Contested pasts: Improving sixth form students' understanding of historical interpretations

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ABSTRACT

The study of historical interpretations is a statutory requirement but is also important in and of itself: history can only be understood with recognition that the past is contested and that interpretations are formed through the activities of the disciplinary community. Moreover, as McAleavy (2002) has argued, through studying historical interpretations, students can grasp that there are 'no monopolies on the truth' - a crucial appreciation for an informed citizen.

This action research project aimed to discover how an introductory taught course, supplemented by supported independent study, could improve students' understanding of historical interpretations in the context of their A-level coursework. Student interviews and questionnaires provided baseline data, which was reviewed, with the findings used to plan the introductory lessons. These focused particularly on increasing pupil awareness of the methodology of historians and the conventions of the disciplinary community they work within. Qualitative data, such as audio transcripts and pupil work, was collected and analysed during this period. Following the completion of these lessons, a further review demonstrated that whilst pupils had advanced in their understanding, further intervention was required to better equip them with the skills necessary to pursue independent evaluation of historical interpretations, and so a second action research cycle ensued. Pupils then undertook a period of supported independent study to produce their final assignment. Collaboration with colleagues was crucial to the success of the project, particularly during the planning stages, and in communication regarding pupil progress during their independent research and writing.

The findings demonstrate that pupils progressed in their understandings of how and why interpretations differ, although some unevenness is evident in the progress achieved between individual students. Focusing on the methodology and disciplinary constraints historians work under helped pupils to move away from simple subjectivist views of academic history, and gave them a deeper understanding of the discipline which they were able to communicate in their final essays. Ultimately, the process of researching and writing academic history needs to be made more transparent to pupils, and a greater focus on meaningful interpretations work should be included throughout Key Stage 3 and 4 in preparation for the demands of A-Level.

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1. Introduction and rationale

The teaching of historical interpretations is inextricably linked with conceptions of what is meant by 'doing' history. This brings into sharp focus the connection – or perhaps, in some instances, the divide – between the academic discipline and the school subject. Seixas (1993, p.319) argues that history teachers 'occupy a key position between two communities organised around history knowledge and history learning'. As such, their understanding of what history is, and what their pupils are capable of, has a crucial impact on the nature of the subject. For example, Harris et al. (2013, p.29) noted that some teachers perceive pupils as skilful junior historians, engaging 'directly in the process of constructing historical knowledge', whereas other teachers place greater importance on ensuring pupils have a bank of substantive knowledge or 'mental map of the past', believing that the academic discipline is an overly complex basis for the school subject. Irrespective of which camp teachers may fall into, the increasing emphasis placed on historical interpretations at both GCSE and A-Level means that ideas relating to subsequent constructions of the past cannot be ignored and must be confronted in the classroom.

The issues surrounding the teaching of historical interpretations reflect an intellectual debate which has had a palpable impact on the way the concept is approached in secondary education (Cruse, 2011). Postmodernist thinkers (e.g. White, 1973; Jenkins, 1999) have argued against the view that there is a 'dead reality independent of the inquiry' (Elton, 1967, p.73). They instead contend that honest, objective historical claims cannot be made because the chief manner of explanation is an ideological narrative constructed and imposed on the past (Munslow, 1997). Such arguments have been countered by historians such as Evans (1997) and Fulbrook (2002), and political scientists such as Bevir (1994), who claim that to accept the notion of a fluid past is not to automatically reject attempts at historical objectivity – a view that can be located somewhere between the two extremes

of postmodernism and naïve empiricism, and one which is based on according importance to the scrutiny of the disciplinary community and parameters of good practice set by fellow professionals. Much of the teaching of historical interpretations in schools adheres to this view, and is predicated on both teachers and pupils understanding that valid historical accounts are possible, despite the intrinsic mutability of the past.

The assessment of pupil understanding of historical interpretations has taken a more central position in both GCSE and A-Level qualifications in their most recent guises. It is interesting to consider why this disputed concept has become such an important component of school history – especially when in recent years there has also been a stronger official emphasis on pupils' acquiring substantive knowledge (see, for example, Evans, 2013). One reason why the study of historical interpretations is so significant is because for many it constitutes what is recognised as history itself – evidence of the past analysed and understood through the mind of an historian, and presented for public scrutiny. Yet, the study of historical interpretations is often an area by which pupils are confounded (Chapman, 2011). Coffin (2006, p.167) has argued that the appraisal of historical interpretations is not a proficiency that 'would be easily and naturally acquired in everyday interaction', and many pupils find this an impenetrable element of their history courses.

Such difficulties for pupils have been compounded by a lack of coherence in various iterations of official policy documents. For example, the last National Curriculum document (DfE, 2013) for Key Stage 3 stated that pupils should 'recognise how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed', but did not make explicit how pupils might begin to grasp such complexity. The most recent directives from Ofqual (2014) have gone some way towards specifying demands on GCSE and sixth-from pupils' understanding with greater precision, but there is still a

certain degree of latitude in the way these ideas have been translated into assessments by the different examination boards.

The rationale for this project – to explore pedagogical methods of improving sixth-form pupils' understanding of historical interpretations – is multifarious. My previous experience of teaching this concept led me to believe that it is one of the most challenging aspects of pupils' study. This idea was supported by my findings in Part II, where I investigated Year 12 pupils' ideas and understandings regarding historical interpretations, and also by the literature (e.g. Harwood, 2008; Chapman, 2007) and inspection evidence such as Ofsted's 2004 report which singled out interpretations as the most demanding facet of National Curriculum history. Thus official organisations, academic researchers and teachers investigating their own practice all appear to agree that historical interpretations can prove a tricky obstacle for pupils to negotiate. It therefore seems a worthy area of focus to ascertain which strategies can best help pupils advance their understanding.

Ofqual's (2014) most recent outline of the requirements for A-Level history courses gives an enhanced status to the study of historical interpretations. The different exam boards must now ensure that Assessment Objective 3 (AO3) – which states that pupils must 'analyse and evaluate, in relation to the historical context, different ways in which aspects of the past have been interpreted' (ibid, p.11) – makes up 20 to 30 per cent of the total A-Level assessment. More specifically, there is now a strong focus on the work of professional historians, as all A-Level specifications must 'require students to develop an understanding of the nature and purpose of history as a discipline and how historians work' (ibid, p.15). AO3 is assessed differently across the separate examination boards in England. For example, 15 per cent of the total 20 per cent weighting for AQA (2014) comes with a compulsory examination question in component 1, where pupils are given three interpretations

from historians and are asked to assess which they find most convincing. The remaining 5 per cent AO3 marks for AQA come in component 3, the independent investigation, where pupils use both primary and secondary sources in their independent coursework investigation. OCR's AO3 assessment structure follows a similar format, with 15 per cent based on the unit group 3 examination, and the remaining 5 per cent assessed in the topic based essay. The OCR specification does, however, make the greatest demands on pupils for the examined unit by stating that pupils are required to 'show an understanding of the wider historical debate connected to the issues' (OCR, 2014, p.68). Pearson (2014) has the largest proportion of their A-Level assessment devoted to AO3, totalling 25 per cent. This is spread between an interpretations examination question and an independent coursework task. The examination question is based on two differing interpretations from historians, which forms part of the Paper 1 Breadth Study, and is worth 10 per cent of the AO3 marks. The final 15 per cent of AO3 marks make up the majority of the independent coursework grade. My school follows the Pearson specification, which gave greater impetus to my study, not only because of the weight given to AO3 across the entire qualification, but because so much emphasis is placed on pupil understanding of interpretations in the coursework assignment. I have previously found that many pupils find the extended independent investigation a daunting prospect, and this had the potential to be a real challenge in combination with the fact that the study of interpretations can pose its own problems, even during a fully taught component.

Finally, perhaps the most important motivation for this research is that the study of historical interpretations has the potential to help pupils develop processes of rigorous and analytical thought, which can become 'context-independent' (Young, 2009, p.14). An argument cited by McAleavy for making this concept a statutory requirement in the first National Curriculum was that it might constitute 'valuable training for future citizens of a democracy' (DES 1990b: 11, in McAleavy, 2002, p.82). Indeed, in an era where pupils can access mass information from a plethora of legitimate and

non-legitimate sources as never before, and where discussion of ‘fake news’ dominates the headlines, it is the duty of history teachers to help pupils recognise that the past is not simply a matter of opinion, where each different version holds equal explanatory weight (Ford, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is an historical interpretation?

As a contested concept, it is important to define the way in which 'historical interpretation' is understood and used throughout this project. The key element common to all definitions of historical interpretation is their 'subsequence' (Mastin and Wallace, 2006, p.6). They are 'chronologically distant' (McAleavy in Card, 2004, p.6) creations, constructed in a different era to the historical event under examination. More encompassing definitions of historical interpretations might include popular representations such as internet sites (Moore, 2000), war memorials (Wrenn, 1998), museum displays (Wrenn, 1999), Hollywood film (Brown and Wrenn, 2005) and historical fiction; and the use of this wide variety of interpretations has been explored to good effect by a range of practitioners. However, to fit in with the scope of my pupils' coursework task, the chief focus of this project is interpretations constructed by professional historians. Whilst these specific types of interpretation will provide the basis for this literature review, research based on non-academic historical interpretations will be taken into account where it is judged to provide instructive findings applicable to my project.

When defining 'historical interpretation', a fundamental consideration is the conceptualisation of the past itself. The academic researcher, Chapman (2017, p.103), who has written widely on the subject of historical interpretations, sees the past as 'inherently fluid', and interpretations as 'inherently plural and variable'. This adds an extra layer of complexity when considering interpretations that were created in an era that can also be considered 'the past' – for example, Victorian ideas about King John. A sophisticated understanding of the nature of continually changing historical interpretations therefore requires pupils to have a strong sense of both the period being interpreted and the period of interpretation construction – Card's 'double vision' (Card, 2004, p.6).

Whilst appreciating that this dual contextualisation is demanding enough in itself, Carroll (2017), has recently argued that pupils need to go 'from 'double vision' to 'panorama' (p.35). Carroll's (2017) practitioner research suggests pupils require a chronological framework spanning the period of the interpreted past to the period of interpretation in order to avoid the issue of 'event space', where pupils see history as a range of seemingly disconnected events spaced by empty gaps. The study of historical interpretations is therefore fraught with complexity, and unsurprisingly many pupils find engaging with such challenging material a perplexing task. A statutory requirement since the inception of the National Curriculum in 1991, the study of historical interpretations in school history has been strongly affected by academic understandings of the concept, and an exploration of this philosophical debate is essential to fully appreciate the puzzlement of pupils, and steps that might be taken to address this.

2.2 How has the academic debate over historical interpretations informed the teaching of school history?

Postmodernism has provided a challenge to the study of historical interpretations, in particular through the contention that there can be no true objective 'uncovering' of history because there is no 'fixed' past to reveal. An upshot of this is that postmodernists share a core belief that any notion of a discrete, 'correct' view is unsound – indeed, the more extreme postmodernist outlook would argue that interpretations of history are all equally valid since objective historical knowledge does not exist. Of course, this school of thought is problematic for the discipline of history as a whole, with some of the more radical theorists questioning its very existence (Jenkins, 1999). Yet, opposing these postmodernist extremes, other academics have provided robust justifications for history (Evans, 1997; Fulbrook, 2002; Bevir, 1994), and it is these 'defences' which have moulded the approach taken by schools when teaching historical interpretations, albeit somewhat untidily. It is

therefore important to grasp the implications of this academic debate, and how the key tenets have filtered down to form accepted norms of good practice in teaching.

Nineteenth-century empiricism has been strongly, and arguably rightly, challenged by postmodernism in many areas. The academic educationist Husbands (1996) provides a good overview of the debate in his exploration of the problem that 'evidence' does not automatically allow the possibility of an empirically truthful account. For Husbands, this is principally because the presentism inextricably linked with the creation of an historical interpretation means that 'no intellectually valid reconstruction can be attempted' (p.56) due to the vast chronological gulf separating the interpreter from the past they seek to explain.

Carr's (1961) well-known assertion that historical 'facts' do not exist unless woven into an interpretive narrative holds sway here. Simply put, we cannot accept the existence of a core of irrefutable factual evidence lying dormant, waiting to be revealed and presented uncorrupted by the objective historian. Yet we do not need to accept postmodern relativism to accede to the view of a fluid past. Bevir (1994) and Fulbrook (2002) have done important work paving a path somewhere between the empiricist and postmodern theories, arguing that rigorous and meaningful disciplinary scholarship can be achieved, when adhering to certain processes. This 'intermediate view' (Coffin, 2006, p.9) is explained in Fulbrook's (2002, p. 185) conception of history as 'like seeing through a glass darkly. It is neither a transparent window on the past, nor a picture, constructed in the present, replacing a past which we can never really know'. Ultimately, this is the conception of history which has gained greatest acceptance in schools, and which provides the basis for the study of historical interpretations enshrined in the statutory requirements (DfE, 2013). By further exploring this particular understanding of what it means to 'do' history, we can more fully understand the

struggles pupils face when attempting to grapple with historical interpretations and recognise strategies that have the potential to expedite pupil progression.

In essence, the challenge to both postmodernism and empiricism asserts that the construction of historical interpretations can legitimately take place within an accepted disciplinary framework, one which recognises the methodological and conceptual constraints historians face. One of the main concepts that requires full exposition in this view is that of objectivity. Empiricist absolute objectivity is refuted by theorists such as Bevir (1994, p.333), who subscribe to a different notion: namely, that 'objectivity rests not on conclusive tests against a given past, but as a process of comparison between rival theories'. For Bevir, objectivity does not exist in the pure empiricist sense, but the postmodern argument against any form of objectivity is also rejected because objectivity is possible through a thorough, criterial comparison of the historical discipline's acceptance of a comprehensive array of facts. Therefore, a great enough factual consensus exists amongst the disciplinary community to allow them to 'debate the merits of their respective views' (ibid, p.334), making it possible to critically judge the relative quality of a plurality of historical claims. Megill (2007, p.113) has refined this idea further, outlining four different, interrelated conceptions of objectivity, with the explanation of 'procedural objectivity' coming closest to that pursued by the history profession. As he defines it, procedural objectivity:

> *aims at the practice of an impersonal method of investigation. Here, the suspicion of subjectivity that is prominent in both the absolute and the disciplinary senses of objectivity is pursued in abstraction from the belief that excluding subjectivity necessarily brings truth with it. Here the aim is less to attain truth than to avoid error.*

Young (2008) has taken ideas regarding an accepted disciplinary conception of objectivity further with his 'social-realist' theory of knowledge, stressing that in addition to the 'social dimension' (the disciplinary consensus regarding concepts and accepted methodology) a 'realist dimension' (the

logic and judiciousness of the explanation) should also be accounted for. Thus a further requirement of meaningful interrogation of historical interpretations is that the disciplinary community operates with the 'intellectual honesty' (Fulbrook, 2002, p.196) to respond to new evidence and arguments.

The idea that judgements can be made regarding the relative superiority of historical interpretations because of the historical community's discipline, rectitude and intellectual rigour partially explains the way in which historical interpretations are conceptualised and studied in secondary schools. Yet this remains an undeniably complex challenge for most pupils. To achieve a solid understanding of interpretations, pupils need to appreciate that the past is contested, and that when historians construct a claim they necessarily frame their accounts with both self and externally imposed criteria. Once engaged in the complex work of claim evaluation, pupils are required to 'test' the interpretations against a backdrop of established factual evidence, whilst also taking into account the multiplicity of other competing claims before reaching a verdict. This is a hugely demanding challenge, made doubly so by the intricacy of the academic debate, and the apparent difficulty of translating this into coherent curricular requirements, which are then subject to further interpretation by teachers and schools (Ford, 2017).

2.3 What are the statutory requirements for the teaching of historical interpretations, and what implications have these had for teaching?

The study of historical interpretations was included in the first National Curriculum (NC) for two reasons: first, as a safeguard against the potential hazard of any one ideology dominating prescribed teaching content; and second, due to the feeling that the use of the work of academic historians had been previously lacking (Harris et. al, 2013, p.125). Since then the study of historical interpretations has remained a statutory requirement for Key Stage 3 throughout each successive NC revision (for

example, QCA, 2007, DfE, 2013), and has also begun to appear in GCSE and A-Level assessment criteria, with an ever greater emphasis on pupil evaluation. However, whilst progress has been made in the teaching and assessment of this concept, this development has not been smooth or consistent, particularly in terms of coherence across key stages. Recognition of the evolving curricular requirements and their translation into the classroom is necessary in order to appreciate the challenges pupils face when studying this concept.

McAleavy (1993), as part of the History Working Group for the National Curriculum, was instrumental in helping to amplify the strands of 'Attainment Target 2' (AT2) as it was then packaged, arguing that AT2 represented 'a new development in history teaching', which had the possibility of enlarging 'the scope of history education by helping pupils to make a discriminating assessment of different interpretations' (p.14). In McAleavy's exemplification of AT2 he provides many ideas which still provide the basis for effective teaching of interpretations, notably the claim that such work must be situated within secure contextual knowledge, and that 'interpretations are dependent, if they are of historical worth, on evidence' (p.14). However, there are elements of McAleavy's work which we might now question, for example his assertion that:

there is no necessary hierarchy of truthfulness or accuracy across the types of interpretations. Academic research is often partisan and can be inaccurate. A popular novel or film can be based on a balanced and judicious use of evidence (ibid, p.16).

If we accept the view that the academic community of historians adheres to the 'disciplinary objectivity' (Megill, 2007) outlined previously, it would be wrong to allow pupils to believe that a popular film can be as historically valid as the work of an academic historian, or indeed that they can be evaluated in the same way. Whilst the profession appears to have advanced beyond this belief that any interpretation, irrespective of genre or type, can be meaningfully compared, it still lingered

in controlled assessment tasks at GCSE until recently (Pearson, 2013), arguably to the detriment of the understanding of the pupils attempting them.

Key Stage 3 has traditionally given teachers more freedom to design original and rigorous enquiries that help pupils appreciate the full complexity of historical interpretations, including giving them the opportunity to engage in the process of historical knowledge construction (Counsell, 2013). Brown and Wrenn (2005) discovered that before reaching secondary school, primary pupils were able to achieve nuanced understandings of historical interpretations through a tightly focused enquiry question and carefully scaffolded activities in work on Alexander the Great. However, at GCSE there has been discontent from some practitioners, such as McFahn (2015), who argue that the standards by which pupils' understanding of historical interpretations has been externally assessed represent a confusing regression for pupil understanding. For example, the controlled assessment task in Edexcel's 2013 specification (Pearson, 2013) — worth 25 per cent of the total GCSE grade — asked pupils to evaluate three representations and then to judge which they considered 'best'. Although pupils were directed toward outlining criteria as a basis for judgement, the task's value was lost due to its contrived nature, as pupils were encouraged to partake in relatively shallow evaluation (Howells, 2007) for which they could still achieve high marks. Another criticism of this task was the expectation for pupils to compare a bewildering collection of representations — including contemporary sources — which should not be classed as interpretations at all. Consequently, these flaws meant rigorous disciplinary evaluation could not take place, and by muddying the waters between contemporary and subsequent constructions there was the potential to add to pupils' confusion regarding interpretations and how they should be approached.

The reformed linear GCSE specifications from 2016 seem to offer more hope. For example, the Edexcel specification outlines that pupils should:

> *understand a range of reasons why interpretations may differ. They should be aware that differences based on conclusions drawn from evidence are legitimate and can be explained. They should be able to evaluate given interpretations using their own knowledge of the period.* (Pearson, 2015, p.37)

The new specification states that pupils will be asked to explain how and why interpretations differ, and should understand the relationship between evidence and interpretation construction – which seems a positive change. Indeed, new GCSE textbooks published for the 2016 specification contain some useful activities designed to help pupils consider these key questions, even focusing on historians' methodologies (for example, Whittock, 2016). However, whilst still a definite improvement on the previous specifications, issues remain regarding assessment, particularly in the question asking pupils why the two interpretations on their paper differ. In an examination context, with the interpretations boiled down to short extracts, it appears that most pupils are likely to approach this question with a 'learned response' of potential reasons for differences in historians' claims that does not require deep thought or full engagement.

It seems, then, that external assessment at Key Stage 4 does not necessarily provide a sound basis for development of a sophisticated understanding of historical interpretations. It is left to teachers to negotiate the way in which the school curriculum has partially accepted the complexities of the academic debate, and in turn provide a compass by which their pupils might navigate the intricacies of the study of historical interpretations when even those involved in mapping the curriculum have found it difficult to chart pupil progression in a coherent manner (Lee, 2001).

A further, if equally important, consideration is the pre-existing ideas the pupils themselves bring into the classroom. Pupil beliefs about the past can have a fundamental impact on their ability to understand historical interpretations, particularly in terms of embracing different conceptions of

historical objectivity (Lee and Shemilt, 2004). This is why uncovering pupils' existing understanding is essential in supporting their intellectual development regarding historical interpretations (Lee and Shemilt, 2004). It can also be instructive in alerting us to new pedagogical approaches with the potential to enrich pupil thought.

2.4 What preconceptions do pupils commonly bring to their study of historical interpretations, and how can this inform our thinking regarding progression?

As we have established, historical interpretation is often considered a challenging concept, and too often interpretations work can appear confused (Davies, 2011). In addition to the somewhat untidy way the complex academic debate has been translated into curricular requirements, a further explanation for the difficulties faced lies in the existing understandings that pupils' hold of the past. Pupils are not clean slates, and uncovering and addressing any misconceptions about the nature of history is a crucial task that underpins effective teaching of historical interpretations. Whilst not history-specific, Donovan and Bransford's (1999) analysis of the research on effective pupil learning found that if pupils' 'initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp new concepts and information that are taught' (p.10). This applies to the study of historical interpretations, as pupils will struggle to fully understand the concept if they approach their work with an unshakable belief that one 'true' version of the past exists. Teachers therefore need to discover and, where necessary, challenge pupil preconceptions to aid progression in their understanding of this concept.

Secondary school history subscribes to the idea of a contested past, but also subscribes to the idea that historical interpretations rest on an agreed basis of unassailable factual evidence, and can be

rigorously compared by criterial evaluation. For pupils to advance in their understanding of historical interpretations, it is thus crucial to discern whether their initial conception of history reflects these ideas, as 'understanding progression and knowing about students' prior conceptions are two sides of the same coin' (Lee and Shemilt, 2004, p.25). Given the academic intricacy of this particular view of history, it is unsurprising that many pupils do not recognise it, instead labouring under misconceptions detrimental to their understanding, unless teachers uncover and engage with them (Lee, 2001; Lee and Shemilt, 2004; Foster, 2011; Richards, 2012; Murray, 2015). A further point of contention here is the thorny issue of progression, with some suggesting that a linear model of progression for historical interpretations is not feasible as 'pupils do not acquire historical skills in a neat and uniform way' and 'even if they did, the variety and complexity of historical interpretations would soon cloud judgements' (Mastin and Wallace, 2006, p.8). This is true in the sense that assessment criteria for interpretation work should be task specific; but the work of Lee (2005) has been instructive in showing that a roadmap of pupil progression begins to emerge from an exploration of frequently held pupil beliefs regarding evidence and historical claims. As a result, recognising some of the commonly held pupil preconceptions can assist teachers in deploying the most suitable strategies to develop understanding.

Lee and Shemilt (2004) outline six stages of progression in pupils' thinking about the past. At the most basic level, pupils comprehend history as a series of events that have to be witnessed to be believed – eyewitness evidence is key. The most common step beyond this for pupils is to subscribe to an empiricist view: accepting that history is possible providing there is surviving evidence, but assuming that this evidence is proof of one uncontested past. The evidence suggests that this is the way most pupils conceive of history until Year 9, viewing history as 'a compilation of information, thought of as pre-existent, waiting to be found and marshalled' (Lee, 2001). The language of historical interpretations can perpetuate this particular pupil misconception. Coffin (2006, p.140) has argued that historians often 'portray a false objectivity', presenting their interpretations as fact

through a convincing writing style. Through her linguistic analysis, Coffin (2006) concluded that many pupils do not have literacy skills advanced enough to recognise the specific linguistic methods employed by the persuasive historian and consequently accept the conclusions uncritically. This is problematic in two respects. Firstly, it means pupils often view disagreements between historians as basic differences of personal opinion (Foster, 2011), 'a source of illegitimate positioning leading to distortion' (Lee and Shemilt, 2004, p.28). The second issue that arises is the view that one historian must be right and another wrong, as the historian's job is to write an account that most closely mirrors a fixed past (Chapman, 2011).

Pupil acceptance of such a simple realist approach is fraught with issues because of the strong correlation between the validity of an interpretation and its basis in known evidence (Richards, 2012). Practitioner research has shown that pupils adhering to this view often reject accounts which show any explicit authorial perspective because this is seen as a pollution of the 'true' past, which should be communicated as objectivity as possible (Cassedy et al., 2011). Howells (2005) suggests that assessment practices have led to this view being reinforced rather than challenged, as GCSE mark schemes have previously rewarded pupils for commenting on the account origin in a stereotypical, generalised fashion. A further, very different, type of reinforcement can emerge from pupils' own identities, particularly when studying personal and emotive history. McCully and Pilgrim (2004) recognised that in their specific context of a Northern Irish secondary school many pupils were deeply wedded to particular views of the past. These preconceptions required open discussion to avoid 'a dislocation between history studied in school and that peddled in the community' (ibid, p.19), and to avoid pupils automatically disregarding any account which ran contrary to their understanding of the 'true' past.

However, Lee and Shemilt's (2004) work identifies a point at which most pupils become aware that all subsequent accounts are, at least partly, a result of authorial perspective. Lee (2001) suggests

that this process begins in early Key Stage 3, when it can become a source of huge bafflement for pupils, because once there is a recognition that the past is constructed (rather than uncovered) many pupils see all historical claims as having equivalent validity. Pupils adhering to this simple subjectivism (Cassedy et al., 2011) view historical claims as mere opinion, with differences understood usually as a consequence of the historian's identity (Foster, 2011). Foster (2011) also realised that pupil literacy was key in reinforcing the simple subjectivist view, as many of her Year 9 pupils concluded that the argumentative nature of historians' writing meant that interpretations could be classed as personal disagreements. This view can persist throughout school and beyond, with Chapman (2011) recognising that his sixth-form pupils viewed historical interpretations as the end result of a process whereby a historian used persuasive rhetorical devices to present carefully selected and manipulated evidence that matched their preconceived idea of the past. Murray's (2015) work supports this, with sixth-form pupils often seeing no distinction between an historical interpretation and a historian's personal opinion. Quite apart from the intellectual problems of the persistence of these views, such confusion, uncertainty and the belief that any historical account is as good as another can lead to pupils becoming disillusioned with history as a subject (Haydn et al., 2006). Even more importantly, the ability to evaluate historical interpretations has intrinsic value (Tosh, 2008; Todd, 2014), and is crucial in understanding history as a discipline. The skills pupils learn when studying historical interpretations are transferable, giving them 'powerful knowledge' (Young, 2009, p.14). This idea chimes with the findings of teacher educators such as Ford (2017) and classroom-based practitioners such as Instone (2013), who are in agreement with McAleavy's (2002, p.82) convincing argument that a broader benefit of the teaching of historical interpretations would be to demonstrate that 'there are no monopolies on the truth', an important lesson in an era where pupils are bombarded by ever increasing amounts of information of varying trustworthiness.

In this way, the two extremes of simple realism and simple subjectivism underpin much thinking by pupils regarding historical interpretations, and originate from pupils' conceptualisation of history.

Development in pupil thinking regarding historical interpretations is often not smooth and linear (Mastin and Wallace, 2006). However, Lee and Shemilt's (2004) scale of pupil progression in this area is useful in outlining milestones in pupil thought, beginning with the most basic view of the past as accepted narratives and advancing to a level of understanding where pupils can see that historians do not attempt to uncover a fixed past, but rather impose a series of criteria onto their study of historical evidence to create an account which illuminates a particular aspect of the past in answer to a self-imposed research question. It is only with this level of thought that pupils can 'begin to understand how several valid accounts can coexist without threatening the possibility of historical knowledge' (Lee, 2005, p.70). A crucial conceptual leap is made when pupils recognise that interpretations are not attempts to produce a perfect reproduction of the past because:

> *If they understand that accounts are selective not on someone's whim, but in virtue of some question or questions, then we begin to talk with them about the parameters set by questions, and the criteria that these allow us to employ in arguing about which account is preferable.* (Lee and Shemilt, 2004, p.31)

Pupils are capable of such advanced understanding, but how (or if) they get there is dependent on revealing any misconceptions they have about the discipline, which can provide a substantial roadblock to progression if not sufficiently recognised and challenged (Donovan and Bransford, 1999; Lee, 2005). Therefore it is crucial that teachers attempt to uncover pupil misconceptions as an initial step, using the resulting information to inform the choice of pedagogical strategies employed to best address current thinking and promote progression.

2.5 What strategies can help pupils develop their thinking about historical interpretations to a more advanced level?

Once pupil misconceptions about the nature of history have been revealed, a number of approaches can be taken to counteract any unhelpful simple realist or subjectivist beliefs. The 'subsequent'

nature of historical interpretations makes their study especially challenging, as pupils need to be able to understand two periods concurrently: the period being interpreted, and that in which the historical claim was assembled. Card's (2004) work on helping pupils attain 'double vision' has been instrumental in this respect, and has latterly been built on by Mastin and Wallace (2006) and Carroll (2017). In addition to dual contextualisation, a range of strategies focus on ways to make explicit to pupils the process of the construction of historical claims, with commentators arguing that helping pupils grasp the key principles of historical methodology can provide them with more nuanced disciplinary understanding (for example, Haydn et al., 2006; Carroll, 2017; Cassedy et al., 2011; Chapman, 2011 and 2017; Ford, 2017; Howells, 2005; Richards, 2012).

Another significant area for exploration is the use of language in written accounts, since pupils' judgement is often influenced by the rhetorical devices employed by historians (Chapman, 2001; Foster, 2011; Coffin, 2006). Once pupils have a sound appreciation of the nature of claim construction, it may be beneficial to develop their awareness of the techniques of criterial comparison to enhance their skills of evaluation and see beyond interpretation as opinion of equivalent value (Chapman, 2017; Fulbrook, 2002). These strategies provide useful ideas about how to approach interpretations work with pupils; but those most likely to have a beneficial impact are those which are judiciously selected to best address specific pupil misconceptions, and help individuals come to a stronger understanding of the process of claim construction, and consequently the discipline as a whole.

The evaluation of an historical interpretation requires an understanding of how one period visualises another. Card (2004) describes this as 'double vision', and her enquiry supporting Key Stage 3 pupils in their analysis of Delaroche's portrait of Lady Jane Grey helps pupils to view the Tudor period through a Victorian lens. This is extremely valuable, as pupils acquire a richer understanding of both

periods in question and are able to 'reconcile the events of one period with the values of another' (Mastin and Wallace, 2006, p.9). Such activities need to be approached with the awareness that it is not useful to allow pupils to slide easily into the belief that certain periods are dominated by particular interpretations, and to do so over-simplifies a hugely complex issue. However, it is equally necessary for the teacher to make some selection of appropriate material, especially at Key Stage 3, where limiting the scope of the task can prevent pupils drowning 'in an overwhelming flood of information and images' (ibid, p.11).

Carroll (2017) moves beyond the idea of dual contextualisation, and argues that pupils require 'panorama' – substantive knowledge of the entire period between the event and the interpretation so as to avoid 'event space', whereby pupils perceive history as 'a series of episodic but disconnected events interrupted by gaps of emptiness' (ibid, p.25). Carroll's (2017) research focused on his A-Level pupils who were all tackling the same coursework question centred on the popularity of the Nazi regime during the 1930s. His provision of a chronological framework from the 1930s to the present day, in addition to his task and period-specific overviews of historiographical trends, are impressive. However, whilst his ideas could be replicated with a similar topic and time period, it would prove difficult to provide similar 'chronological fluency' to pupils studying early modern or medieval periods for reasons of curriculum time alone. Equally, whilst Carroll (2017) is critical of approaches to interpretations that are not task- and period-specific, this is only possible when all pupils are doing precisely the same task. The coursework element of A-Level History is the only component where sixth-formers are afforded any choice over their period of study, so the trade-off here is to impose a question on a whole class and thus remove this autonomy from pupils – something not all practitioners may accept, especially those keen to allow pursuit of pupils' own historical interests and increasing independence.

Therefore a key consideration for teachers is supporting work in two historical periods concurrently. However, this can sometimes lead pupils to fall back on oversimplification in their explanations (e.g. seeing one interpretation as a representation for the entire views of that era: 'all Victorians were proud of the British Empire'), or to place too strong an emphasis on how an historian's background might influence their account. Pupils need to be made aware that 'the relationship between a person's "background" and their approach to history is by no means clear and direct' (Howells, 2005, p.33). They also need an awareness that when they use this information to explain disparities between interpretations, they can only ever make inferences rather than statements of fact (Mastin and Wallace, 2006). Helping pupils to appreciate the process of claim construction (Chapman, 2017) can be instructive here, and Howells (2005) argues that historiographical methodology should be explicitly discussed and analysed with pupils to enable them to see 'the process of historical research and evaluation at the heart of the investigation' (Howells, 2005, p.33). This approach gives pupils the opportunity to recognise the restrictions historians work under, and to appreciate that choices have to be made regarding evidential focus and the methods employed to interrogate and analyse their sources.

Thus, the argument for exposing pupils to the methodology of historians is a powerful one, with the potential to de-mystify the work of professionals whilst demonstrating to pupils the disciplinary constraints under which claims are constructed. If pupils can appreciate this process then they are better placed to understand the 'how and why' of differing interpretations, and also see that meaningful evaluation and comparison is possible (Haydn et al., 2006; Cassedy et al., 2011; Chapman, 2011; Ford, 2017; Howells, 2005; Hammond, 2012; Richards, 2012). Haydn et al. (2006) suggest that a fundamental goal should be helping pupils to recognise that the past is not fixed, and that this can be achieved by analysing accounts with a focus on the intended audience, deployment of evidence, and any underpinning theoretical assumptions. This approach has the potential to

support pupils in coming to terms with a conception of the past that is fluid and subject to change. Yet, unless developed carefully, it could still leave pupils believing that the historian's identity is still the primary explanatory factor for differences in interpretations, underscoring their choice of evidence and school of thought. A different approach has been taken by Hammond (2007) who used the starkly competing approaches of microhistory and cliometrics to demonstrate to her Year 9 pupils how different analysis of evidence can lead to very different interpretations. Hammond's use of two such unambiguously different methods certainly reinforces the overall point – that understanding methodology is crucial to understanding the final interpretation — but this is an extreme contrast, and perhaps a third account could have provided a more realistic overall view of the discipline. That said, encouraging pupils to become confident in using a range of accounts stemming from different methodological bases certainly has potential to enhance pupil understanding and move thinking away from over-reliance on the background of the historian.

A number of useful approaches that advance the idea of the importance of the disciplinary community have been developed. These have the potential to move pupil thinking beyond a focus on an historian's identity or individual choice of methodology by demonstrating that some interpretations can legitimately hold more weight than others (Cassedy et al., 2011). However, this view can have the unintended consequence of pupils becoming in awe of the epistemic authority of the historical profession, leading them to avoid challenging historical claims due to feelings of academic inferiority. Chapman (2006) has suggested that this issue can be confronted by making pupils aware of the assumptions that historians make in their written accounts, demonstrating that such work is open to challenge. Chapman (2011, p.30) also focuses on the decisions that historians make and argues that with careful exposition it is possible for pupils to recognise that there are 'theoretical decisions, methodological decisions, practical decisions and, perhaps, ethical decisions' made whilst searching for the answer to a research question. Richards (2012) designed a task based

on a 'historians' dinner party' to help her sixth form pupils appreciate the intricate connections between differing accounts and to show them that the complexity of historiographical argument goes beyond a crude conflict versus cooperation model. Taking this further, Chapman (2015) has more recently argued that direct engagement between pupils and historians has the potential to help de-mystify the processes of historical claim construction, and can support pupils in recognising that the identity of the historian is only one aspect in a complex blend of factors that unite to form a historical interpretation.

In addition to the methodology employed by historians, some academic commentators such as Coffin (2006) suggest pupils need to be shown how to analyse the linguistic devices used to project historical claims as this has the potential to help the pupil move beyond an explanatory focus based on the historian's identity. Coffin (p.151) breaks down historical works into three main categories or 'voices', that of the recorder, appraiser and emoter, and argues that the intention behind the claim will be more apparent if the pupil is attuned to the historian's particular writing style. Chapman (2011) builds on the work of Megill (2007) by highlighting the need for pupils to understand how an interpretation operates as a text, outlining four levels of analysis: the narrative structure, argument structure, citation and annotation, and sophistication of logical argument. By thinking about historical interpretation in these ways, Chapman (2011) asserts that pupils can be alerted to the types of claim being made (e.g. primarily descriptive or primarily explanatory), creating a stronger basis for evaluation. The rhetorical devices used by historians can undermine pupil belief regarding the strength of the claim. Foster's (2011) pupils were suspicious of the emotive language used in the texts they were exposed to, whilst Chapman's (2011, p.26) sixth-formers viewed historians as ''twisting' (distorting and manipulating the record) and 'shouting' (asserting their preconceived stance on the past by any rhetorical means necessary)'. Yet an important point to consider here is Foster's (2011, p.9) overarching conclusion, which was that pupils' initial conceptualisation of an

academic text (for example, as a 'mode of discourse, as a mode of learning, and as a product of the author's personality') showed a strong correlation to their later evaluation of it. Therefore, whilst pupils should certainly be encouraged to recognise and engage with the linguistic devices deployed by historians, it appears that the most urgent priority should be to uncover and address the precise misconceptions that pupils hold before beginning any study of historical interpretations.

In Lee and Shemilt's (2004) model of progression, the most sophisticated level of understanding was reached when a pupil acknowledged that historical interpretations can be validly judged and evaluated through criterial comparison. A criterial analysis of interpretations as a means to assess the relative value of historical claims is the approach adopted by academics attempting to steer a course between postmodernism and empiricism (Bevir, 1994; Fulbrook, 2002). By formulating criteria on which to base logical appraisal of competing interpretations, pupils can recognise that the simple subjectivist view is false. Bevir's (1994) academic model has been streamlined by Husbands (1996) for use in secondary schools, with Husbands (p.64) suggesting that appropriate criteria might be how accurate, comprehensive, consistent, progressive, fruitful and open to further scrutiny the interpretations are. Chapman (2006) has added to Husbands' criteria with the addition of textual analysis: pupils should be encouraged to probe the interpretation for signs of authorial assumption and assess the logic of written argument. It should be reiterated that due to the complexity of the nature of historical interpretations, pupils will require a significant level of support before they are able to independently select appropriate, recognised and accepted criteria with which to evaluate historical claims. Equally, criteria should be selected judiciously to match the type of interpretations under examination, with the caveat that artificial attempts to impose unsuitable criteria (for example asking pupils to evaluate the comprehensiveness of short extracts, or images) can be counterproductive, potentially hindering understanding.

2.6 Implications from the literature

Given the complex nature of historical interpretations, it is predictable that many pupils find studying this concept challenging. It is no surprise, too, that attempts to embed historical interpretations into the school curriculum have proved difficult and contentious. The literature demonstrates that pupils enter the history classroom with a range of misconceptions of history – ranging from a 'simple realist' view at one end of the spectrum to a 'simple subjectivist' view at the other (Cassedy, et al., 2011; Lee and Shemilt, 2004) – and that these misconceptions have the potential to impact powerfully on subsequent attempts to extend pupil knowledge. Such misconceptions exist and persist both as a result of preconceived notions of what history actually is and as a consequence of prior learning (Lee, 2001, p.94 has criticised school history's focus on 'information collecting' at the expense of more powerful analytical and evaluative strands) and ill designed assessment criteria. Recent GCSE assessment criteria have come under particular criticism from Howells (2005), who argues that pupils are left short changed with a simplistic and inaccurate view of the activities of historians after being expected to jump through the mark scheme hoop of making preconceived comments regarding authorial identity.

A key finding in the literature is that pupil preconceptions need to be uncovered and identified in order to decide how any misconceptions might best be addressed (Donovan and Bransford, 1999). Once any such misconceptions have been acknowledged, a range of strategies exist that can be amended to challenge prevailing ideas. The present research thus focuses on the benefits that might be derived from helping pupils to recognise the methodology of historians, the process of claim construction, the nature of the disciplinary community, and analysis of the chosen language utilised by historians (Cassedy et al., 2011; Chapman, 2011; Hammond, 2007; Coffin, 2006; Foster, 2011). Supporting pupils in their understanding of these areas should aid them in thinking about historical accounts in increasingly advanced ways.

In light of these findings, three clear research questions have emerged which will frame my project:

RQ1: *What views do sixth form pupils currently hold about the nature of historical interpretations?*

RQ2: *What does the teaching of an introductory course, focusing on historical interpretations further reveal about the challenges associated with pupil mastery of this concept?*

RQ3: *In what ways can an introductory course and supported independent study improve pupils' understanding of historical interpretations?*

3. School based research: Methodology

3.1 Project outline

The literature – supported by my findings in Part II – suggested that my Year 13 pupils would benefit from an intervention to help them develop a more nuanced and advanced appreciation of historical interpretations. A key aim of action research is to improve practice (Elliott, 1991), and I hoped that the planned intervention would give the pupils an enhanced understanding of how the past is constructed by historians and how these accounts can be critiqued. Since the project focused on the internally moderated and externally assessed A-Level coursework, I also hoped that it would enable the pupils to achieve highly against the examination board mark scheme, thus having the potential for positive outcomes for both researcher and participants (Menter et al., 2011).

Small school size meant the Year 13 history class contained only five pupils, and one of these was not part of the project due to extensive absences during the first term, which limited data collection. The very small sample size means I do not make any claims regarding the generalizability of my research. That issue notwithstanding, my findings have been relevant and enlightening for my current and future practice, and I believe they are interesting and useful for fellow practitioners working in this area. Indeed, according to Kelly (1985, p.13), in practitioner research 'replicability and transferability are less important than authenticity and accountability'. My research is authentic in the sense that it has been conducted in the context of a specific A-level course and I have responded to each new insight gained into students' understanding and abilities. It is also accountable, as both the school and pupils were made aware of the aims and process of the research, what data would be collected and its usage, both for this project and potentially for future publication.

Although the sample size is very small, there were key differences in gender, background, previous academic attainment and SEND, which meant that I expected to see a range of understanding in the initial baseline data, and also in pupil progress during the project. The small sample size also meant that the research could be squarely situated within the interpretivist paradigm (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative methods, such as individual interviews and lesson transcripts provided a rich data set, and it was possible to transcribe and analyse the verbal contributions of each pupil in depth, giving opportunities to observe and reflect on 'the exclusive distinctiveness' of each participant (ibid, p.161).

The project consisted of two action research cycles of review, plan, act, review. The literature review proved instructive in drafting an initial plan, and throughout the research the insights of other researchers and practitioners were drawn upon as part of the action research process of 'modifying widely held ideas to fit your practice' (Edwards and Talbot, 1999, p.62). The project's action research cycles are outlined in table i below.

Due to the cyclical project design, and the way in which the data from one phase informed the next, details of research design, methodology and findings will be discussed in an integrated manner. Such an analytic narrative approach is recommended for the writing up of action research by Edwards and Talbot (1999, p.76), given that 'action research findings constantly redirect design and method', and seems most appropriate in this instance. But first I will outline the ethical considerations that informed this research and the collaboration it entailed with colleagues.

i. Research and development project plan

ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE OUTLINE
REVIEW: Collection of baseline data through individual pupil interviews, questionnaires and whole group discussion.
PLAN: The baseline data was used to inform the planning of a short introductory course to help pupils appreciate more fully what historical interpretations are, how they are constructed and why they differed.
ACT: The introductory lessons were taught over five 70 minute lessons during the first half term. Throughout the course data was collected through transcripts of audio recorded lessons and examples of pupil work.
REVIEW: All the data generated from the introductory course was analysed to get a sense of the outcomes of the lessons. Whilst the data suggested that the pupils had advanced in their understandings of historical interpretations, their understandings were still fairly abstract. Consequently a further action research cycle was planned to address the issues the pupils were still facing.
PLAN: Further lessons were planned involving modelling of the key differences between how and why interpretations differed on a familiar topic. Pupils were also shown ways in which they could find more information about the historians they had selected.
ACT: Two 70 minute lessons were used. Pupils analysed the work of three historians with different interpretations of the Glorious Revolution, and practised online searching. Data was collected through transcripts of audio recorded lessons, and resources created in class time. Pupils were also supported with individual feedback on first drafts of their essays.
FINAL REVIEW: Pupils' completed coursework essays provide the main data for the final analysis. These were written independently and completed by the end of the Lent term.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Due to the fact that the research project centred on pupil preparation for writing an externally assessed component worth 20 per cent of their A-Level grade, all pupils taking part in the research followed the same scheme of work and were expected to complete the same tasks. As a consequence there was no scope for introducing a control group, and so any ethical issues that may arise from that approach are not relevant to this study.

The introductory course formed a core part of the A Level teaching, so pupils were unable to opt-out of the lessons completely, but had the right to restrict the usage of their individual data. One potential ethical issue was that the pupils may have felt obliged to take part in the research process because I have been their main history teacher in the past, and because they may have felt somehow at a disadvantage if they did not. A related concern was that it may have been particularly hard for a pupil who did not wish to participate to communicate this to me within the small group setting. These issues were overcome as follows: firstly, as I was sharing the teaching of the coursework element with a colleague, pupils had the opportunity to inform him if they did not wish to take part in the research process, which diminished the pressure they may have felt had I been the sole teacher. Secondly, although I was involved in the final moderation (as second marker) of the pupils' coursework, they were clearly informed that whilst there was obviously some cross-over, the research criteria were different to and separate from the examination board criteria, and that neither the analysis of their work for the project, nor any of the other data would be used for assessment purposes. Therefore, all pupils were clearly informed that there was no obligation for them to take part, and that participation in the project did not have any bearing on the final assessment of their coursework essay.

Each participant was between the ages of 17 and 19 during the project, and gave their voluntary, informed consent to take part in accordance with the BERA (2011) guidelines. The research design and data collection was explained to our Headmaster, who gave permission for the project, and agreed that the participants' age meant parental consent was redundant. Project aims and procedure were outlined to the pupils, and their rights to anonymity and to withdraw at any point were explained. Pupils were also informed that they could tell any member of the history department that they no longer wanted to take part in the project at any time, thus safeguarding against the possibility of them continuing to participate against their wishes. References to pupils and colleagues in this project are made using pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity.

All data collected was stored securely. Transcriptions of audio-recording of interviews and lesson discussions were anonymised and secured on a password protected computer following transference from a password protected recording device. Hard copies of pupil questionnaires and written work were stored securely in a private, locked area. Audio recordings will be deleted and paperwork appropriately destroyed three years after the submission of my dissertation to allow for possible publication usage. Ethical approval to conduct this research was received prior to its initiation from the Central University Research Ethics Committee.

3.3. Collaboration

Collaboration with a variety of other professionals was central to the viability of my project. Communication with my colleague, Roger, was particularly important, as he was the colleague who took over the timetabled supervision of the pupils' independent research and writing following completion of the introductory course, and who formally first-marked the final assignments. As such,

we were in regular communication regarding the pupils and their progress, and our discussions were valuable in helping me fully grasp each pupil's understanding at each stage of the research and writing process. This also helped to clarify my thoughts regarding their development in terms of their understanding of historical interpretations over the course of the year.

The literature suggests that exposure to the practical decisions made by historians (e.g. Chapman, 2011; Chapman and Goldsmith, 2015) can help pupils to understand that such decisions often override 'opinion' or 'background' in the creation of an historical interpretation. As a result of these ideas I decided to invite three professional historians into school to talk to the pupils about their experiences of creating and publishing their own work. Part of this process involved collaborating with the historians to ensure that their talks focused on the themes that would be most enlightening for the pupils (Appendix I).

Following completion of the pupils' final coursework assignments I presented my findings to a wider department meeting. As a result, my colleague John adopted lessons from my introductory course to begin the coursework process with our Year 12 group in the summer term, and we discussed how best to make use of the insights generated by the historians' visit. This led to John and I collaborating on the creation of new resources designed to help pupils consider various aspects of the work of a historian, including an examination of the summary text presented on book covers, an extract from the historian's talk, and samples of book reviews to show how the work has been accepted within the disciplinary community (see Appendix II). The collaboration surrounding the project thus contributed to the development of teaching, ideas and resources that can benefit future A-level pupils.

3.4 Research design and findings

3.4.1 Review

- **Individual interviews: methodology**

A key finding from the literature is that uncovering pupils' current understandings is an important starting point prior to an intervention taking place. Any existing misconceptions can then be addressed and will not persist to cloud future thinking (Donovan and Bransford, 1999; Lee, 2005). The first phase of my project was therefore a heuristic process, designed to help answer RQ1: What views do sixth form students currently hold about the nature of historical interpretations? Although I already had some ideas about the nature and form of the intervention that would follow, I was also open to amending my plans based on the findings of data gathered at this stage.

Three methods were used to collect data to allow for methodological triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007), providing me with a detailed picture of pupil views. Before the first lesson, each pupil was given two extracts from historians (Coward, 1997; Vallance, 2006) discussing the Glorious Revolution (Appendix III) and were asked to consider how the interpretations differed from each other, and reasons for this divergence. The Glorious Revolution was a topic the class had studied with a colleague at the end of Year 12 and so were familiar with. It has a diverse historiography (Glassey, 2013), and the two extracts used were chosen deliberately for the differences in argument, chronological span and evidential base. The rationale for the two questions was straightforward: if the pupils were to understand the concept of historical interpretation, then they needed to be able, first, to point to concrete differences in interpretation, and second, offer reasons that might explain why these differences have emerged. This task had also been trialled successfully during Part II with a different cohort, so I knew it had the potential to capture pupils' baseline understandings.

Pupils were given the extracts a day in advance of individual interviews, for familiarisation purposes. The interviews took place before the first history lesson of the Michaelmas term. Since this first stage was designed to elicit the current thinking of each individual it was not structured as a group interview. Interviews were audio-recorded as this was relatively unobtrusive and allowed participants to be less self-conscious. The recordings were transcribed on the same day as the interviews (Edwards and Talbot, 1999), with initial analysis at this point in the form of a process of sentence-by-sentence open coding (Cohen et al., 2007).

- **Individual interviews: findings**

The meaning of each of the codes are summarised in Appendix IV for ease of reference. The coding was influenced by the work of Chapman and Goldsmith (2015), and reflected the different facets of historical interpretations that pupils would be likely to discuss. During Part II, I found these codes provided a sound basis for organising and interpreting data. Table ii below shows the codes evident in pupil responses during the interviews when attempting to explain how (black ticks) and why (red ticks) the two accounts differed, with the number of ticks denoting the number of times a pupil's contributions could be assigned to a particular code. However, whilst this organisation of the data provides a useful comparative snapshot, it cannot demonstrate how convincingly pupils were able to explain their views, and a more detailed analysis of the transcribed data is required.[1]

When answering the 'how' question, all four pupils understood the key difference, although their explanations varied in terms of sophistication. Jenny appeared to recognise Vallance's emphasis on the power of parliament as a key element that differentiated his account from that of Coward:

[1] See Appendix V for examples of coded baseline data.

The first one [pause] like, highlights the parliaments, says the parliaments are absolutely vital. The second one kind of dismisses the importance of the revolution, like the significance of it.

ii. Frequency of coding category seen in pupil data in initial interviews

	FREQUENCY OF CODING CATEGORY - INITIAL PUPIL INTERVIEWS ✓ **Black ticks: responses to the EXPLANATORY question (How interpretations differ)** ✓ **Red ticks: responses to the EVALUATIVE question (Why interpretations differ)**									
	Aims	Argument	Evidence	External	Objectivity	Identity	Interpretation	Opinion	Breadth	Contextual knowledge
Jake	✓		✓			✓	✓✓		✓	✓✓
Darcy				✓			✓		✓	
Jenny	✓					✓			✓✓	
Laura		✓	✓	✓			✓			

Laura hinted that the two historians had different understandings of what precisely constituted a revolution:

the first one seems to suggest it was a revolution - a complete change - the second one is more like the changes weren't as big as they could have been. So maybe it wasn't such a revolution.

Darcy made a similar point, by drawing out the differences related to the extent to which monarchical power was limited:

Vallance sees the Glorious Revolution as something that established parliamentary government and imposed limits on the monarchy - he says "ended the threat of Royal tyranny". Coward is different - he doesn't see the reforms as extreme as intended and says it didn't have a direct large impact.

Jake provided the most refined explanations at this stage, using his contextual knowledge to support his point:

Vallance was quite in favour of parliamentary government, and new systems, Coward was more sceptical, saying it couldn't do everything, or initial great ideas with the radical reform they had planned had to be settled down as William didn't want to limit his own power.

The literature (Lee and Shemilt, 2005) suggested that pupils find explaining how interpretations differ more straightforward than explaining why such divergence occurs. This is borne out by the data. My reflective diary written at the time of interviewing mentions that I was surprised that the pupils' verbal articulation on this question did not straightforwardly reflect what I know to be their written capabilities from GCSE, and pupils clearly found this a challenging question. Laura struggled to articulate her thoughts. The following quotation demonstrates her appreciation that a fixed past does not exist, but only due to a lack of recording 'technology': 'So, long ago - because there wasn't technology or anything there's not a set record so it's sort of open to interpretation…'. Although many of her other contributions were quite stilted, Laura did also demonstrate some awareness of the importance of dual contextualisation when considering historians' accounts as 'when they are writing and the political situation at the time might affect their ideas'.

Darcy mentioned that Vallance was writing in 2006, and his account may differ from Coward's 1997 work since 'more might have been known'. In this contribution she showed recognition of a potential impact related to the time of writing as more evidence might become available for later accounts, but was not able to explain this. Jake took the opposite – and arguably more correct – view that the dates of publication of the two extracts probably did not account for their difference, showing an understanding that ten years is usually not a hugely significant gap in terms of historiography: 'They're relatively close in date, only about ten years difference, so they don't have radically different views due to the differences in time of writing'.

Similarly, Darcy identified a valid point about the chronological scope of the two texts, and the likely focus of the historians as a consequence: 'Vallance is writing directly about the revolution in 1688 so

the effects that it had in the short term can be more specific as it is such a short area of history'. This idea was also recognised by Jake, who said:

> *Coward seems to be doing breadth, the whole Stuart era from James I whereas Vallance focuses first just on the Glorious Revolution and the title gives away his argument - a positive view.*

Jake had thus made inferences based on Vallance's title about the nature of his argument, an approach that Chapman (2015) suggests can be a useful analytical starting point. Jenny also discussed chronological span of both works, and was able to offer a slightly more sophisticated exposition of the idea that the historical accounts differ based on this:

> *The first one - the book obviously focuses solely on the Glorious Revolution. Coward's book is a history of the age in general. Maybe Coward is more focusing on the impact the Revolution had on the rest… you know, afterwards and beforehand, whereas Vallance, I don't know, is concentrating on just the events of the revolution*

Jenny also claimed that 'their own circumstances and background is probably important in shaping these views', but was not able to explain why this might be the case. Jake made a similar point about identity, commenting that one reason for the difference in accounts 'could be the way they look at it… the way they value things? Personal beliefs?', but again did not elaborate further.

At this stage it was Jake who seemed to demonstrate the most nuanced understanding of the nature of historical interpretations as evidenced in the following comment:

> *I don't know… there's no one set truth in history so there's different ways you can do history. So Coward seems to be more keen on military history and the way that seems to affect change, whereas Vallance …. seems keener on political history, this affected parliament more powerfully, so they have different approaches.*

The first sentence is interesting, as Jake explains clearly that he understands that history is 'plural and ever changing' (Chapman, 2015, p.5). He also seems to be trying to suggest that the two

historians have different approaches or priorities which have ended up affecting their eventual interpretations.

Ultimately, the interview transcripts – whilst certainly giving me some insights into pupil thought – were not the responses I had envisaged when planning my project, due to factors beyond my control. I had expected pupils to be able to give more elaborate thoughts about both how and why the interpretations differed. On investigation it transpired that the pupils had only very briefly covered the Glorious Revolution at the end of the previous academic year, and had done little explicit work on historical interpretations during Year 12 as a whole. However, this provided further impetus to my research, and meant that because pupil understandings appeared fairly basic at this stage the intervention had potential to be of greater benefit.

- **Questionnaire and whole group discussion: methodology**

Following the individual interviews, the pupils undertook a questionnaire as part of their first history lesson. The rationale for this was two-fold: firstly, to encourage pupils to think about the creation of historical interpretations more generally; and secondly, to generate a whole group discussion where they could elaborate on their judgements and make their knowledge 'publically accountable' (Mercer, 1995). The inclusion of the questionnaire results and discussion transcript as baseline data provided triangulation and gave me a fuller picture of the precise nature of each pupil's thinking regarding historical claim construction.

The brief questionnaire used Likert scale responses to ascertain the relative importance the pupils believed historians placed on various considerations when interpreting the past. Whilst there are obvious limitations to using a rating scale – for example, disparities in the way each individual pupil

interprets the level of importance given to each number, and the 'central tendency', where participants cluster responses around the mid-point on an odd-numbered scale – it was felt the potential it offered to 'fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality' (Cohen et al., 2007) outweighed these drawbacks. Some limitations – such as the fact the questionnaire offered no space for additional comments – were overcome with the discussion that followed, where pupils could explain their judgements in discussion with peers. In addition, the results demonstrate that pupils made good use of all the available rating options, thus avoiding the 'central tendency'. All pupils completed the questionnaire individually without communicating with each other.

- **Questionnaire and whole group discussion: findings**

The results from the questionnaire are displayed in table iii which is colour-coded for clarity. The data supported the initial interview transcripts, demonstrating that all pupils had different starting points. Three out of four pupils thought that objectivity was 'not at all important' to historians when creating an interpretation, with the same pupils judging the personal opinion of an historian to be an important factor, suggesting an adherence to the 'simple subjectivist' view (Cassedy et al., 2011). All four pupils considered the political, economic and social backdrop at the time of writing to be a very important determinant of the type of interpretation generated, showing awareness of a need to employ Card's (2004) 'double vision'. There was less certainty regarding selection of primary evidence, chosen focus and methodology, which highlighted these as possible areas to focus on in the introductory course to help pupils move beyond the view that history is based on personal opinion (e.g. Husbands, 1996; Chapman, 2011).

iii. Questionnaire results

QUESTION: *How important do you believe the following considerations are for historians during the creation of historical interpretations? Write the number of the descriptor which best reflects your choice next to each option:*

1 = not at all important
2 = of very little importance
3 = neither important nor unimportant
4 = quite important
5 = extremely important

Statement	Jenny	Jake	Darcy	Laura
Selection of primary evidence	4	5	3	3
Creating a convincing argument	5	3	4	5
Being objective	1	5	1	1
The chosen focus of the work (e.g. chronological or geographical breadth)	3?	5	3	4
The methodology used (e.g. the specific methods the historian has used to interrogate the evidence)	3?	4	5	3
A historian's own background and identity	4	2	1	3
The political, social and economic backdrop of the time in which the historian was writing	5	5	4	4
A historian's personal opinion	5	2	4	4
The particular writing style employed by the historian	4	1	2	3

Following completion of the questionnaire, pupils were given five minutes to discuss their thoughts with a partner before whole group discussion began. The brief, paired discussion was designed to enable pupils to feel more confident sharing their thoughts with the whole class. I wanted the pupils to do as much talking as possible and so kept my interventions to a minimum. I initiated the discussion by asking pupils to talk about which considerations they thought were the most important and why, and later prompted them to discuss those they considered the less significant factors.

The discussion transcript was useful in shedding further light on the pupils' key judgements in the questionnaire. The significance all pupils placed on the personal opinion of historians came clearly to the fore. For example, Jenny stated, 'I thought the historians' personal opinions were important because they are literally never objective'. This echoes Coffin's (2006) and Foster's (2011) research by demonstrating a tendency to view an explicit historical argument suspiciously, believing it to be merely personal opinion, leading to a view of historiographical disagreements as paltry arguments (Foster, 2011). Laura's views also chimed with this stance when she discussed the fact that historians might be selective with the information they include because 'if you want people to take your argument seriously you have to persuade them it's the right one'.

Darcy took this idea further still, stating: 'they use evidence to back up their views. If they are really for something being true they manipulate the facts'. This reflects Chapman's (2011, p.26) claim that many pupils have a 'twist and shout' perspectival view of history, believing that historians deliberately corrupt the record to mirror a preconceived argument, and then use persuasive rhetoric to convince readers of their case. Such scepticism was less evident in Jake's contributions, who argued that historians 'try, but it's difficult to be objective… it's often difficult to state it as it is, especially as in history there's not one clear way in which to interpret it'. Here Jake seems to be moving towards a different conception of objectivity, one more in keeping with that accepted by the disciplinary community (Bevir, 1994). This is also supported by his interview contributions, where he was the only pupil to clearly state his understanding of a fluid past.

3.4.2 Plan

- **The introductory course**

Using the baseline data and findings from the literature, plans for a short introductory course (five 70 minute lessons) were refined. A number of general considerations were taken into account when planning this course, which explain its final structure and content. One of the first related to individual pupil choice regarding the title and topic of their coursework assignment. Some practitioner researchers such as Carroll (2017) have been critical of general teaching approaches for historical interpretations, arguing that they should be related directly to the period being studied. However, when preparing for an A-Level coursework assignment this is only possible when all pupils are attempting the same question. Whilst this may be the approach of some centres, such as Carroll's, my department is of the view that it is crucial to allow sixth-form pupils an element of choice and independence as part of their development as historians, and the coursework task is the only part of the A-Level course affording this opportunity. Consequently, the introductory course I planned had to take a general approach, since the pupils would be pursuing different questions with different historiographies.

Chapman (2015) has outlined a series of general and adaptable teaching activities designed to develop pupils' understandings of historical interpretations as part of Pearson's support for teachers. The document is wide-ranging, but could not be directly adopted as a scheme of work. This is partly due to time constraints – the sixteen activities proposed by Chapman would take almost an entire term of lessons to complete, well beyond the duration allocated for my introductory course. As a result, I knew that my course needed to be tailored to specifically address the shortcomings in pupil understanding evident in the baseline data. This data suggested that most pupils adhered to the simple subjectivist view, emphasising the role of a historian's personal opinion in the creation of historical interpretations (Lee, 2005). If left unchallenged this misconception could weaken pupil understanding because, as Howells (2005) has claimed there is not necessarily a direct correlation

between a historian's identity and the interpretation produced. The literature suggested that a powerful way to help pupils move beyond such assumptions was to expose them to the decision-making and methodology of historians (Chapman, 2011; Hammond, 2007) and also to help them see that a historian's work is situated within a disciplinary community, subject to scrutiny by fellow professionals (Cassedy et al., 2011). The introductory course was planned with these aims in mind, and the rationale behind the planned teaching activities is outlined below.

- **Lesson 1**

A key aim was to ensure the pupils understood and could use the term 'interpretation' with precision from the outset, whilst dispelling any misconceptions that may have lingered from their work on the GCSE controlled assessment task (Pearson, 2013). Consequently, the key question was 'what constitutes an historical interpretation?' The lesson was designed to help pupils begin their independent research by modelling techniques for picking up clues relating to the nature of an historical interpretation from book titles, blurbs and front covers. Pupils were initially to study photocopies of the front and back cover of Crook, *Governing Systems* (2016). This text was chosen deliberately, firstly, because the blurb on the back cover gives pupils several indications regarding the nature of the interpretation, and secondly, because Dr Crook was one of the historians invited in for lesson 3, so this task provided an introduction to his work. Using the information they had been given, pupils were to contribute to a group discussion in answer to the question, 'What suggestions are there that this is a new interpretation?'

Pupils then moved on to consider book front covers. Three different titles on books about the Great War were selected – Frank Furedi, *The First World War: Still no end in sight,* Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* and Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers.* These books offer different interpretations of a familiar historical event. Some time was planned for pupils to study the images and titles individually prior to a class discussion surrounding the question, 'From looking at the front

covers of these books, can you suggest what the historical interpretation might be?' This task was another designed to encourage pupils to begin making inferences about the nature of an interpretation based on cover information, a skill that could be utilised in future weeks as they began to research and select interpretations relevant to their topic of choice.

- **Lesson 2**

This lesson focused on the question, 'what decisions do historians have to make when creating an interpretation?' The aim was to help pupils appreciate that there are 'theoretical decisions, methodological decisions, practical decisions and, perhaps, ethical decisions' (Chapman, 2011, p.30) made when constructing an account. This, it was hoped, would enable pupils to realise that often these decisions have a much greater impact than background or personal opinion. The main part of the lesson focused on a task adapted from Chapman (2015, p.15). The task instruction slide is the first shown on the next page.

After pupil consideration and whole class discussion of the present day scenario, following the example of Chapman (2015), the exercise was applied to a historical case – the variations in estimates of the number of Chartists who attended the Kennington Common meeting of 1848. The instructions for this task are shown in the second slide below – pupils would consider the question at the bottom and then discuss ideas as a group. The rationale behind this task was to force pupils to consider several factors that influence historians – for example, limitations on the primary evidence available, and also conceptual decisions e.g. who counts as a Chartist?

Recognise this place?



Two research teams have set out to find the answer to an identical question, but have come back with dramatically different answers…

They were instructed to count the exact number of people in Cornmarket St, Oxford at precisely 14.13 on Tuesday 19th September 2017. One team reports the number as 324.5 people and the other as 1,876. How can we account for this dramatic discrepancy?

How many Chartists attended the Kennington Common meeting of 1848?

There are very different answers to this question - estimates range from 15,000 to 300,000.

What methods could we use to try and solve this problem, and come up with the most accurate answer?



- **Lesson 3**

The historians' visit was planned for Lesson 3. Dr Tom Crook, Dr James Cooper and Professor Glen O'Hara from Oxford Brookes University each gave a 15/20 minute talk explaining the key issues/choices they had encountered when writing historical interpretations. Chapman (2015, p.186) has argued that directly involving professional historians is useful in helping pupils to achieve a more advanced understanding of historical interpretations, suggesting that 'interaction with expert historical practitioners could have positive impacts in sophisticating students' historical thinking about why interpretations may differ '.

The historians were briefed beforehand and informed that the emphasis needed to be firmly on the process of their work rather than the finished content of their publication (see Appendix I). The lesson aimed to give pupils further insight into the practicalities of account construction from those engaged in the process on a daily basis.

- **Lesson 4**

This lesson aimed to help pupils begin the process of independent research. The first task followed on from the historians' visit, and was designed to ascertain whether the pupils' understanding of historical interpretations had advanced compared to the findings of the baseline data. Pupils were asked to create a basic spider diagram in response to the question 'why do historical interpretations differ?' followed by a brief discussion of the key points from the historians' visit.

The rest of the lesson centred on ensuring the pupils were equipped to begin the process of independent research, and involved a 'refresher' course covering basics such as note-taking, using the Pearson specified reading record and referencing. By this stage it was envisaged that all pupils would have an idea of their individual coursework questions, and would be beginning the process of independent research and selection of their three key interpretations for analysis. To provide some

focus to this initial phase of independent work, pupils were asked to create a presentation detailing their work so far for lesson 5.

- **Lesson 5**

It was planned that this lesson would involve the pupils presenting their ideas about their personal coursework question and the interpretations they had encountered. My role was to listen to the presentations and ask the pupils questions at the end to help them consider areas they may have omitted, or to help them clarify their thoughts.

3.4.3 Act

- **The introductory course**

The introductory course began with the first lesson of the Michaelmas term, and thereafter one lesson per week, with a fortnight between lessons four and five to allow time for pupils to prepare their presentations. All lessons were audio-recorded and transcribed the same evening that they took place. I also made some notes in my reflective diary immediately after each lesson, which I referred to during the process of data analysis in the 'review' section below. The lessons ran as expected, and did not diverge from the plan outlined about. All four pupils were present for each lesson. Key events and data generated are discussed below.

3.4.4 Review

- **The introductory course**

A large amount of data was generated in the form of lesson transcripts and pupil work. Due to constraints of word count only the most prescient data relevant to my project and its overall aims are discussed here.

➢ Lesson 1: Findings

Lesson transcripts demonstrated that each pupil had engaged well with the first task and were able to make inferences from the cover information to piece together an idea of what the book's central interpretation might be, as demonstrated in the following extract:

> ***Laura:*** *'It says that Crook offers a "fresh answer to the question". So other historians have looked at this before but he's saying something else.'*
> ***Darcy:*** *'It also says the book "makes other work in the area seem simplistic". No-one has done all these things together before.'*
> ***Jake:*** *'Um well, it mentions "long considered", so this is a new view and the argument is that previous historians have looked at professional expertise or the centralized bureaucratic state but Crook is saying it's the "contested formation and functioning of multiple systems, both human and material, administrative and technological" - whatever that means!*
> ***HH:*** *It's a complex sentence! You can ask him exactly what it means when he comes in to speak to you.*
> ***Jenny:*** *'No way, he's coming in, that's cool! It also says "a book that will spark debate". That suggests he has a particular view that some people will agree with and others will disagree with.'*

Pupils were able to infer that Crook's book differs in argument and content to the accepted view on Victorian public health, even if some of the more complex language puzzled them. Laura, Jake and Darcy appreciated the fact that Crook's interpretation is situated in a larger body of work on the period, thus showing an awareness of a disciplinary community (Cassedy et al., 2011). Jenny also understood that Crook's argument might give rise to further debate. We discussed the phrase 'theoretically ambitious yet empirically grounded' (Crook, 2016), that appears in the blurb, with pupils understanding that – although the statement did not indicate the precise nature of the theoretical grounding – the fact that it is underpinned by theory may mean the argument is framed in a particular way. Equally, the term 'empirically grounded' meant pupils could not dismiss the other language relating to debate, argument and interpretation as mere opinion. As such, this was a useful starting point, and pupils began to appreciate that historical interpretations may be more complex than they had previously believed.

The second task also generated a useful discussion. The pupils made good attempts at working out the likely interpretations contained in the books from the front cover information. The discussions surrounding the titles proved most instructive, as this excerpt from the transcript demonstrates.

> ***Jenny:*** *'Maybe Furedi's book is concentrating on the issues that are still around because of the war? Going by the title, things are still happening as a result of it?*
> ***Jake:*** *'Yes, it had repercussions on other historical events'*
> ***Darcy:*** *'The second one is how it was a really good thing - it was a victory - whereas the third one, in comparison to that, is saying they didn't really know what they were doing, how significant their actions were that they were leading to war.' "Forgotten"... people tend to look at it like quite a negative thing - it was a war...Maybe could say it was a good thing, well not a good thing but a victory.'*
> ***Laura:*** *Sleepwalking could be the Allies… or the alliance system? Like they thought it could protect them but the opposite was true.*

Here, the pupils proved that their literacy skills and wider knowledge of the historical context enabled them to draw valid conclusions about the types of interpretations on offer before looking at any of the main text.

➢ Lesson 2: Findings

Lesson 1 gave the pupils a good introduction to the study of historical interpretations. They understood them as subsequent constructions of the past (Mastin and Wallace, 2006), and had gained confidence in recognising an interpretation and making inferences about its nature. Lesson 2 aimed to help pupils begin to recognise that historians are required to make methodological and practical choices which can shape their interpretation. Chapman's 'counting' task was successful in helping the pupils understand that dramatically different conclusions could be reached on ostensibly the same question:

> ***Jake:*** *'One team might be looking straight down the street, the other team might be looking from an alley at one side, so one sees the whole street and the other only sees part of it.'*
> ***Darcy:*** *'One group might be trying to count everyone, whereas the other group might have taken just a small area and timesed [sic] that to get an estimate. However many times that fits in the street?'*
> ***Jenny:*** *The 0.5 might mean an average was taken. Or is it a child? Or what if a woman was pregnant? Would that count?'*
> ***Jake:*** *Maybe that's the 0.5*
> ***Laura:*** *It could depend on where the street starts and ends. Or if shops count or not.*

This led to a good discussion of the need for historians to establish criteria, and that understanding the types of criteria an historian is using is necessary to fully appreciate their interpretation. Once pupils shifted their focus to the historical example of how many Chartists protested at Kennington Common they were able to suggest ways in which the most accurate estimate might be established:

> ***Darcy:*** *Seeing how many people went to other rallies and stuff like that - there might be better figures, could judge based on this. Could also think about the size of the space…*
> ***Jenny:*** *You need to think about the context of the time, so I imagine were like only men counted, or families? I can see children in the picture but were these included in official figures?'*
> ***Laura:*** *Possibly accounts of people who were there or who organised it might give an indication although they might exaggerate. But then maybe government figures would underestimate so it's probably somewhere between the two.*
> ***Jake:*** *Use images that exist - count them in the picture. You have the factories for scale, could then make a reasonable estimate?*

A further discussion of the conceptual decisions and criteria that would need to be established to answer the question ensued, e.g. who is a Chartist? Do only adults count? What weight can be placed on different types of evidence? Are there significant gaps in the evidence? By the end of this lesson I felt confident that the pupils were beginning to realise that the process of historical claim construction and analysis of evidence was much more complex than a historian simply cherry picking evidence in support of a preconceived idea.

➢ Lesson 3: Findings

The historians' talks took up the entire lesson time, so no data was generated from the participants. However, with the consent of the historians, the talks were audio-recorded and transcribed to be used as resources with future cohorts.[2] Dr Crook and Professor O'Hara gave the most useful talks, as these stuck consistently to the brief and helped the pupils appreciate the choices and constraints historians face.

[2] See Appendix I.

Dr Crook discussed how pupils should be aware of the type of book they were reading and its intended audience. A hallmark of academic monographs is their presentation of an original argument, and Dr Crook explained what distinguished his interpretation from the other historiography of Victorian Public Health. Dr Crook explained some practicalities that pupils may not have previously considered – for example, that historians are constrained by a publisher's word limit. Using the example of *Governing Systems,* Dr Crook explained that in order to adhere to the 100,000 word limit he had to include only what he perceived to be the crucial, defining and innovative features of public health in England alone (deciding not to include Wales and Scotland), and further practical and time constraints meant limiting his archival work to Manchester, London and Oxford. In contrast to some of the pupils' ideas that historians' deliberately manipulate evidence to fit a preconceived argument (Chapman, 2011), Dr Crook instead explained that whilst a historian might have a hypothesis prior to consulting the archive, the evidence they found there would determine whether the original argument needed revising. In keeping with this point, Dr Crook finally explained the importance of peer review, a process potentially resulting in further revisions, and the acknowledgement of other professionals within the discipline.

Professor O'Hara emphasised the way that writing can be about 'discoveries you didn't expect to make' and stated that for a historian writing is a process of accumulating insights from the research. This helped pupils to realise that historians amend and re-formulate ideas based on the evidence available. Professor O'Hara also made an interesting point about the contemporary political and economic situation that historians write in, telling the pupils that historians do draw on the present, and 'often what's being written about is a series of workings out about what's really going on in politics or public policy right now'. Again, this helped emphasise to pupils the significance of taking into account the societal backdrop when searching for clues that might explain a particular argument (Card, 2004).

➢ Lesson 4: Findings

The spider diagrams pupils created provided a quick visual demonstration of their understandings of why historical interpretations differed. The coded data from the diagrams is displayed in table iv and an example of a pupil diagram features in Appendix VI. In comparison to the baseline data, all pupils were able to offer a greater variety of valid reasons which explain why historical interpretations may differ. The impact of the historians' talk was evident. Jake and Darcy had mentioned points regarding the selection of evidence, and also differing methodologies – for example, archival research in comparison to oral testimony. Equally, there were pleasing points about the fact that historians might have differing conceptual understandings which could affect an interpretation, and all pupils recognised that an historian's aims, research questions and chronological focus could impact their ultimate claim.

Whilst each pupil had advanced in their appreciation of the factors that can influence an historian's account, there were still some lingering ideas regarding opinion in particular. Darcy, for example, had written 'bias – what they are trying to prove' on her diagram, and Laura had included 'own beliefs'. However, overall, this data suggested that the pupils could now explain reasons that account for differences in historical interpretations in a sophisticated manner, and consequently seemed well placed to begin their independent research.

Pupils were given details of the presentation task for lesson 5, and instructed that they needed to include a brief explanation of the overarching argument of each of their three chosen interpretations, ideas about how and why they were different from each other, and a summary of their own central argument in their five-minute presentation.

iv. Frequency of coding category seen in pupil spider diagrams

	FREQUENCY OF CODING CATEGORY SEEN IN PUPIL SPIDER DIAGRAMS (LESSON 4)								
	✓ Red ticks show responses to the EVALUATIVE question (Why do historical interpretations differ?)								
	Aims	Argument	Evidence	External	Objectivity	Identity	Interpretation	Opinion	Breadth
Jake	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Darcy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Jenny	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Laura	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓

➢ Lesson 5: Findings

The pupils presented their thoughts on their own research so far. The key finding was a significant one, relevant to all four pupils' work. In each presentation the pupils were generally good at explaining how the interpretations differed, but still struggled to offer legitimate reasons why. Taking Jenny's presentation as an example, she had found three suitable and relevant contrasting interpretations from Barry Coward, David Smith and John Miller. She could explain the differences in the interpretations of these historians well, and situating them in a wider historiographical context. However, when pressed on the question of why these differences occurred, she could only surmise that there was probably some divergence in focus between the three.

This pattern was repeated for the presentations that followed. I was surprised at this finding, as the data generated by the spider diagrams a fortnight earlier led me to expect better attempts to address the 'why' question. This may have been because in the exact wording of the coursework question, explaining why interpretations differ is only implicit and is not set out as an obvious requirement (although it is contained in the mark scheme).[3] My reflective diary highlighted other

[3] The pupils' coursework question has to follow the format, *Historians have disagreed about …….. What is your view about ……..?*

issues, particularly that it appeared difficult for pupils to acquire the key information they needed for a proper judgment on this issue through only reading a couple of chapters or an article by a historian (the length specified by Pearson for the coursework task), and not researching more widely about the historian themselves.

Overall, the findings from the introductory course demonstrated the following: firstly, that the pupils had advanced in their understandings of historical claim construction. They could confidently explain how various interpretations differed, and were also now appreciative of a greater variety of valid factors that help explain why interpretations differ, albeit in an abstract fashion. However, the data from lesson 5 showed that the pupils were still struggling to apply this understanding to their own research. This confirmed that additional work was needed to extend the introductory course to ensure that pupils were better placed to progress through their independent reading and writing. As a result, I decided to undertake further planning and action to help pupils overcome this hurdle.

3.4.5 Plan

- **Lesson 6**

After consulting with Roger about my findings, I planned an additional action-step to help provide an extra layer of support for pupils as they properly began their independent development of a first coursework draft.

At this point in term I had been asked by my Head of Department to complete the Paper 1 course with the Year 13 pupils whilst another colleague took over the supervision of coursework due to my greater expertise in Stuart history and previous experience in preparing a class for the Paper 1 examination. I decided to use the opportunity of focused revision of the Glorious Revolution – which included helping pupils to meet the demands of the interpretations examination question – as the foundation for further action that would be relevant to their coursework task too.

I really wanted pupils to see clearly the difference between how and why interpretations differ. I decided to frame the lesson around a question, which I phrased to reflect the exact wording of the coursework task: *Historians have disagreed about whether the Glorious Revolution was truly 'revolutionary'. What is your view about whether the Glorious Revolution was truly 'revolutionary?* By doing this I hoped to make the link between our revision for Paper 1 and the pupil's coursework explicit. The structure of the lesson proceeded as follows:

- Pupils were given three extracts from Christopher Hill, Edward Vallance and John Morrill, relevant to the overarching question.[4] Pupils were to read and annotate the extracts, firstly considering how they were different.
- Working as a class the key points of each historian's argument would be summarised and displayed on the board, with the three different interpretations emerging as a clear starting point.
- I would then display a diagram I had created presenting ideas that explain why historians' arguments differ. These ideas were consolidated into four areas – methodology, specific focus, historical context and personal background, with relevant sub-sections for each. A brief class discussion about each area would ensue, including what we would need to know about the historians and their work in order to formulate a hypothesis regarding differences in interpretation.
- Pupils would then be given specific information about the three historians – for example, regarding Christopher Hill's work being grounded in Marxist theory and the relevance of this to the topic. Paired discussion would follow as a catalyst to generate specific reasons why the historians had interpreted the events of 1688-9 so differently which could be recorded on the board.

[4] Examination length c.450 words from Bullock, Nuttall and White, 2015, p.116.

- The three 'parts' to the lesson could then be displayed together, and a copy printed for pupils as a clear visual representation of the 'how' and 'why' of these three interpretations.

➢ Lesson 7

Despite the pupils understanding the relevant factors that could explain why historical interpretations differ, lesson 5 demonstrated they needed greater guidance in investigating these factors independently. It emerged that the pupils had believed that the reasons for specific interpretations would have been made more overt by their authors: as Darcy commented, 'I struggled because I thought they would make it more obvious'. This statement reminded me of the complexity of the task the pupils were attempting, reinforcing many of the claims in the literature about why pupils find interpretations such a challenging concept, particularly when writing style and rejection of the authorial 'I' is taken into consideration (Coffin, 2006), as this makes it difficult to trace an argument's origins.

My plan for lesson 7 involved showing the pupils how they might do some investigation of their chosen historians to help them better understand issues such as methodology[5], or the contemporary political and economic backdrop. I had – wrongly – assumed that as 'digital natives' the pupils would have been able to quickly and efficiently discover key information as part of the research for their presentation but, it transpired where this had been attempted, pupils had only consulted Wikipedia. After discussion with our digital literacy co-ordinator I decided to model the process of researching such information online. We would work methodically through a google search of an historian, beginning with the name, discussing which sites were reputable, and making inferences from the information found.

[5] For example, history based in a particular school of thought such as Whig or Marxist history.

Following these two lessons, pupils would be fully immersed in their independent research and writing. Roger met with them weekly to supervise progress and check reading records, and kept me up to date about the headway each pupil was making. Pupils received verbal feedback from Roger on a first draft, with a period of time available for further revisions prior to handing in the finished essay.[6] The final drafts were double-marked by Roger and myself, and our judgements on the completed assignments form the basis of the final review.

3.4.6 Act

Lessons 6 and 7 were audio-recorded and transcribed the same evening that they took place. The activities encapsulated in lesson 6 and outlined in the plan above were useful in helping pupils appreciate what they were aiming for in their coursework.[7] For example, Jenny commented, 'I really get it with the Glorious Revolution'. However, there was still an obvious gap between applying this understanding in a lesson situation on a revision topic with teacher guidance, and the pupils being able to do the same independently.

Lesson 7 sought to address this issue by taking pupils through a guided search to demonstrate how they might find out more about the historians they had chosen. We took the example of Barry Coward, a familiar name to all the pupils, and, beginning with a step-by-step Google search of his name, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of websites such as Wikipedia, reputable sites such as *History Today* or *BBC History*, the meaning of Coward's involvements in organisations such as the Historical Association and the Cromwell Association, and the nature of obituaries in online broadsheet newspapers. I was careful to ensure that the pupils understood that they could not make any totally assured claims based on such information, since there is not always a direct relationship between a historian's work and their background (Howells, 2005), but that having such knowledge

[6] In keeping with exam board regulations.
[7] A copy of the lesson diagram can be found in Appendix VII.

can certainly lend weight to suggestions about why interpretations take the shape they do. The final thirty minutes of the lesson was an opportunity for pupils to practise this skill for their individual areas of research.

3.4.7 Final Review

I was more confident that the pupils were better equipped to pursue productive independent study, planning and drafting of their coursework following the two additional introductory lessons. During this process Roger checked in with them weekly, signing off their reading records and monitoring progress. Roger and I discussed each individual briefly every week, and during this period it seemed that they all had a clear idea of the work required to tackle the extended writing task successfully. The quality of independent research and thought is obviously difficult to evidence as a process, but the reading records of the pupils go some way towards doing this.[8] The example in Appendix VIII gives a flavour of a selection of Jake's research, the reasoning behind the choice of his final three interpretations, and how they fit into a wider debate.

Roger and I read and discussed the pupils' first full drafts before he gave individual verbal feedback. Generally, we judged that each pupil had made a very good attempt to address their respective questions, and to engage with the nature of historical interpretations. Jenny and Laura in particular produced strong first drafts, and feedback here mostly involved stylistic points such as ensuring consistent referencing. Darcy was guided towards giving greater thought to her overall structure, and ensuring there was a final substantiated judgement, and Jake's feedback mainly centred on issues relating to clarity of written expression and grammatical accuracy. Overall, the first drafts were promising, and I was encouraged with the way the pupils had responded to the challenge.

[8] An exam board requirement.

The main analysis of this final review focuses on the submitted coursework essays – the end point which had provided the rationale for the project. The baseline data had demonstrated that most of the pupils held ingrained beliefs that historical interpretations were based on personal opinion (Cassedy et al., 2011). Literature such as Chapman (2017) and Howells (2005) had suggested that focusing on the methodology and decision-making of historians, along with the disciplinary constraints they work under, could help pupils advance in their understanding of historical claim construction. This final review therefore analyses the pupils' coursework essays with a focus on how far they were able to apply their understanding of these specific areas covered in the introductory course to their writing.

After submission, the final essays were first-marked by Roger, and second-marked by myself prior to being sent away for examination board moderation.[9] Three essays were marked within level 5, the top level of the mark scheme with two of these being placed in upper level 5. The other essay was awarded a high level 4. The moderator report received by the centre in August 2018 stated that our judgements had been accurate and all marks were agreed. Anonymised copies of the essays were subject to a process of sentence by sentence open coding, using the same categories outlined in Appendix IV for ease of comparison. It should be mentioned that as a consequence of the complexity of the coursework task the coding category 'contextual knowledge' in this analysis encompasses the following types: pupils' contextual knowledge of the period being interpreted; pupils' knowledge of the period in which the interpretation was created (evidence of deployment of dual contextualisation); and, finally, knowledge of the wider historiographical debate. The results can be seen in table v below.

The table demonstrates that all pupils moved away from the simple subjectivist view, and were better placed to consider the aims, argument, evidence and both the historical and historiographical

[9] See Appendix IX for an example page of a marked essay.

context of the interpretation. The table, however, only provides an overview of the individual pupils' ideas and understandings, and a few extracts warrant more in-depth analysis to fully demonstrate the advancement in thought.

v. Coding data for final coursework essays

	FREQUENCY OF CODING CATEGORY SEEN IN PUPIL DATA FROM COMPLETED COURSEWORK ESSAYS									
	Ticks represent evidence where pupils have attempted to explain why the interpretations of their three chosen historians differ. The number of ticks represent the number of times this code was represented in the essay.									
	Aims	Argument	Evidence	External	Objectivity	Identity	Interpretation	Opinion	Breadth	Contextual knowledge
Jake	✓	✓✓✓		✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓		✓	✓✓✓
Darcy	✓	✓✓✓		✓	✓	✓	✓✓✓		✓	✓✓
Jenny	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓	✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Laura	✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓				✓✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓

The essays demonstrated that – in contrast to the baseline data – all pupils appeared much more able and confident to discuss the historians' views as interpretations emerging from a particular aim or focus. Laura was able to use this as a convincing reason to explain differences in interpretation on her chosen topic, the failure of constitutional monarchy in France, 1792. For example:

> *For Sutherland to reach this conclusion, feasibly he is approaching the question from a different angle; whilst Tackett and Doyle's approach consider what the trigger for the necessary end of constitutional monarchy was for the leaders of the revolution, Sutherland considers the reasoning used by the ordinary citizens of France who felt denied of their rights that they had been promised at the start of this turbulent period of history.*

Darcy was also able to do this to good effect in her essay exploring the causes of the English Civil War of 1642, and in particular in her introduction to her analysis of Conrad Russell's interpretation:

> *Whilst Russell still identifies a place for Gardiner and Hill's perspectives for the inevitability of political and social transformation, he seeks to explain the Civil War in terms of specific actions and events, and that an understanding of these key events concludes that poor judgements, personality, over reactions and accidental factors are the root cause.*

This ability to convincingly explain divergences in interpretations as a consequence of legitimate differences in the aim or focus of an historian underpins a more advanced understanding of the nature of history as a discipline, as the pupils recognise that historians have asked different research questions, or have placed greater weight on one particular aspect of their research (Chapman and Goldsmith, 2015; Ford, 2017). Lesson 2 of the introductory course was designed to help pupils consider this aspect of claim construction, and the adaptation of Chapman's (2017) task provided a thought-provoking activity which resonated with the pupils. Lesson 3 was also important, as each historian had emphasised the significance of their research questions and how their overall aims for their work influenced the subsequent interpretations.

In addition to the improved recognition and explanation of the different aims of historians, some essays were able to evaluate the historians' choice of evidence and its impact. For example, Jenny used her knowledge of the primary source base of David Smith's work to critique his interpretation of the reign of Charles II:

> *By predominantly using primary sources such as government records, letters and memoirs, Smith's interpretation naturally focusses upon the perspective of the monarch, his advisors, and the men in government. Without considering the position of the population during Charles II's reign, Smith fails to assess a large aspect of the King's reign.*

This extract demonstrates an awareness that an historian's methodology and decision making can have a discernible effect on the final interpretation. The historians' visit in lesson 3 saw Dr Crook give a full explanation of his selection of evidence and its relevance to the nature of his interpretation. We had also discussed historians' choice and use of evidence in lesson 2's activity based on Kennington Common, so it was pleasing to see the pupils applying this learning to their independent work.

Most impressive was the pupils' use of contextual knowledge, particularly when demonstrating their awareness of the need to employ dual contextualisation (Card, 2004) and to situate their chosen

interpretations in a wider historiographical debate. Darcy was able to offer a credible explanation that as Samuel Gardiner's 'analysis was completed in the mid to late 19th century', his work was 'unlikely to have faced the type of academic challenge that is prevalent today', showing an understanding of the interpretation's historical context, and the importance of the disciplinary community for more modern works of history. Jake was also able to demonstrate a strong understanding of the importance of dual contextualisation in his explanation of some of the more obscure aspects of Macaulay's interpretation of Oliver Cromwell:

> *An unusual avenue for regarding Cromwell as a revolutionary, according to Macaulay, was in his redrawing of MPs' constituencies to better reflect the population makeup of England. Cromwell also modestly expanded the suffrage. In reconstituting this body, the Protector showed a wisdom and a public spirit which were not duly appreciated by his contemporaries but which could be well appreciated by Macaulay for at the time he was writing there were ongoing debates about the contemporary reform of parliament. Macaulay himself was a participant in these debates as an MP and was keen as a Whig politician to see a similar extension of the vote and a removal of the old rotten boroughs.*

These examples demonstrate that the pupils had grasped the significance of undertaking dual contextualisation, and were able to offer some sound inferences as a consequence. The pupils had indicated that they felt much more confident in this analysis following the lesson 7's modelling of how to investigate the background and context of their chosen historians.

Darcy and Jake had both chosen historians writing in three distinct eras – the nineteenth century, the early twentieth century, and a modern account. They were consequently well placed to discuss interpretations created within different schools of thought, and both explained ways in which Whig, Marxist and revisionist theories differ in an accomplished manner. In addition, all pupils had explored a range of high level reading beyond their three chosen interpretations in order to situate their evaluations in the context of a wider historiographical debate. Most impressive in this respect was Laura, who had discussed the works of Schama, Hanson, Lefebvre, Furet, Lewis and Rudé in her analyses of the interpretations of Doyle, Sutherland and Tackett. Lesson 3 of the introductory course had been significant in this respect, as each historian had discussed their work in the context of

others, and gave the pupils an insight into conventions such as peer review enabling them to gain a more complete understanding of history as a discipline (Chapman and Goldsmith, 2015, Cassedy et al., 2011).

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Research questions: conclusions

- **RQ1:** *What views do sixth form pupils currently hold about the nature of historical interpretations?*

The initial pupil interviews, questionnaires and group discussion highlighted the fact that the pupils held fairly basic ideas regarding historical interpretations. The most prominent issue was the belief that historical interpretations were analogous to personal opinions, and that historians were guilty of selecting, rejecting and distorting primary evidence to fit a preconceived argument (Chapman, 2011). The literature suggested that this type of simple subjectivism (Cassedy et. al, 2011) might be overcome if pupils can be made aware of historians' decision making, methodology and the disciplinary conventions they work within (Lee, 2005). As a consequence, my introductory course was planned with these three key features of academic claim construction at the forefront.

- **RQ2:** *What does the teaching of an introductory course, focusing on historical interpretations further reveal about the challenges associated with pupil mastery of this concept?*

Pupils were receptive to the ideas introduced. For most it was the first time they had properly considered the process of researching and writing history, and they appreciated the opportunities the course offered to understand the subject at a deeper level. The pupils developed a good abstract understanding relatively quickly, but lesson 5 demonstrated that they found this difficult to apply independently. Ideally, such work on interpretations would be done in the context of a whole-class topic, where the historians and their works have direct relevance to the learning of the period (Carroll, 2017). However, whilst it does not directly contravene examination board regulations to do this for the A-Level coursework, there is certainly a trade-off between allowing pupils' freedom of choice in their topic and greater whole-class, focused support. As a department we believed it was

important to allow our pupils to choose their own coursework questions to aid them in their development as historians and better prepare them for higher education. The conclusion after the first five lessons was that further intervention was needed, which included more explicit modelling and structured support to enable pupils to independently investigate the background and historical context of their chosen historians.

- **RQ3:** *In what ways can an introductory course and supported independent study improve pupils' understanding of historical interpretations?*

The final conclusion is that the introductory course did have value in helping the pupils to advance in their understanding of historical interpretations and provided a supportive framework for independent study. Whilst the small sample size means that I make no claims regarding generalizability, the research nonetheless shows that a series of carefully planned introductory lessons, specifically centred on the process of historical claim construction, can be beneficial to pupil thought. The coursework essays show that each pupil advanced in their understandings of the areas the course focused on, most notably in the following areas: in the ability to employ dual contextualisation (Card, 2004); in their appreciation of how the aims and focus of historians can impact on their interpretation, and how the selection of historical evidence can frame an interpretation; and in their ability to contextualise interpretations within a wider scholarly debate rather than as stand-alone opinions. Pupils' final judgements were made based on attempts at criterial evaluation, showing definitively that they had moved beyond simple subjectivism, recognising that 'several valid accounts exist' (Lee, 2005, p.70).

Working collaboratively with colleagues was crucial to the success of this project. In particular, consulting with Roger and John at the end of the initial five lessons helped me to see not only that further intervention was required, but also the specific form that intervention should take.

Communication with Roger during the independent research and writing phase, and discussion regarding the final essays, also enabled me to be confident in my judgements regarding how well the pupils had grasped the key tenets of the introductory course. Finally, perhaps the most valuable consequence of the project is that it has opened further avenues for productive collaboration in work on historical interpretations within the department, which are detailed below.

4.2 Next steps

The project has led me to reflect on how to make some of the more successful elements accessible to a greater number of pupils. From a school-based perspective, three of these might be identified. The first of these is the need to plan meaningful interpretations work into the history courses from Year 7 upwards. The new GCSE course gives a good opportunity to explore how and why historical interpretations differ, building on important work done at Key Stage 3. In discussion with my colleagues, it has been agreed that this will be a future departmental focus. Secondly, one of the surprises my research unearthed was pupils' lack of basic internet research skills. As a result, I have recommended that more work be done directly with our digital literacy coordinator at an early stage in the course to help pupils hone their searching skills, thereby enabling them to gain a fuller picture of the historians whose work they are evaluating.

Thirdly, elements of the introductory course I planned have already been taught by a colleague to the current Year 12 pupils, who are beginning their coursework module at a slightly different time in the A-Level cycle. We revised the introductory course in light of my experiences, in particular ensuring that there were opportunities for pupils to apply their learning from the introductory lessons to their independent research from the outset, so that the two ran more concurrently, and also by including a session with our digital literacy coordinator as part of the course. In collaboration with my department we have also begun to create new resources which are intended to de-mystify

the process of independent research whilst also leading pupils to consider some key aspects of historical interpretations, such as methodology, and the wider disciplinary context.[10] The creation of these resources, and the value of the historians' visit in lesson 3, has also given me further ambitions to create a resource bank of videos of academic historians giving explanations of the how they wrote a particular book. These would have the potential to be developed into similar resources for the classroom. They could also be accessed via a website to make them available to a much wider cohort of pupils, thus contributing to the development of teaching and learning about historical interpretations much beyond my school.

[10] See example in Appendix II, which encourages pupils to begin to make inferences from books covers and blurbs, and also includes extracts of book reviews to help pupils appreciate the way the text has been received within the disciplinary community.

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APPENDIX I

Copy of rationale for organising the historians' visit in lesson 3 which I had to complete for my school, and which was sent to the historians to help them plan their talks.

VISITNG SPEAKERS – Professor Glen O'Hara, Dr Tom Crook and Dr James Cooper (Oxford Brookes University)

Visit to [redacted] for a workshop with Year 13 History: 03/10/17 (Organised by HJH)

- **Purpose of visit**

Background: The Year 13 History pupils (5 in total) are about to embark on their independent coursework task (20% of the total A Level grade). They have each chosen a separate area of 'historical controversy' to focus on, and by the Easter holidays will need to have produced a 4,000 word essay which answers a question in the following format:

'Historians have disagreed about [the chosen question/problem/issue].
What is your view about [the chosen question/problem/issue]?
With reference to three chosen works:

- *Analyse the ways in which interpretations of the question, problem or issue differ*
- *Explain the differences you have identified*
- *Evaluate the arguments, indicating which you found most persuasive and explaining your judgements*

The task focuses heavily on pupil selection and understanding of the nature of historical interpretations. The exam board, Edexcel, suggests that as a result of a short introductory taught course (of which the visit of Prof O'Hara, Dr Crook and Dr Cooper is part), and the pupils' own independent investigation, the following learning objectives should be met. Pupils will:

- Recognise that interpretations are representations and constructions of the past
- Recognise the relationships between interpretations and the questions that they seek to ask and answer
- Comprehend and analyse the defining elements of particular interpretations
- Explain why historians arrive at the interpretations they do and that differences in interpretations can be legitimate
- Be able to evaluate differing interpretations against appropriate and relevant criteria

The pedagogical literature (and teacher experience) suggests that pupils, even at sixth form level, often struggle to see beyond the identity of a historian when evaluating historical interpretations, meaning that many are written off as little more than 'opinion'. Equally troubling is a tendency for pupils to attempt to match evidence used in historical writing to what they consider to be a 'fixed, known' past. The introductory course aims to help pupils appreciate the process by which historical interpretations are created, including historical methodology and a consideration of evaluative criteria that may be applied to historiography. Prior to the visit of Prof O'Hara, Dr Tom Crook and Dr James Cooper, the pupils will have had two lessons to consider some of the factors historians have to consider when creating an interpretation, for example, the particular choice of research question, and practical/methodological decisions and constraints.

Historians' visit
Prof O'Hara, Dr Crook and Dr Cooper will lead a session covering one double lesson (period1&2/08.55 – 10.05/03/10/17). The aim of the visit is for pupils to hear first-hand about the historical research, writing and publication process, which will hopefully encourage them towards a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies involved in the creation of an historical interpretation. The two historians will present their ideas (approximately 15 minutes each) on the following:

- What they consider to be the job of a historian/role of a historian in society
- A basic overview of the process they go through when researching/writing/publishing. References to their own works are welcome, as are some of the disciplinary conventions that pupils might not be aware of, e.g. peer review.
- An idea of what each historian considers to be 'good history', or what makes a convincing historical interpretation.

There will then be 15 minutes or so for questions from the pupils which Prof O'Hara, Dr Crook and Dr Cooper can respond to.

APPENDIX II

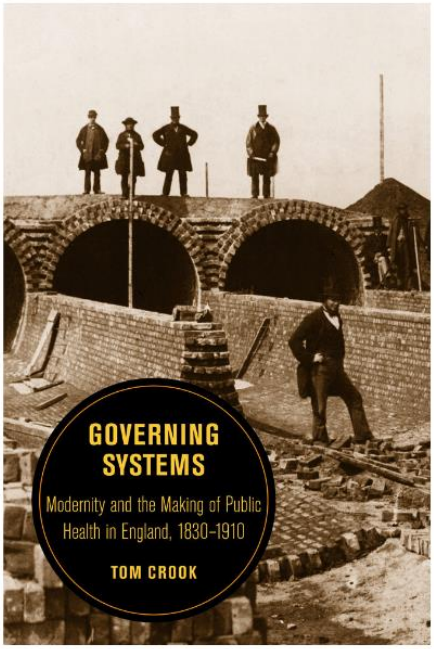
Copy of resource created in collaboration with my department as a result of the project.



We're going to look in detail at the work of the historian, Dr Tom Crook (Oxford Brookes University) to help us consider the process by which a work of history is created, and the process you should follow when examining an interpretation. .

You're going to explore the following: clues from book front covers/blurbs; Dr Crook's description of the process of research and writing; reviews of the book by other academics.

Constructing the Past: A Case Study



First Impressions...

← Front Cover

Your first impression of a book usually comes from the front cover. Have a look at this one. The picture shows the construction of part of the first sewerage system for London, overseen by one of the most prominent civil engineers of the period, Joseph Bazalgette. This image would have been chosen deliberately by Dr Crook to represent his work. Look also at the title.

THINK:

- *From the information available to you from the front cover, what do you think this book will be about?*

Back Cover →

After considering the front cover of a book, you might turn it over and look at the back cover or blurb. This is designed to provide a brief summary of the book for potential readers. The back of 'Governing Systems' is produced on the right. It contains a brief summary, the thoughts of two other historians of the period on the book, and also other information about the book - for example it is part of the Berkeley series in British Studies and has been published by the University of California Press - an academic publisher. Read the back cover and:

THINK:

- *What language is used to suggest this is a 'new' interpretation? What can you learn about Crook's argument, just from this brief summary?*

HISTORY | BRITISH STUDIES

When and how did public health become modern? In *Governing Systems*, Tom Crook offers a fresh answer to this question through an examination of Victorian and Edwardian England, long considered one of the critical birthplaces of modern public health. This birth, Crook argues, should be located not in the rise of professional expertise or a centralized bureaucratic state but in the contested formation and functioning of multiple systems, both human and material, administrative and technological. Theoretically ambitious yet empirically grounded, *Governing Systems* will be of interest to historians of modern public health and modern Britain, as well as to anyone interested in the complex gestation of the governmental dimensions of modernity.

"*Governing Systems* is an ambitious, original, and stimulating book on a central subject of modern British history, indeed of modern history: the forces creating 'modernity.' Crook gives equal attention to local detail, variation, and contingency and to general principles and dynamics of social and administrative change. In sum, this is an important book that will spark debate and leave its mark on the subject."

FRANK TRENTMANN, author of *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First*

"*Governing Systems* is an absolutely excellent book: sophisticated in conception, tightly argued, brilliantly researched, highly polished, and beautifully written. It is restlessly unreductive in its analysis of government, technology, and health, and it makes much of the work in this area seem simplistic by comparison. It achieves this level of subtlety by being simultaneously empirical, theoretical, and synthetic. It truly captures the sense of government as something multiple, dynamic, frustrating, and contingent, by focusing on the mundane, daily, nitty-gritty acts of trying to get people (and technologies) to behave in particular ways to achieve certain ends."

CHRIS OTTER, author of *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910*

TOM CROOK is Lecturer in Modern British History at Oxford Brookes University.

Berkeley Series in British Studies, 11

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Cover design: Nicole Hayward. Cover illustration: Construction of the Northern Outfall section of London's Main Drainage Scheme at Barking Creek, 1862. The sewerage system for England's capital city was the brainchild of the Victorian engineer Joseph Bazalgette, pictured standing top right. © Hulton-Deutsch Collection/CORBIS.

ISBN 978-0-520-29035-8

In the words of the author....

In October 2017 Dr Crook visited Kingham Hill School along with two of his colleagues to discuss the process of researching and writing their books. Below are some extracts from his talk. **THINK:** *What can they tell us about (i) the way a historian approaches the process of writing a book; (ii) the decisions historians have to make, and the practical constraints they face.*

My book is about Victorian public health. Victorian public health has been much studied, and there have already been many books written about Victorian public health, lots of articles, lots of biographies about the key players, so one of the things I had to do in terms of selling my book - not least to publishers - was to think about what was going to distinguish my history of Victorian public health, what was going to be unique to my story. And this is especially important for anyone writing a monograph because in a specialist study of this sort the author has got to make a case for the originality of his story. And in my case there were three particular aspects that distinguished my account of Victorian Public Health. First of all, my story of Victorian Public Health was a story about lots of different systems, lots of different governing systems. Previously Victorian Public Health had been told as a story of state-building, so the Victorians had built this big, monolithic, proto welfare state which looked after and cared for the health of its subjects. But what I wanted to do was focus on the practicalities and the details of governing, so I tried to tell the story of public health as not building this big, interventionist state but about lots of different systems, for instance sewerage systems, water supply systems, systems for notifying infectious diseases, systems of inspection, systems for collecting vital statistics so they knew how many people were dying of infectious diseases and so on. Secondly, a distinctive feature was, I was interested in the local professionals that made public health happen. Victorian public health was often being told by looking at the key leading figures, often based on London, Edwin Chadwick, Joseph Bazalgette, John Simon… and these were all sort of leading figures based on London, but I wanted to tell the history of London from a more local perspective, and look at the local engineers and look at the medical officers and local inspectors that made public health happen across the country. Finally, I was also concerned with the members of the public, the 'public' of public health. Prior to my account, historians had often talked about public health from an expert perspective, but I was also interested in how the public cooperated with public health initiatives, and indeed resisted them, so I was trying to offer a richer, more inclusive history, and that was my pitch, that's what made my monograph original.

In the course of trying to tell my particular story about Victorian public health I had to make a number of decisions, I had to go through a number of processes. This is a book in particular about public health in England. Books have been written in the past about Victorian public health across Britain as a whole. One of the choices I had to make, right at the start, was whether this was going to be a book about Britain, or about England. Scotland has a slightly different culture of public health as it emerges in the 19th century, partly due to the peculiar culture of the Scottish Poor Law so in the end I decided to leave Scotland out of it because it was a bit too complicated. I left out Wales as well because nothing really important had happened in Wales in terms of public health in the 19th century, so I figured it was easier for me to focus on England, and in any case, England was home of crucial developments in public health. Due to the word limit I knew I wasn't going to be able to document everything that happened under the banner of public health in the Victorian period; this is not a comprehensive account nor does it claim to be, and I say this in my introduction. Things that I included were those I felt were the crucial, defining and innovative features of Victorian public health.

Then we come to the question of sources. This might be different if you're a medievalist, but in the Victorian period you're spoilt for choice in terms of your sources for the 19th century, so actually my problem in writing and researching was what sources to consult. I went for a variety of of published, printed material, generally of a professional or official sort, plus a sampling of newspapers, but as I mentioned before, my books was trying to get at the local dimensions of public health, but there was no way I could go round all the archives in England so I went for a sample - Manchester, London and Oxford. Then there is the process of reading and writing. On the one hand you have your argument that you've partly formulated in advance of looking at the sources, so then I went to the sources to basically find out if the sources would support my argument, or whether, in light of actually looking at the sources I needed to refine and revise my argument….

Of course, history is what's happened in the past but we can't go back to the past, so this is what history appears to us as, we find it in books, a variety of books, and articles. And it's about constructing arguments and interpretations based on evidence. No account can be truly comprehensive as I've mentioned before, choices have to be made about the scope of your study, about the sources you're going to draw upon, ok… but that does not mean that history is about subjective opinion. It is evidence based and historians try to construct arguments and interpretations that are based on that evidence. But it does involve making choices, but that does not mean that it is based on subjective opinion, it's much more complicated than that.



What else do we need to know?

As well as considering your own first impressions of the book, along with Dr Crook's explanation of his argument and the process of research and writing, it's useful to examine how the book has been viewed in the disciplinary community - that is, by other historians. By reading book reviews you can gain an insight into what other academics have considered to be the strengths and weaknesses of the interpretation offered. **THINK:** *Read the extracts from reviews of 'Governing Systems' below. What can they tell us about what others consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of this interpretation and indeed, Crook's approach?*

Barry M. Doyle, Social History of Medicine, Volume 30, Issue 3, 1 August 2017

When I was a student victorian urban history was deemed a dull backwater concerned with stinks and drains. In this new contribution to to the study of nineteenth-century public health - and by extension the urban history of Victorian Britain - Tom Crook has taken stinks and drains, and many other topics besides, and effectively placed them in the forefront of social and cultural history. Shaped by concerns with governance, liberalism and modernity, especially the Victorian tension between the political centre and the locality, the book offers a novel interpretation of the transformation of the urban sanitary infrastructure. Its key strength is the way it brings together the debates, discussions and propaganda of a range of actors - from parliamentarians, through metropolitan opinion formers and professionals to the local agents concerned with the delivery of services - and illustrates these through extensive evidence of the competing technologies and systems at the heart of the debates. In the process Crook presents a sophisticated new interpretation of the English route to modernity.

The book takes us from reified theoretical discussion on the nature of government, especially the antagonisms between centre and locality and liberty and control, through a number of practical problems of urban health governance to a final chapter focused on the individual's role in the emerging category of personal hygiene. In many respects the introduction is the least satisfactory part of a challenging and innovative book. Although it provides an interesting overview of some important theoretical issues in cultural history, it fails to provide the reader with an effective introduction to the largely empirical themes examined in the book. It is the second chapter that really establishes the framework for the book, taking the traditional topic of centre-local relations and recasting it as a productive tension rather than a dichotomy. Thus, central government took the right to regulate, advise and only occasionally compel, while the localities were left to shape services around their needs, resources and preferences.

Overall this is a very stimulating book that takes a series of traditional urban history debates and casts them in a very different light, both renaming and re-thinking many of the old problems. Ultimately it concludes that the modernity of Britain's public health system was characterised by contingency, diversity and competition rather than a simple narrative of growing central state power. As a result for most of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century local agents retained the liberty to decide the means by which they would protect the public's health.

David McLean, Journal of Modern History 89, no.4, December 2017

It takes courage to write a book about public health in nineteenth and early twentieth century British cities. After all, what can be said that has not been said before? Undeterred, Tom Crook justifies his labor at the outset. He makes no claim to a comprehensive coverage of the field; his emphasis is on notions of modernity in public health provision and the diversity of the systems that were involved. Space is, of course, devoted to definitions of terminology, modernity included, and there is a useful survey of the existing historiography. But the author eschews the well-trodden path of telling the story through the writings and campaigns of nineteenth-century reformers. Naturally, most of the major figures are mentioned, but Crook is concerned less with politics and policy and more with everyday manifestations of change as they impacted ordinary lives. His work thereby looks to qualify the heroic role of the Victorian and Edwardian state, so prevalent in traditional histories of the era. Instead, he diverts the reader toward practical solutions to the widespread problems of waste collection and disposal…

Public health improvement raised contentious issues. What powers should the state, acting so reformers claimed, for the good of all, take for itself at the expense of individual freedoms? And even where legislation and compulsion were felt appropriate, where should the line between central government and local authority be drawn? In a liberal age, Crook rightly observes, these were fundamental questions that could take decades to resolve. In this context, citing the dates and terms of various Acts of Parliament can only serve as markers of a long and complicated historical journey. Being thematic, the book does present the reader with certain challenges. Considering the Victorian and Edwardian eras as a whole sometimes requires the sense of chronology to be suspended. Crook by no means suggests that the period was static, yet readers are occasionally confronted with leaps in time that can belie the social and cultural changes underway….

The value of the book lies in its impressive command of detail. Admittedly, there is more to say about antiseptics and the search for an effective disinfectant. Yet no book can cover everything, nor should it be expected to do so. Compared with their condition in 1830, by 1910 British cities were cleaner, smelt less, and their inhabitants were generally healthier. *Governing Systems* goes far to unravel the multilayered means by which that was achieved.

Christopher Hamlin, Reviews in History, 7 September 2017

Tom Crook has written a big book - big in scope, range and thought. It is both an overview of the institutionalization of public health in England and an interpretation of that event as paradigmatic of the systems and practices of pervasive governance that constitute modernity. *Governing Systems* is a double entendre - not only do public health-related systems do the work of governing, they themselves may require governing - though it is not clear they get it.

……

Though I find the gestures toward 'systems' and 'modernity' underdeveloped and the terms themselves probably unnecessary, the concerns above should register as complements not criticisms. It is rare to finish a reasonably lengthy book and wish it were longer. Crook has done much; there is need for much more. Crooks's principal choice - to open our minds to the pervasiveness of public health governance that arose during the 19th century - is exactly right. He recognizes that his approach does not replace those of heroic and antiheroic historians. But the most important contribution of his book will be (I hope) to stimulate research. There is so very much we do not know about very familiar elements of modernity. The potential source base is enormous. Crook relies mainly on underutilized printed sources of professional exchange, though he has sampled local archives too. But his book is not significantly based on parliamentary papers - the great blue books with their mountains of tables and 10s of 1000s of technical questions and answers that were the staple of an earlier generation of historians of 19th century government - or, as I have noted, on the tons of digested governance in the National Archives, not to mention in innumerable local archives. All these record key sites of professional practice. That much of this, along with the goldmine of local newspapers, is now digitized, makes such work possible, though daunting too - the sheer mass of materials may well deter students needing to produce a dissertation in finite time. Still, Crook's fine book gives me hope that historians will come back to (or, more properly, discover for the first time) a kind of research immensely important to the understanding of the present and the recent past, and long neglected.

APPENDIX III

Study the two extracts below. They are interpretations by professional historians which discuss the nature of the Glorious Revolution, and the change it brought about to the power of monarch and parliament.

In no more than one and a half sides of A4 explain:

a) How these two interpretations differ;
b) Why you think these two interpretations might differ.
c) Which interpretation do you find most convincing, and why?

E. Vallance, *The Glorious Revolution: 1688 – Britain's Fight for Liberty,* (2006)

At the time, 1688–89 was called a revolution and there remains significant evidence to support this view. If the Revolution did not represent the advent of parliamentary 'democracy', it certainly established parliamentary government. Through its increasing control over government expenditure, and later through the Triennial Act, Parliament became a permanent institution at the heart of government. Equally important, the Revolution imposed real limitations on the power of the monarch. Restrictions were placed on the crown as a defence against the likely succession to the throne of more foreign princes. The Act of Settlement, with its limitations upon royal powers of appointment and royal power to wage war independently, effectively ended the threat of royal tyranny.

……

William's assent to the Triennial Act of 1694 ensured regular Parliaments and ushered in a period of feverish electioneering and deeply partisan politics. Between 1689 and 1715 there were twelve general elections: in 1689, 1690, 1695, 1698, 1701 (two), 1702, 1705, 1708, 1710, 1713 and 1715. Each of these saw on average 100 out of 269 seats contested… Over that period only nineteen constituencies managed to avoid having contests at all, meaning that in almost every constituency in England the local electorate was at some point asked to decide between rival candidates… politics was increasingly being governed by loyalty to one or other party. There is strong evidence that after 1695 voting in the Commons was conducted largely along party lines, with only 14 percent of MPs regularly engaging in cross-party voting.

B. Coward, *The Stuart Age: England, 1603 – 1714,* (1997).

Important as were the limitations put on the powers of the new monarchs by the coronation oath, the Declaration (and Bill) of Rights, and the financial settlement of 1690, they were much smaller than had been intended by some in the Convention Parliament in 1690. The best illustration of this is a comparison of the programme of sweeping constitutional changes proposed by a parliamentary committee in its report in February 1689 and the shortened list of limits put on royal power by the Bill of Rights.

Why was the Bill of Rights emasculated in this way? One reason is that William's hostility to constitutional limitations being imposed on him was well known, and ambitious politicians at the start of the new reign took the hint. Above all, however, the major reason was that, as in 1660, most MPs were driven to a speedy settlement by panic at the thought of what might happen if the lack of a settled government were prolonged. The men of 1689 were no less fearful of the collapse of order than were the men of 1659-60. In this climate the demands of those, like radical Whig zealots ('the true Whigs' as they were called), for major constitutional and ecclesiastical changes were swept aside. In the view of many, the pressing need for the re-establishment of monarchical authority took precedence over the luxury of lengthy debates that a programme of major constitutional changes would require. Like the Toleration Act, the Bill of Rights was the outcome of pressing needs and not careful thought and planning. It was, as a result, a limited document.

…. After 1689 there emerged a more powerful British state than ever before. The Glorious Revolution contributed to that process but only directly in a limited way. However, its indirect contribution to it was more important. One consequence of the Glorious Revolution that has not yet been mentioned in this chapter was the involvement of Britain in a long period of European warfare. It was this that was the major agent of constitutional change that transformed Britain in fundamental ways in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

APPENDIX IV

Explanatory/evaluative (how/why) codes (based on Chapman and Goldsmith, 2015)

Code Category	Accounts differ, and their relative quality can be judged because:
AIMS	Historians make decisions about what questions to ask and/or about which issues to focus on
ARGUMENT	Historians construct their arguments in different ways (e.g. including or not including counter-argument, the presentation of the argument)
EVIDENCE USED	Historians use or selection of different evidence / the quality or quantity of this evidence / the way in which it's used to support their claims
EXTERNAL FACTORS	Factors beyond historians impact interpretation (e.g. the complexity of the past or changes in perspective caused by the passage of time)
OBJECTIVITY/SUBJECTIVITY	Some historians may aim to write more 'neutral' accounts, without any sign of their own opinion, others may have a very definite view which is clear in the text.
IDENTITY	Historians have different identities, motivations, beliefs and interests that have an impact on their interpretations
INTERPRETATION	Historians organise and interpret their evidence in different ways
OPINION	Historians' interpretations are based upon their personal opinion of the time period/evidence
BREADTH	Considering the degree to which accounts address a wide or narrow range of issues / perspectives / time period.
PUPIL CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE	Historians' accounts can be evaluated based on how they fit in with pupils' contextual understanding of the period.

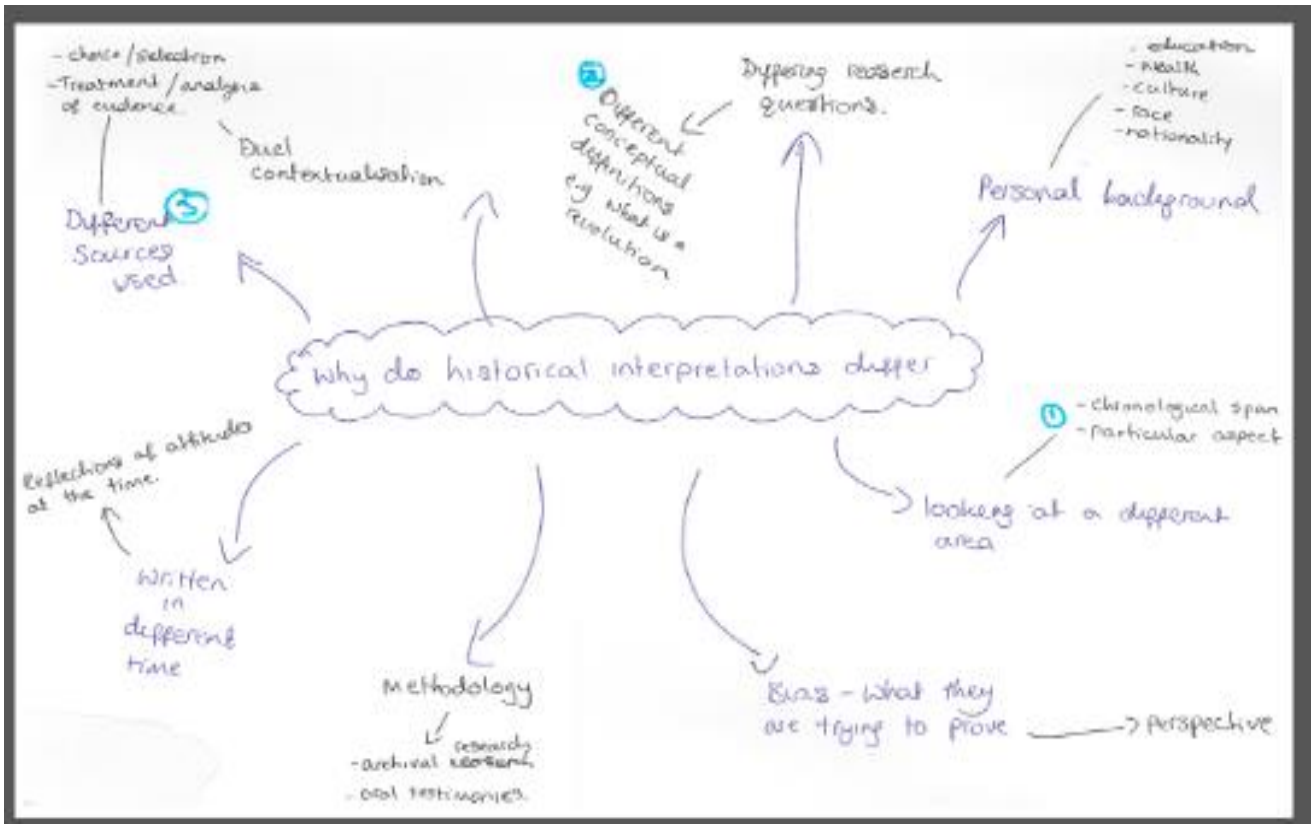
APPENDIX V

Example of a selection of some of the coded data from baseline interview and discussion transcripts. The excerpts from the transcripts are coloured to match the codes to which they were assigned.

Coding category	A selection of extracts from the transcripts of all four pupils
Aims Argument Evidence used External factors Objectivity/subjectivity Identity Opinion Breadth	more might have been known than in 1997 writing directly about the revolution in 1688… he's trying to be more specific as it is such as short time of history Coward talks about the whole Stuart Age so may be having a larger scale when looking at the consequences of the revolution When they are writing, the political situation at the time Their own circumstances and background It is difficult to be objective He mentions quite a lot of dates and Acts of parliament so seems keener on political history Could say the way they look at things? Personal beliefs? If you want people to take your argument seriously you have to persuade them it's the right one Each view reflects how time has passed and how close you are to an event Personal opinions are important They are literally never objective If they are really for something they manipulate the facts They're not saying this is what happened, they're saying this is what happened having looked at all the evidence

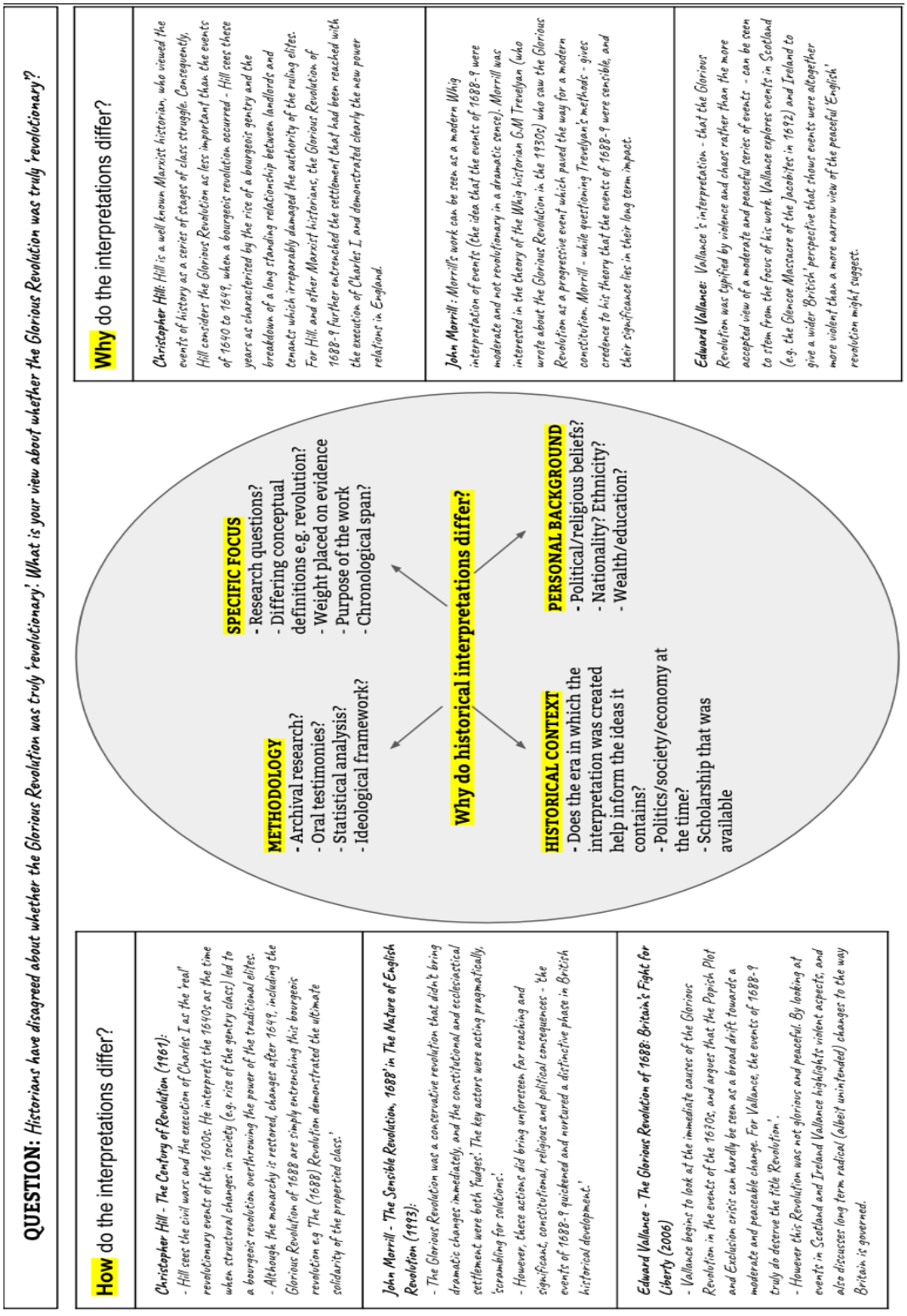
APPENDIX VI

Example of pupil spider diagram from lesson 4



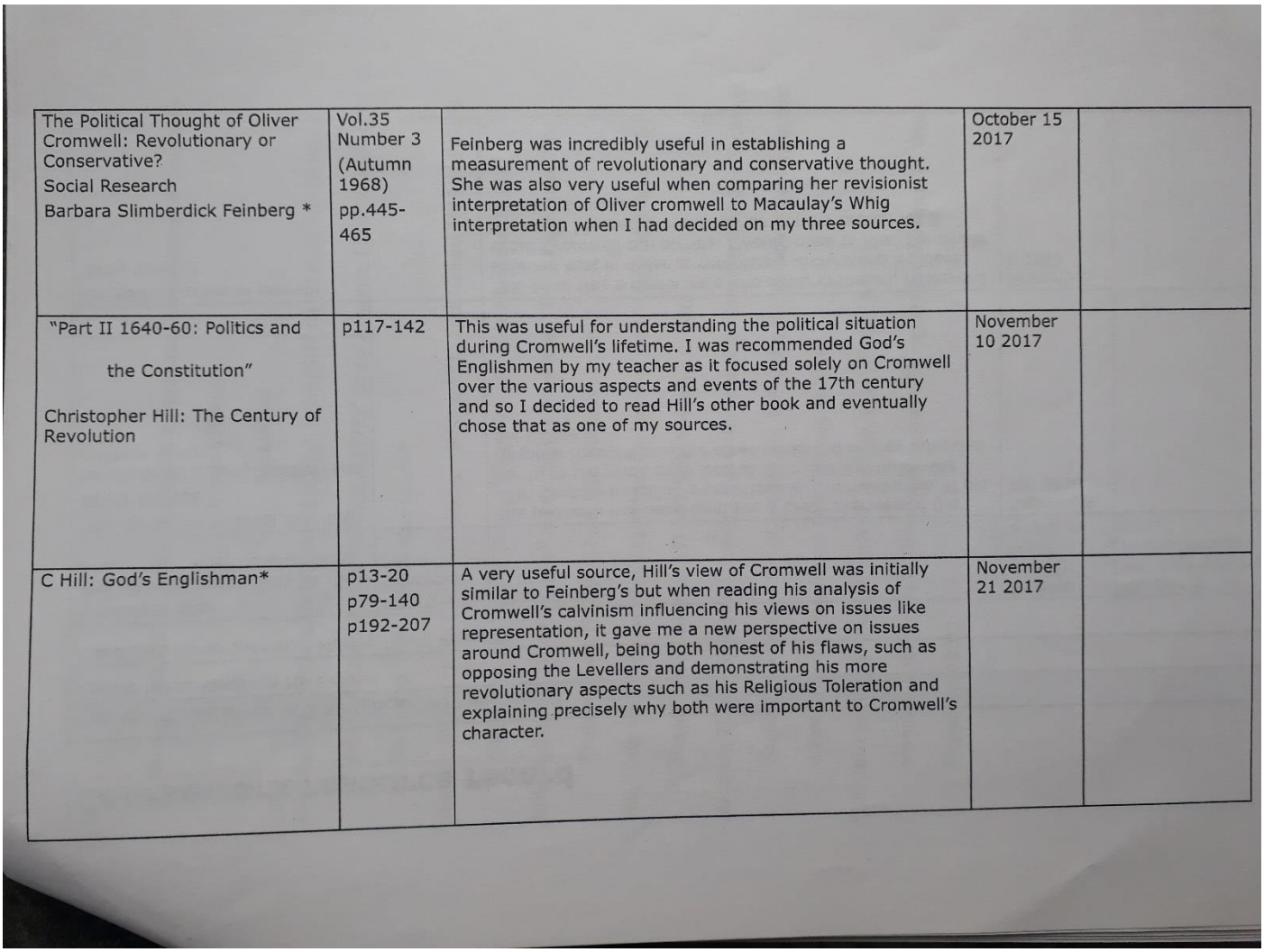
APPENDIX VII

Class diagram created during lesson 6



APPENDIX VIII

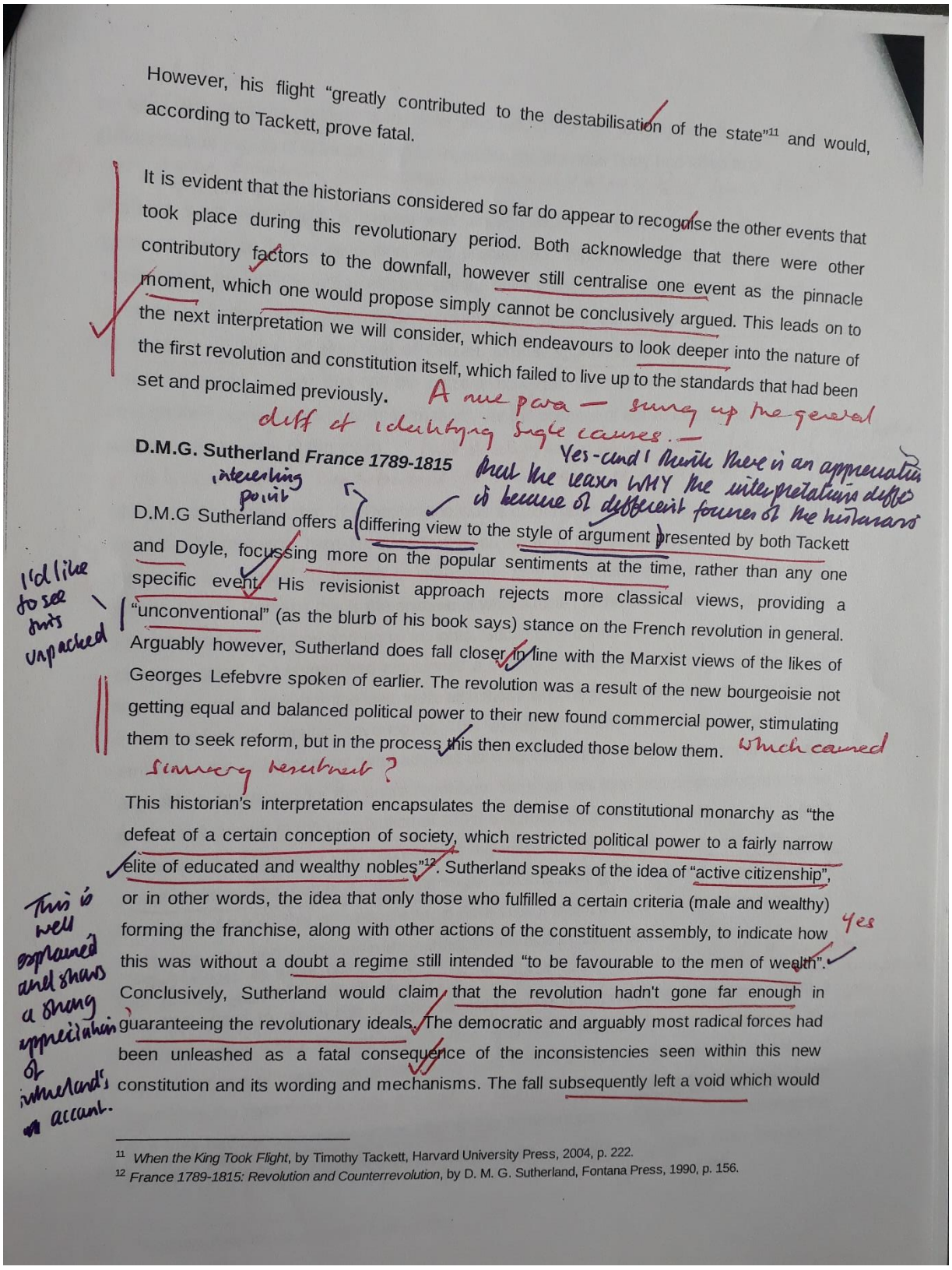
Copy of section of pupil reading record



The Political Thought of Oliver Cromwell: Revolutionary or Conservative? Social Research Barbara Slimberdick Feinberg *	Vol.35 Number 3 (Autumn 1968) pp.445-465	Feinberg was incredibly useful in establishing a measurement of revolutionary and conservative thought. She was also very useful when comparing her revisionist interpretation of Oliver cromwell to Macaulay's Whig interpretation when I had decided on my three sources.	October 15 2017	
"Part II 1640-60: Politics and the Constitution" Christopher Hill: The Century of Revolution	p117-142	This was useful for understanding the political situation during Cromwell's lifetime. I was recommended God's Englishmen by my teacher as it focused solely on Cromwell over the various aspects and events of the 17th century and so I decided to read Hill's other book and eventually chose that as one of my sources.	November 10 2017	
C Hill: God's Englishman*	p13-20 p79-140 p192-207	A very useful source, Hill's view of Cromwell was initially similar to Feinberg's but when reading his analysis of Cromwell's calvinism influencing his views on issues like representation, it gave me a new perspective on issues around Cromwell, being both honest of his flaws, such as opposing the Levellers and demonstrating his more revolutionary aspects such as his Religious Toleration and explaining precisely why both were important to Cromwell's character.	November 21 2017	

APPENDIX IX

Extract from marked essay



However, his flight "greatly contributed to the destabilisation of the state"[11] and would, according to Tackett, prove fatal.

It is evident that the historians considered so far do appear to recognise the other events that took place during this revolutionary period. Both acknowledge that there were other contributory factors to the downfall, however still centralise one event as the pinnacle moment, which one would propose simply cannot be conclusively argued. This leads on to the next interpretation we will consider, which endeavours to look deeper into the nature of the first revolution and constitution itself, which failed to live up to the standards that had been set and proclaimed previously.

D.M.G. Sutherland *France 1789-1815*

D.M.G Sutherland offers a differing view to the style of argument presented by both Tackett and Doyle, focussing more on the popular sentiments at the time, rather than any one specific event. His revisionist approach rejects more classical views, providing a "unconventional" (as the blurb of his book says) stance on the French revolution in general. Arguably however, Sutherland does fall closer in line with the Marxist views of the likes of Georges Lefebvre spoken of earlier. The revolution was a result of the new bourgeoisie not getting equal and balanced political power to their new found commercial power, stimulating them to seek reform, but in the process this then excluded those below them.

This historian's interpretation encapsulates the demise of constitutional monarchy as "the defeat of a certain conception of society, which restricted political power to a fairly narrow elite of educated and wealthy nobles"[12]. Sutherland speaks of the idea of "active citizenship", or in other words, the idea that only those who fulfilled a certain criteria (male and wealthy) forming the franchise, along with other actions of the constituent assembly, to indicate how this was without a doubt a regime still intended "to be favourable to the men of wealth". Conclusively, Sutherland would claim that the revolution hadn't gone far enough in guaranteeing the revolutionary ideals. The democratic and arguably most radical forces had been unleashed as a fatal consequence of the inconsistencies seen within this new constitution and its wording and mechanisms. The fall subsequently left a void which would

[11] *When the King Took Flight*, by Timothy Tackett, Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 222.
[12] *France 1789-1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution*, by D. M. G. Sutherland, Fontana Press, 1990, p. 156.