Pupil: [Singing]

Peter: No you would have drained it, part of it first.

Researcher: So you thought that might be more affective in terms of how it would have got it across to you.

Alex: Yeah, coz we done this thing for geography at [Unclear-16.54],

Researcher: Oh right.

Pupil: Oh wow!

Alex: And they had people acting it out then and that sort of got through to a lot more people than I think this one.

Pupil: Yeah because you actually sort of, you actually,

Pupil: And you had a vote. You had a vote of would you rather be a knight or a Peasant.

Pupil: Yeah I think it could have been a bit more interactive.

Researcher: Right Ok so sort of asking you to do more than just listen.

Peter: Yeah like set off in some groups, and do stuff.

A2.4 Four students from School 1 discuss how the session at the Museum of London made the medieval past come to life

Researcher: So going back to what you just said then, about how it made people seem similar to you. So was that how you sort of thought of people in the past as very different?

Emily: Yeah, but actually they were quite similar.

Researcher: In what way would you say they were quite similar?

Emily: Like in their feelings … you know

Abby: Yeah I know what you mean like, you see them as a completely different like culture but actually …

[Lots of talking over]

Abby: The actor made that clear as well through like …

Imogen: Jokes

Abby: Jokes and everything

Student: He was fun

Abby: And the way that he translated everything he was saying, it made it easier for us to understand

Ruth: Yeah it was like explanations, he sort of made it clearer

Researcher: Do you think because he was doing it in modern English as opposed to sort of Chaucerian language all the way through …

Imogen: Yeah, that was good

Abby: Yeah, yeah because he kind of switched a bit. He started off and we were like … [laughter] and then he like explained it a bit and then said some more quotes and stuff in Chaucerian language which …

Emily: You always think of them as so different, I don't really know why.

Abby: But a museum … because you see things like a comb …

Emily: Yeah because they're history …

Imogen: It's like they're not just a few generations away, like you won't see any photos of them …

Emily: You won't see photos

Abby: But if you see artefacts like the comb and whatever, you're like 'oh yeah, I've got one of those'

[General laughter]

Emily: And you know how you don't have any … because you don't have any like recorded conversations, you don't have any sort of …

Imogen: It's really hard to get an idea of what they were like …

Abby: And then you read what they said and you're like 'well, that's nothing like I talk' …

Student: But if you like …

Emily: Often in history lessons and English and stuff like that, you only learn about the sort of what happened rather than sort of the …

Abby: Culture

Emily: Yeah you don't learn about like …

Abby: The culture around it

Emily: Like whether they went home or … just really, you know, if they were annoyed that someone took a throne they just learn about …

[General laughter]

Emily: … the battle [hard to hear]

Abby: Yeah, yeah I know, like the background to it

Researcher: So you kind of learn what but not why or how, that kind of thing?

Students: Yeah

Researcher: So do you think that session really helped to sort of widen out …

what people actually did?

Students: [Over] Yeah

Emily: Yeah, to say why something like … because he was being the …

Abby: Innkeeper

Emily: … the Host and he was like 'my wife keeps me tied down' you know,

you want to know those kind of things about history

Researcher: So you're more interested in the kind of social …

Student: Anthropology, the social side of history, that's a good word

[General laughter]

Researcher: Okay so, it made it, would you say it made it more relevant,

history? More sort of …

Abby: It made it more approachable, the tale, like you could see it kind of like in

your mind.

Appendix 3

Example meaning maps
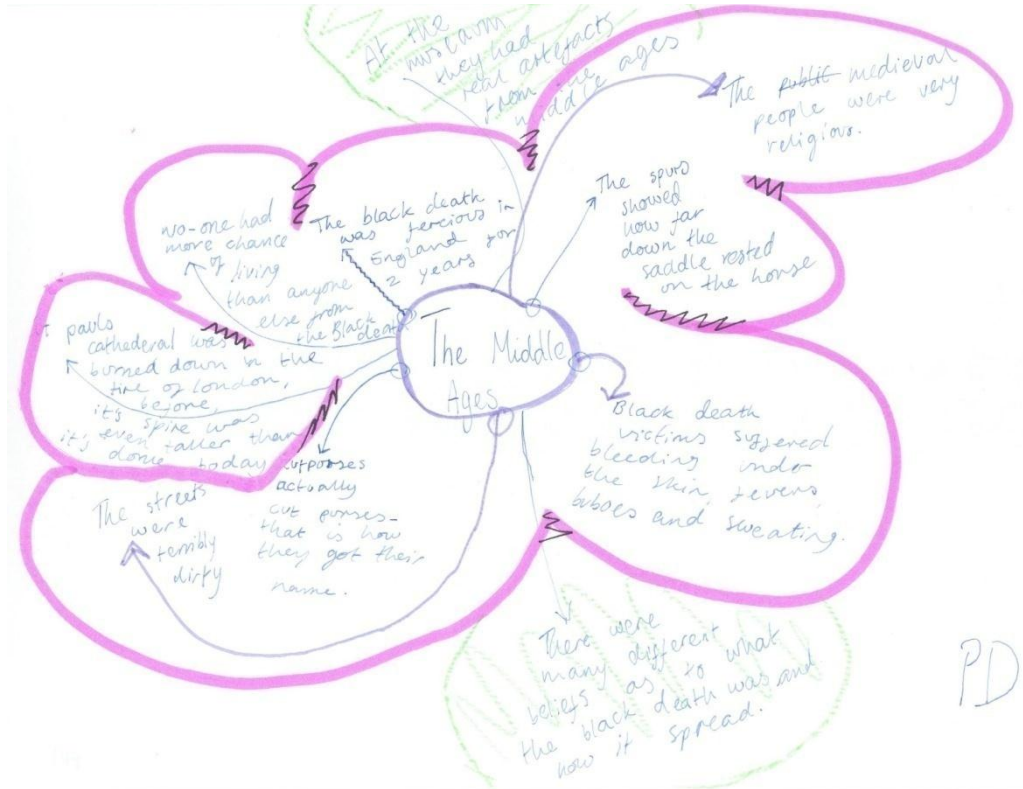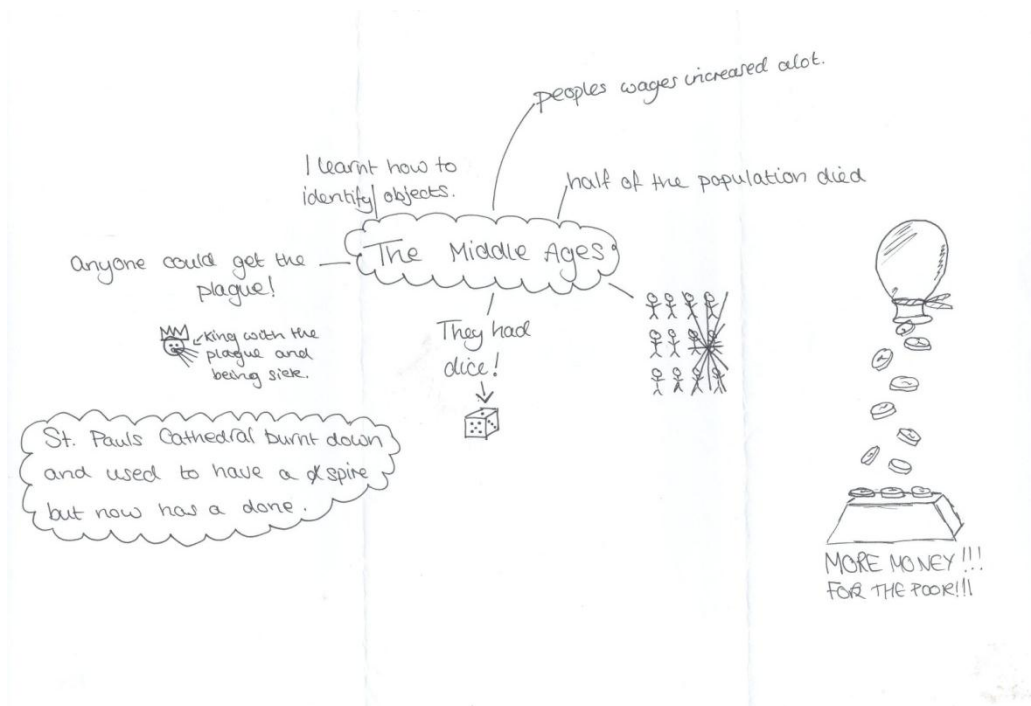
Figure 2: PD1, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 3: PD4, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 4: PD5, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 5: CW1, School 2, Museum of London

CW

Thomas Becket

Howald Hardradaa
Harold Godwinson
William of Normandy

Battle of Hastings
Battle of Stamford Bridge

Tostig

Henry II

Canterbury
Cathedral

buboes

1000 – 1500

Westminster Abbey

(Middle Ages)

Pests

Normandy

Norway

St Paul's Cathedral

Black Death

Mild Headache
Fever
Bruises
armpit
groin
Sewers   Rats
River Thames
Pestevance
poisonous air
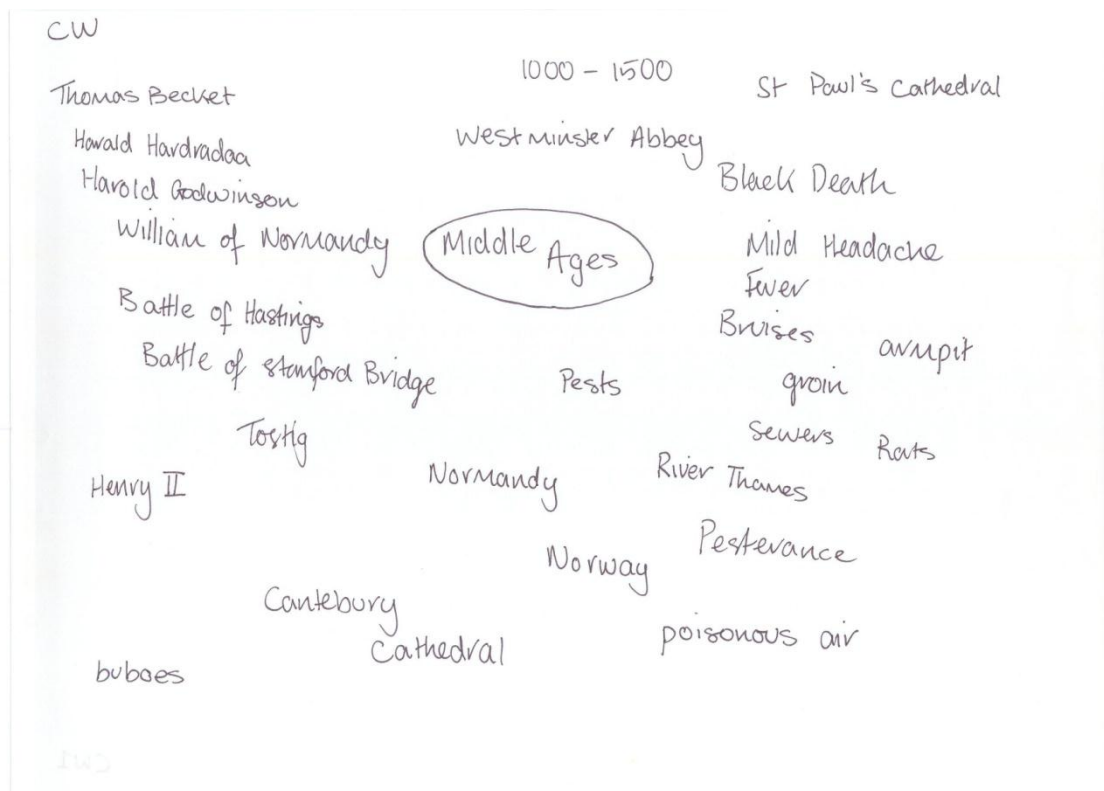
Figure 6: CW3, School 2, Museum of London
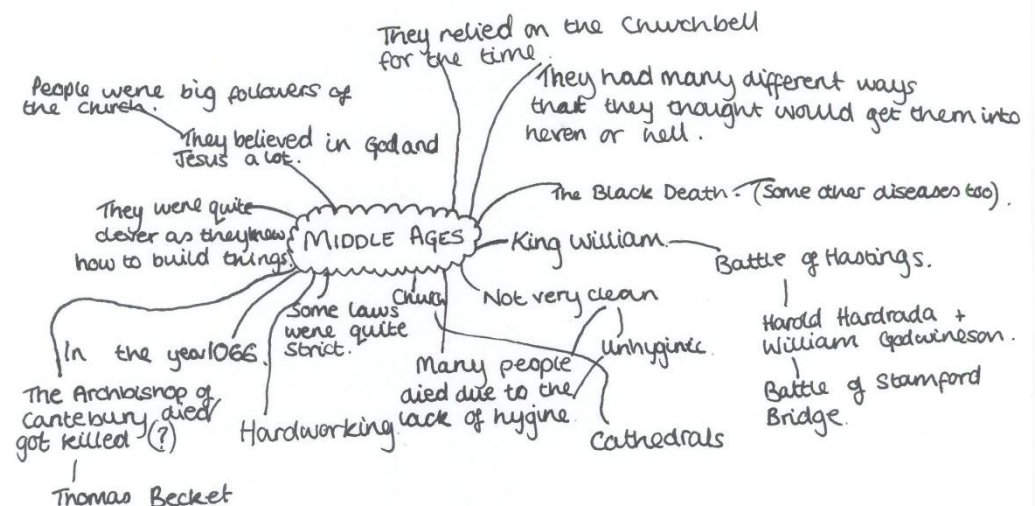
A3.2 Meaning maps completed by students after their visit to the Museum of London and Tower of London

Figure 7: PD1, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 8: PD4, School 2, Museum of London

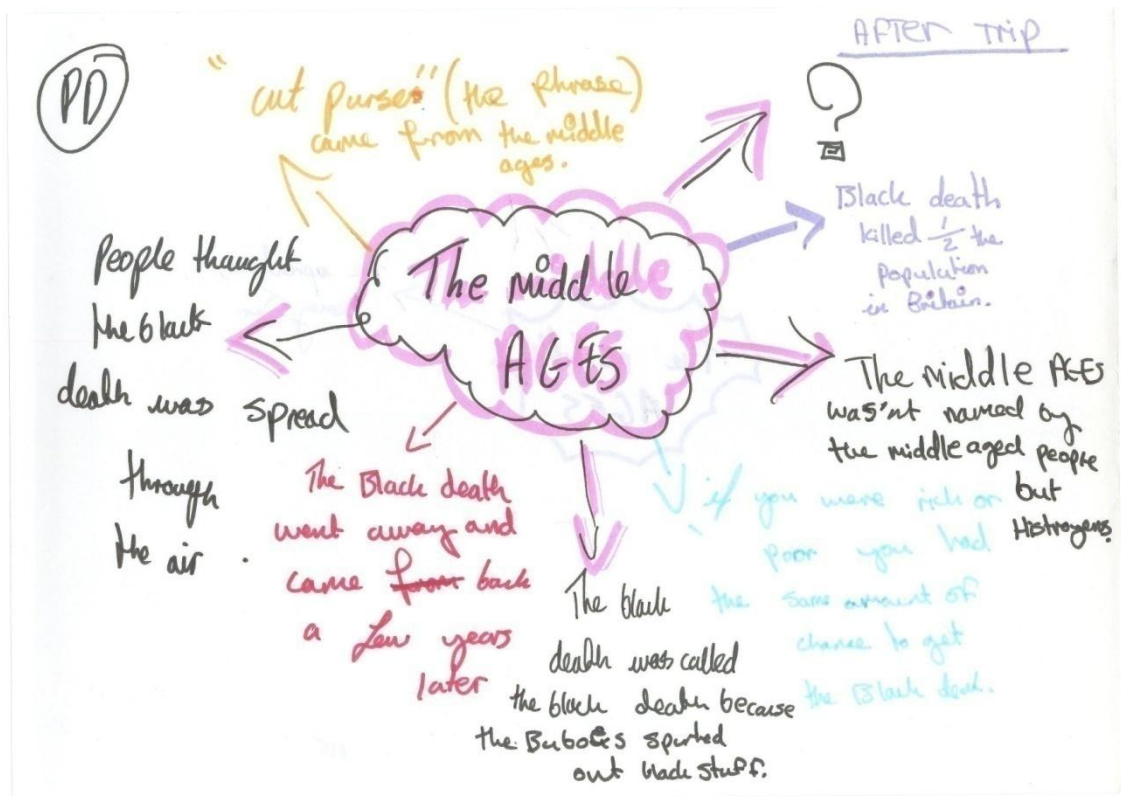Figure 9: PD5, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 10: CW1, School 2, Museum of London
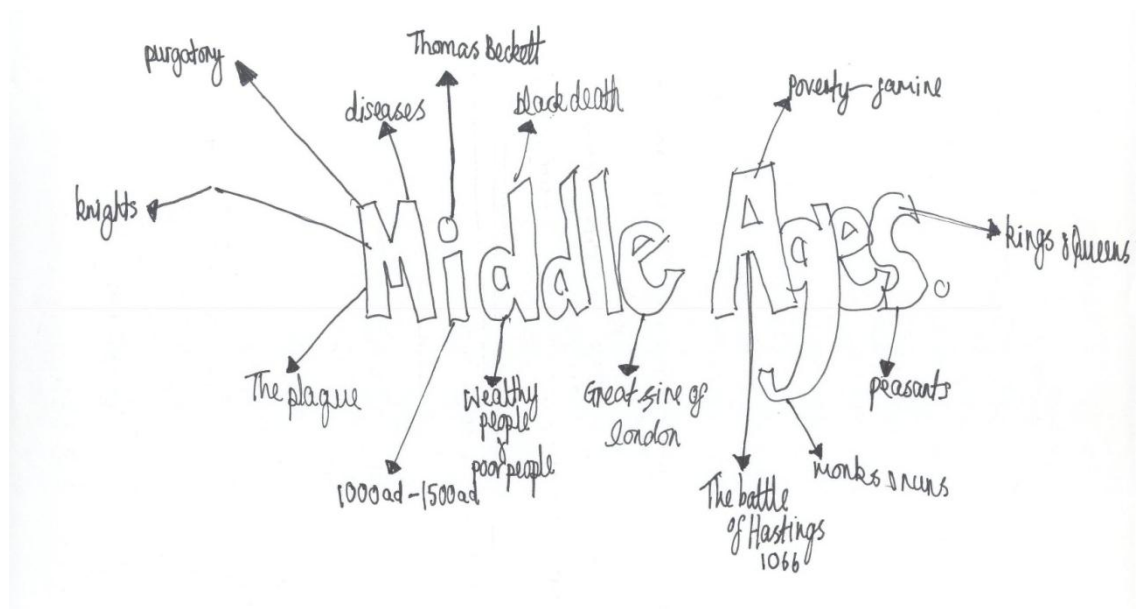
Figure 11: CW3, School 2, Museum of London

Figure 11: CW3, School 2, Museum of London

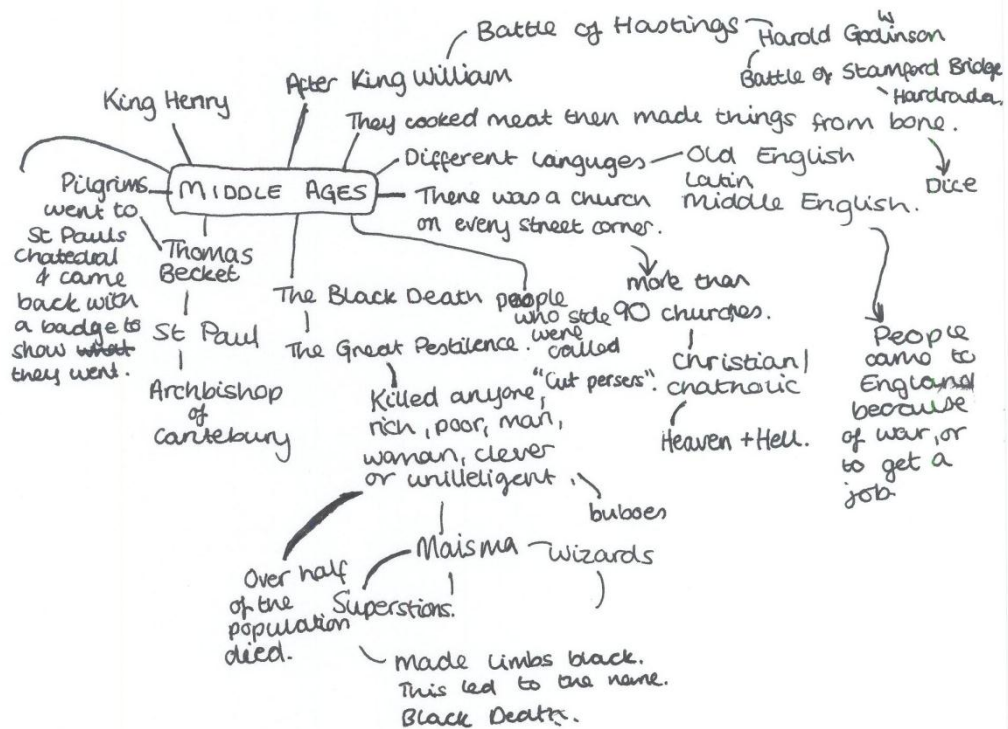Figure 12: JC1, School 6, Tower of London

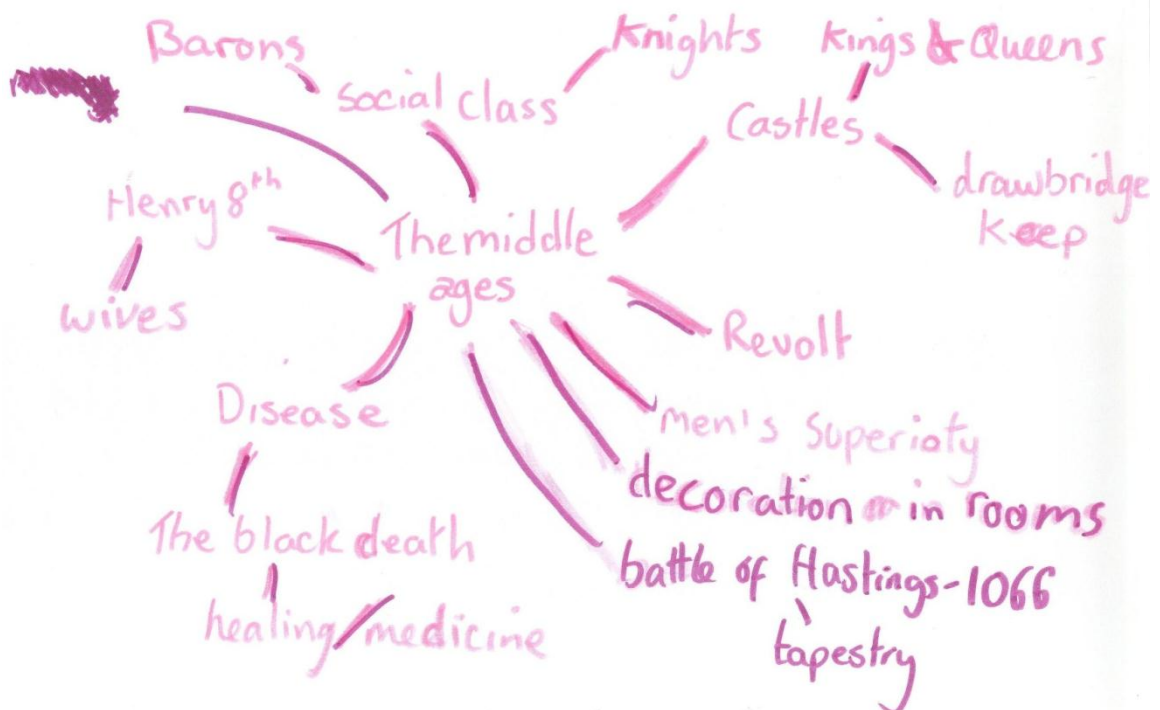Figure 12: JC1, School 6, Tower of London
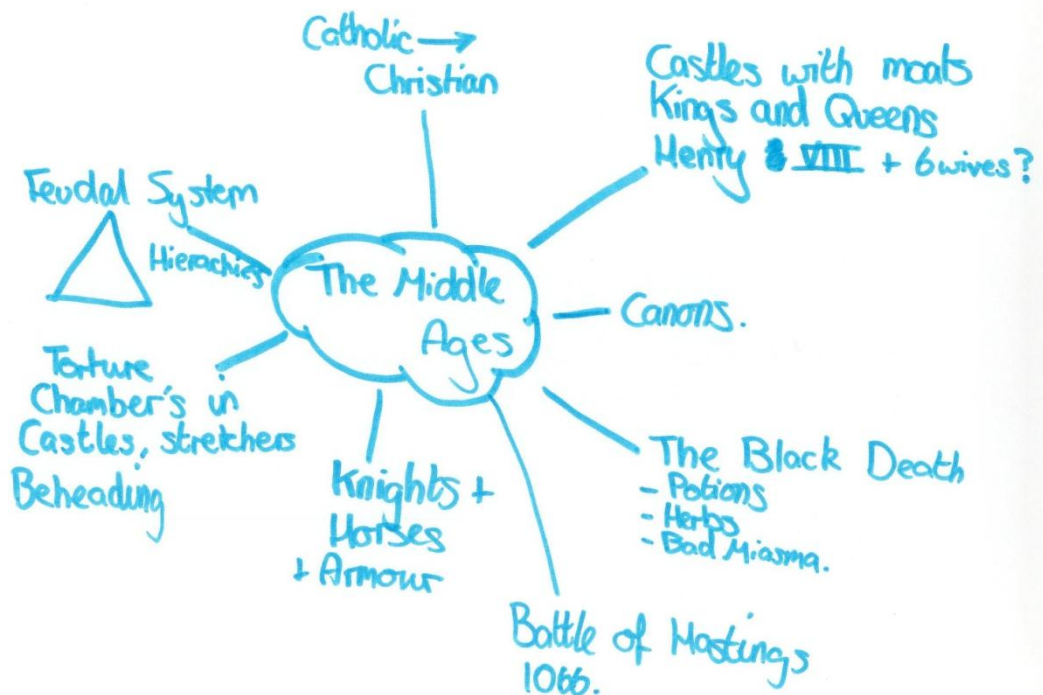
Figure 13: JC2, School 6, Tower of London

Figure 14: JC3, School 6, Tower of London

Appendix 4

Description of the living history performances

A4.1 Living history performances at the Museum of London

The living history performances described here at the Museum of London took place at the back of the Medieval London gallery. The theme for this area is 'Books and Printing' and it is framed on one side by a wooden arch. Figure 15 (a photograph taken by the researcher) shows this space when not in use by school groups.

Figure 15: Location of performances in the Medieval London gallery

'Chaucer in Context' (School 1)

When I arrived at the Museum of London on 28 January, it was a while before Reception was able to contact one of the museum education staff so unfortunately I missed the beginning of the performance (which started at 11am).[837] The group of 20 students were already seated towards the back of the medieval gallery on folded chairs listening to Harry Baille give his performance. They were sat in a horseshoe at right angles to the entrance to the space, facing the area immediately behind the wooden arch where Harry Baille performed (potentially the performer came through the arch). The gallery was quite noisy with younger school groups and several times members of the public stopped to listen to the performance, which lasted 25-30 minutes.

The performance was a monologue from Harry Baille partly performed in Middle English and modern (if 'flowery') English. The performer did not have a loud voice but he used a variety of tones throughout to emphasise the feelings of his character, which change considerably from the beginning to the end of the session. The drama of the performance is that at first Harry Baille is clearly appalled by his treatment in *The Canterbury Tales*: he complains that his supposed friend the poet has distorted his character for dramatic effect. He tells the students how he attended a 'public oration' performed by the poet: however his excitement at the event is soon dispelled by his treatment by the poet. However, as Harry Baille describes the event and the poet's skilful rendering of the pilgrims, he begins to realise that, in fact, Chaucer has

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[837] According to the script supplied by the Museum of London, Harry Baille enters the space and immediately launches into lines in Middle English from *The Canterbury Tales*. This was confirmed in the interview with the students after the visit.

described him very well, and the performance ends with Harry Baille praising the poet for 'making him immortal.' Structured through the act of Harry Baille describing to the students the public reading of *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer, the performance enables the wider context of medieval society to be incorporated through Harry's 'description' of the King's court, as well as incorporate passages of *The Canterbury Tales* in the original Medieval language. Harry's reaction to these passages in 'modern' English thus enables him to subtlety translate the Medieval prose for the students.

The tone of the performance is humorous, particularly Harry's over-exaggerated horror at his treatment from Chaucer and, by the end, his revelation that Chaucer has, in fact, described him perfectly. The performer uses plenty of eye contact with his audience, addressing the students directly for example through the use of (mainly rhetorical) questions. The humour works well with the students, who laugh in the right places. However, other than being addressed directly by the performer, there is no participation required from the audience until the monologue is over and there is an opportunity for the students to ask him questions. During the performance, Harry Baille was dressed in the costume (it appeared) of a medieval innkeeper and used no additional props.

For the question and answer session at the end of the performance, the actor 'came out' of character in his responses and encouraged the students to think about the implications of their questions rather than just giving them the 'facts.' For instance, one student asked 'Harry' if Chaucer based the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* on people he had met or stereotypes. When 'Harry' asks

what she thinks Chaucer did, the students replies that she thinks 'he

exaggerated.' Then 'Harry' threw the question out to the whole group and asks

them if they have ever tried to make up a character themselves; do they think

that fantasy films (the actor gives the example of Star Wars) have made up

characters or is there an element of something real in them? Still the students

say that they are unsure and so the actor draws attention to the fact that

although Chaucer left no evidence to say where he got the characters from, we

do know that there was a Tabard Inn which was used by pilgrims on their way

to Canterbury so he might have based his Tales on real people, however we

cannot ever know for sure. This small example illustrates the way in which the

performer drew the students in, encouraging them to think about the answers to

their questions rather than giving them the information alone. The students

asked a range of questions about the importance of oral story-telling in the

Medieval period; the nature of Chaucer's audience and how he earned his

living; and the language of *The Canterbury Tales.* Throughout, the performer

demonstrated his knowledge of the topic, often using contemporary references

to relate the society of Chaucer to the students. He was quite informal with the

students, using humour in his responses and references to popular culture.

Towards the end of the session, an overhead 'Tannoy' message in the gallery

disrupted the conversation and the performer announced that it was time for

him to leave. Before he left, the performer asked them if they 'liked the outfit'

and one student asked him if he wore it everyday, to which he replied, 'No I

don't do this everyday' (again emphasising that he is not really Harry Baille?)

The students thanked the performer with a round of applause before he left the

space.

'Medieval London Study Day' (School 2)

Two performances on the Black Death were observed as part of School 2's visit to the Museum of London, as the students were divided into two groups for the day-long session. The first performance observed was for Group 2. The Black Death drama took place in the Medieval London gallery in the same place as the performance for School 1 ('Books and Printing' space at the very back of the gallery). Chairs were laid out for the pupils of Group 2 in a horseshoe shape, with space left in the middle for the performer so he could move 'amongst' the seated pupils.[838] Throughout the performance, 'Harry' made expansive use of the space to ensure that he engaged the whole audience.

The drama was in the form of a monologue from Harry Baille, with a small amount of participation for the students, followed by a short question and answer session. The students had been asked to prepare questions in advance (which for Group 2 had been part of their homework the night before). 'Harry' was dressed in a costume consisting of a dark blue woollen jerkin, rough-looking trousers and boots, overlain with a beige jerkin. Apart from being surrounded by medieval objects in the gallery, a sense of the medieval past was built entirely through the appearance and the words of the performer. During the performance the noise from the gallery could be distracting. Curious members of the public also stopped to watch the drama from time to time.

The drama was a mixture of social history around the time of the Black Death and the 'story' of Harry Baille, a survivor of the plague. Harry Baille introduced

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[838] The performer for all three performances at the Museum of London was the same.

himself as an innkeeper at the Tabard Inn in Southwark. He explained that he

wanted the pupils to come on a journey with him, a journey back in time. Pupils

were asked to close their eyes and imagine that they were travelling back to

'the year of our Lord 1377.' 'Harry' explained that he would be telling them a

story about a very black time in English history when a Great Pestilence swept

across the known world and killed many people. To demonstrate how many

people died he asked twelve pupils to stand up. Each pupil was given a

number (either one or two) and a 'character' from Princess Joan, daughter of

King Edward, to a 'filthy beggar woman' (which provokes laughter from the rest

of the group). After the pupils had 'acted out' their characters, 'Harry' then

asked all the pupils who had been given the number one to sit down, leaving

the remaining six standing. In this way the activity demonstrated that half the

population of England died from the Black Death. Furthermore, the Pestilence

affected rich and the poor alike, so Princess Joan and the Mother Superior

'died' whilst the 'filthy beggar woman' lived. Nobody at the time understood why

this happened and 'Harry' tells the students how 'educated opinion' advised

people to deal with the threat in the following ways. This included: locking

yourself and your family away; eating no old beef or poultry; not mashing butter

in food; thinking positive, beautiful thoughts or having flowers about the house;

or handling gold and valuable stones.

During the drama, few visual props were used aside from two masks which

'Harry' used at significant moments in his narrative to change his appearance.

For instance he put on a red mask and became much more threatening in his

manner (even intimidating) in order to illustrate how 'looters and brigands' took

advantage of the social chaos during the Black Death to 'take whatever they want and do what they like' without fear of repercussion. A second mask transformed 'Harry' into a physician and in this character he described the symptoms of the Black Death in gruesome detail and how the people of the Middle Ages attempted to cure a disease that took such hold on its victims that it was said, 'you could lunch with your friends and supper with your ancestors and the saints in Heaven.'

Although 'Harry' was a survivor of the plague, the performance conveyed that the life of a plague survivor was not an enviable one. He had lost his father, mother and six of his brothers and sisters to the plague when he was a young boy and he had to resort to begging and stealing to stay alive. Detailed information was given from the Medieval perspective about how the Black Death originated; how it spread from the Genoese merchants who caught it from the Tartars in Caffa or it came from evil wizards in the Far East who brewed the 'poison' as a terrible storm which spread through the world. The sense that there was nothing that could be done to prevent the spread of disease came out powerfully, and interesting little vignettes were given about how people reacted e.g. the Flagellants who felt that they had to atone for mankind's sins by whipping themselves in gory public displays. 'Harry's' reaction to the plague was also conveyed in how he did not understand why he has survived when so many other people had died. It was also a mystery to him why the plague started to disappear after 1350, coming back in 1371 before dying out completely. There is some discussion of the social impact of the plague, e.g. because there were fewer people in society wages rose and some

people were able to have a better quality of life. 'Harry' concluded by asking the students if better wages were a fair trade for all the people that died and told the pupils that he 'thanks God everyday that I am still alive.'

At the end of his narrative, 'Harry' told the pupils that he will return them to the 'present' but before he has to return to 1377, do they have any questions for him? Possibly because it was their first session of the day, the pupils were reluctant to ask questions until prompted by their teacher, then a few hands went up. Most of the questions repeated what had been said in the performance (because they had been pre-prepared). Students asked where Harry lived, what he did to try and prevent the plague, and 'how hygienic were people in the Middle Ages?' 'Harry' answered all the questions in character before it was time for him to leave and return to 1377. The group thanked 'Harry' for showing them 'the true horrors of London at that time,' and he left the space to disappear into the Medieval London gallery.

Speaking to the performer before the session for Group 1, he remarked that it was much harder than the 'Chaucer in Context' session to inject any humour in considering the subject matter ('it will not bring a smile to their face'). The noise in the gallery was considerably less for the second group as most of the school groups had gone. The structure of the drama was very similar to the performance for the first group, although the actual words and interaction with the group were different because of their responses. A few of the pupils were taking notes during the drama and from my position at the back of the horseshoe (rather than at the entrance to the space) I could hear their reactions

to the drama more clearly. For instance, when the actor put the looter/brigand mask on, the pupils nearest to me responded with 'woah', expressing their surprise. They laughed (perhaps to cover their discomfort or embarrassment) when 'Harry' asked them if the mask had frightened them. Similarly to Group 2, before 'Harry' returned to his own time, he asked the pupils if they had any questions to ask him. They asked him about what caused the Black Death - which 'Harry' was careful to answer in character - the chances of people surviving the plague, what its symptoms were, and its impact on living conditions. As with the first group, many of these questions had been contained in the narrative of the performance but 'Harry' answered them patiently. At the end of the session, 'Harry' said that he had to 'return to his own time' and the group thanked him before they left the space to go and have their lunch. In this case, the performer left the space *after* the group.

A4.2 Living history performances at the Tower of London

During the fieldwork period, medieval living history performances at the Tower of London took place outside, and inside, the Medieval Palace (the extent to which more time was spent inside depended on the weather). School groups were met at the entrance of the Medieval Palace by the costumed interpreter and, depending upon the session, were taken on their tour of the Tower. Most of the tours made comparisons between the defensive structures built by William I (1066-1086) and the splendour of the Medieval Palace built by Edward I (1239-1307). Figures 16 and 17 (photographs taken by the author) provide an example of the exterior and interior of the Medieval Palace.

Figure 16: Exterior of the Medieval Palace

Figure 17: Interior of the Medieval Palace, the king's bed chamber

'Medieval Monarchy' (School 3)

The two 'Medieval Monarchy' sessions for School 3 took place inside and around the Medieval Palace, located in the outer curtain wall of the Tower. The first group was made up of around twenty Year 7 students (aged 11-12 years old). They met the costumed interpreter 'Isabella' at the entrance to the Medieval Palace, where she introduced herself, drawing attention to her costume. The session was in the form of a 'tour' externally taking in the White Tower, the Wakefield Tower and the interior of the Medieval Palace. Throughout the session, 'Isabella' asked the students questions, encouraging them to participate, think about and respond to the themes covered. Generally the students were keen to put their hands up and they were able to answer most of the interpreter's questions correctly, which she encouraged with praise. In terms of manner and delivery, 'Isabella' was clear and authoritative, and the conversation was packed with amusing anecdotes and stories of the Middle Ages alongside the factual information that she communicated to the students. The students were very attentive during the session, answering, and asking, many questions. They seemed to have a substantial amount of knowledge about the Middle Ages, including the terminology used and some of the key characters involved. The session covered a large amount of information about the Middle Ages for the students to absorb which included: castle-building and development from William I to Edward I; Edward I's view of monarchy and what the Medieval Palace reveals about that view; using material evidence to reconstruct life in the Middle Ages; medieval society, including the development and decline of the feudal system; religion; and the nature of the monarch's power (e.g. wealth, consumption, travelling household and personal rule).

Towards the end of the session there was time for the students to ask 'Isabella' some questions. One of the students wanted to know how William Wallace was executed, which the interpreter described in gruesome detail. At the end of the session, the group thanked the costumed interpreter, giving her a round of applause. Immediately after the session the students described it as 'good' and one boy thought it had been 'quite relaxing, the woman was nice.' They thought it had been 'funny' that one man had had to give a rose in exchange for his lands. They also thought that the Tower was interesting and the Medieval Palace looked a lot older than some of the buildings around it.

The second 'Medieval Monarchy' session was led by 'Isabella.' The structure of the session was very similar to the first one, although the actual content and the thread of the discussion varied in response to the students' responses. The second group appeared to be slightly less engaged than the first and the interpreter countered this with more liveliness in her performance and more provoking stories and facts to awaken their interest. This was confirmed when speaking to the costumed interpreter immediately after the session; she noted the difference in attitude and focus between the two groups and remarked that it was common for the groups around lunchtime to be more restless.

Medieval Chest (School 4 - adapted for their age)

The group of thirty students led by their Class Teacher and two other teachers, took part in the booked session with the costumed interpreter in the morning of their visit to the Tower of London. The costumed interpreter 'Alice' met the group outside, close to the shop. 'Alice' was very lively in her manner and had

a good clear voice, which enabled the children to hear her above the surrounding noise of other groups. During the session the interpreter worked hard to involve the children in the discussions and allowed them to voice their opinions whilst guiding them towards the 'correct' responses. She was also very good at getting the children involved in short role-playing activities, asking them questions and drawing them into the history of the site. One activity included dividing the group into two groups in order to 're-create' the succession crisis at the death of Edward the Confessor and the subsequent battle for the throne. Towards the end of the session, there was a short 'knighting ceremony' which involved two students chosen on the basis of how well they had worked in the previous activity.

Whilst clear ground rules were set in the introduction, the class were very well behaved and took part in all the activities throughout the session without needing much encouragement. There was a far greater emphasis on using story, drama and interaction than observed in the sessions with School 3. This links with the idea that younger students are far more willing to become involved in such activity, which was borne out by the enthusiasm of the students and their eagerness to take part. The session covered the Medieval period from the time of Edward the Confessor to Edward I, beginning in view of the White Tower and finishing inside the Medieval Palace.

Medieval Chest and Medieval Monarchy (School 5)

School 5 arrived late to the Tower of London. They had booked two sessions at the Tower of London - Medieval Chest and Medieval Monarchy - with the

intention of the group of forty students experiencing both sessions. The costumed interpreter leading both sessions, 'Harold', however explained that it was not possible to negotiate the space with such a large group and the school eventually agreed to have the two sessions back to back whilst the other group had a look around the Tower.

It was extremely busy inside the Medieval Palace because of the wet weather and throughout the session with the school, visitors stopped to watch what was going on. 'Harold' had a good, clear speaking voice so it was possible to hear him above the noise. The pace of the session was quite fast (which can partly be attributed to the pressure on time) and 'Harold' kept it lively, asking the boys many questions in rapid succession. He introduced himself to the students as a servant, showing how the costume that he was wearing identified him as such because of the material and colours used. The first session 'Medieval Chest' was an investigation of the different sources that could be used to recreate the past, focusing on the King's bedroom. The focus was on using skills of analysis to identify clues in the built environment and material culture (which included the items in the King's chamber and a number of replica artefacts) which would help the students to find out how people lived in the Middle Ages. The set of objects that created the most interest amongst the students was some replica armour which they enjoyed trying on. Some of the boys took photographs of their friends wearing it. There was also a difference in the response between the younger and older boys in the group. Whilst the younger boys tended to remain in their groups and focus on their objects, the older boys were much more restless and lively, walking about and generally being more noisy.

The objectives of the session were summarised at the end by 'Harold'; from the session the students would have: learnt about aspects of life from seven hundred years ago; developed the ability to analyse sources of evidence; and created a picture of life of the Middle Ages from objects, like the historians did when they recreated King Edward's chamber.

The second session covered 'Medieval Monarchy' in the period from William the Conqueror to the reign of Edward I. The group remained indoors because of the weather. The main themes covered included the development of the White Tower and the impact it had on the surrounding area and populace; the Medieval Palace and what it tells us about the change in the status and position of the monarchy; the re-construction of the Medieval Palace and how that had been achieved by historians; and an analysis of the Palace interior and the objects within it to see what it says about Medieval life and kingship.
At the end of the session, the students were given the opportunity to ask questions. Questions ranged from 'Is the bed comfortable' to 'why is the fireplace so enormous?' Most students were interested in the gruesome story of Richard Pudlicote, who had been skinned alive for stealing the crown jewels from Westminster Abbey. As a result of the session, 'Harold' hoped that the students would have learnt more about Edward I and the medieval period, and considered how medieval kings ruled the country.

Medieval Monarchy (School 6)
School 6, who were late for their session because of a prior visit, met the costumed interpreter 'Isabella' outside the Medieval Palace. The relationship

between the group and the interpreter seemed quite 'frosty' at first seemingly because of the late arrival of the group and the young people had difficulty engaging with the format of the session (their knowledge of the Middle Ages was limited). However as the session progressed and the students showed that they were interested, this tension began to subside.[839]

Like previous 'Medieval Monarchy' sessions, 'Isabella' started close to the White Tower and discussed with the students what they thought the Tower would have been used for; between them the group came up with military headquarters, a security centre, a safe place for the king to live, a prison and an administrative centre (the king kept his important paperwork here). The tour then went on to cover the developments that came in the centuries between the reign of William I and Edward I before reaching the Medieval Palace. In the Palace they looked at the way in which the building had been designed, how it had been re-constructed in the present-day and the messages that both the room and the objects within it conveyed about Medieval kingship. During the tour the students were very attentive, and attempted to answer the questions posed to them by 'Isabella', however they struggled sometimes to answer and 'Isabella' had to give them the answers. Compared to previous sessions, 'Isabella' focused for a longer time on the feudal system and discussing with the students how it developed into a mixture of services, money payments and other 'weird things' to replace the traditional military service. This provided an

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[839] In a later interview, the female teacher who accompanied the group considered that the facilitator had misjudged the students and their willingness to take part, associating her (in the teacher's words) 'aloof' and 'authoritarian' manner with the need to control what might be a potentially troublesome school group.

introduction to the more entertaining and light-hearted part of the session which took place in the King's throne room. The male teacher accompanying the group was asked to take on the role of King Edward I and he sat down on the throne. In order to illustrate the different services that were made to the King in return for land, 'Isabella' asked the students to volunteer to act out the following services to the 'King' on his throne. These included: a lady of Essex who came each year to the King's court and presented him with a rose; the Abbess of Barking who prayed for the King; and a gentleman from Essex who held land in return for coming to the King's Christmas court and for entertaining the assembled party with 'a whistle, a leap, and a fart.' The role-play was evidently enjoyed by the students and they were willing to take part despite the very public nature of the session. 'Isabella' concluded the session by explaining that they had seen 'the lighter side of life' in the Middle Ages, however the role of the King was a very serious one and very much depended upon his personality. There was time for questions at the end of the session and students were more interested in asking about the Tower buildings and who lived in them now rather than in the Middle Ages.

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