

Editorial: 'Ad fontes'

Lord Asa Briggs of Lewes sadly passed away on March 15th this year. Perhaps better known for his social history of the Victorian era, than his institutional histories of the BBC and Marks and Spencer, Briggs had played a key role in the Second World War as a member of Intelligence Corps staff in Hut 6 at Bletchley Park, a fact that featured prominently in a recently broadcast BBC documentary.¹ A memoir, *Secret Days: Codebreaking in Bletchley Park: A Memoir of Hut Six and the Enigma Machine*, was published in May 2011 to coincide with Lord Briggs' 90th birthday, and recounted his five years working alongside the likes of Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman. As is well known, central to the work of Hut 6 was the instrumental exploration of an abundance of encrypted messages. These were the only source of information, yet from them, complex codes were cracked 'sometimes even before they were read by their intended recipients'.² The members of Hut 6 sifted these messages, looking for unique insights into the contents of individual communications, as well as mapping patterns and protocols used between them; their methods varied, developed and advanced, but their sources remained steady. Briggs, as a historian, was perhaps particularly able to ascertain the significance of individual messages to their senders and receivers.

Possibly less widely known was Briggs' interest in the history of education, being a contributor to the first ever edition of our sister publication, *History of Education*. Within that article,³ he reflects on the then newer approaches to history (including sophisticated local histories that intersect with national histories; quantitative approaches; history from below; and analytical political histories) considering different types of history, and their roots and trajectories for growth. Whilst many of the approaches that Briggs labels as 'new' are now very much established, his discussion of them has become important as a primary source in the exploration of the history of history of education as a field of research.

Perhaps these methodological reflections were informed by Brigg's experiences in Hut 6. Key to deciphering Enigma machine messages from the German Army and Luftwaffe, which was pioneered by those in Hut 6 in the early 1940s, was the development of a number of new methods, including 'traffic analysis'. By focusing on certain clues in Enigma messages, it became possible for code-breakers to establish the identity and locations of German radio communication networks, a form of Social Network Analysis.

In his *History of Education* article, Briggs also considers the widening variety of sources available to the historian of education, suggesting that, to some extent, the new approaches are 'made possible by the availability of new materials', or through the 'analysis of bodies of data which were often collected for strictly limited immediate purposes'.⁴ Again there are echoes here of the work of Hut 6; none of the messages intercepted were intended to betray the enigmatic workings of the overarching system in which they were communicated, and yet it was often the most predictable and routine messages which disclosed the most.

¹ 'Bletchley Park: Code-breaking's Forgotten Genius', BBC, 7 Sept 2015. Television. (Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b069gxz7/bletchley-park-codebreakings-forgotten-genius>, last accessed April 28th 2016).

² 'Bletchley Park Code-breaking's Forgotten Genius', 17:24.

³ Briggs, A. 'The Study of the History of Education', *History of Education* 1, no.1 (1972): 5-22.

⁴ Briggs, The Study of the History of Education, 8; 7.

In relation to the history of education, Briggs mentions oral history, legislation and the debates behind it, materials on individual schools and school boards, together with the records kept, and papers published, by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). Throughout, there is an implicit assertion of the importance of handling sources appropriately. On the use of school logbooks and diaries, for example, he reminds the historian that we 'have to penetrate beneath the surface to some of the fundamental problems of language and communication which were as crucial in the nineteenth century as they are today'.⁵ However, in contrast to his methodological reflections, his discussion of historical sources remains as pertinent today as it was when written in 1972. The guidance is not only of historical interest, but also of relevance to our current praxis.

Briggs writes, in 1972, of the History of Education Society itself, commenting that—only five years after its establishment—it 'is poised at a particularly interesting moment in its short life'.⁶ 44 years after Briggs' article was published, and 49 years after the establishment of the Society, we again are poised at a particularly interesting moment in the Society's life, as we look forward to celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2017.

There are many exciting plans under discussion for the marking of this achievement, and one to which we wish to draw our readers' attention is a planned 'Special Edition' of this journal. We plan to publish a collection featuring a number of short, autobiographical, and personal reflections on the past, present and future of the Society for publication in the May 2017 edition. We envisage a range of informally written contributions, with authors writing brief responses to a series of questions; a sort of written interview. We'd like to know what first ignited an interest in the history of education; which three books on history and/or the history of education specifically have been the most influential in your career; what was your greatest breakthrough moment in research; what was the biggest challenge you faced, and how did you overcome it; what experiences have you of teaching the history of education and what approaches consistently worked well. We'd also like to think about the kind of sources you have worked with, trying to understand what are the joys and sorrows associated with them. Finally, we might ask what advice you would give a budding historian of education starting out in their career today. If you would like to contribute in this vein to the planned Special Issue, please get in touch, with Jonathan in the first instance (J.Doney@exeter.ac.uk). We hope to create a resource that not only contributes to the 50th anniversary celebrations, but also provides future historians of the Society with a rich and revealing primary source.

The variety of sources relevant to historians of education, as noticed by Asa Briggs, still continues to expand, and the assortment of material available is exemplified in the range of articles we bring together in this edition. Patrice Milewski bases his article, *An oral history of students' experiences of teachers and school during the 1930s*, on a series of oral history interviews centering around elementary schooling in Canada in the late 1930s. He identifies and discusses some of the methodological tensions that arose from the use of oral history interviews in relation to his reading of Foucault, something which initially led him to put the interviews aside. His decision to re-examine the material demonstrates the fruitfulness of returning to the sources, as well as highlighting the vital interconnectedness of method and source selection.

⁵ Briggs, *The Study of the History of Education*, 17.

⁶ Briggs, *The Study of the History of Education*, 9.

Jane Dove takes as her source, a nineteenth century board game. In *Contextualising Wallis's Picturesque Round Game of the produce and manufactures of the counties of England and Wales*, Dove examines the context of the games production and use, arguing that such sources, whilst providing important insights (especially in terms of informal and home-based education), are frequently overlooked in the history of education. With deep regret we report that Jane died shortly after her article had been accepted for publication in the *Researcher*. As editors, and on behalf of the History of Education Society, we extend our deepest condolences to her family and friends.

In '*For you seem principally to indulge in brain work pure and simple*': *Utilising Life History Methods to Connect Women's Education and Agency in Nineteenth-Century America*, Annmarie Valdes focuses on documentary archival sources, bringing together sources 'which may initially seem disconnected' to develop a re-telling of the relationship between women's lives and the spaces in which those lives were lived out, and drawing upon fragmented archival remnants in order to do so.

Archival sources, albeit from a different era, and a different locale, are a key source for John Black's *Micro-History of Nelson Haden County Secondary Modern Boys School, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Focusing on the HMI Inspection of October 1959*. He draws on a range of documentary sources from national and local archives, interspersing his analysis of these with his personal reflections on, and recollections of, the documented events. This combination leads to a fascinating insight into the history of a specific school, set in a specific location, and considered over a specific time.

Reading more widely within these pages, the preponderance of sources continues beyond the articles, through the book reviews, the call for papers for the Society's Annual Conference, and the advertisement of Seminars and Conferences in *Notes and News*. These items are not written in a secret code to be broken, and do not seek to hide the activities of a belligerent enemy! On the contrary, they plainly present the ongoing vigour and friendly activities of the History of Education Society, its promotion of teaching and research in the field, its celebration of methodological pluralism and diversification of source selection, and its desire to preserve and facilitate access to primary sources in the history of education. Whilst they are substantive in content, they are also something more; evidence of a Society and community of inquiry vibrantly engaged in the work of 'decoding' and 'deciphering' the traces of the educational past that have been left to us.

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