

History of education in Britain since 1960

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This article reviews the historiography as it has developed in Britain over the past sixty years in the history of education. This encompasses three key phases. From 1960 until about 1975 it was a field that was based mainly in key texts while new journals and societies began to emerge. From 1975 to the end of the century as it lost its mass market in teacher education, general texts in the history of education declined while specialised journals research grew in importance. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, specialisation continued in an increasingly diversified research field with a growing emphasis on theory, methodology, comparative and transnational approaches, and engagement with the social sciences. Initially quite insular and tending to focus on local and national concerns, it became prominent in international activities and in contributing to research with international, comparative and transnational vistas. Overall, the map of the history of education in Britain has changed both in form and in content, as well as in the audience towards which it was principally directed.

: historiography, society, conferences, Britain

L'histoire de l'éducation en Grande-Bretagne depuis 1960

Cet article passe en revue les évolutions historiographiques qui ont marqué le champ de l'histoire de l'éducation en Grande-Bretagne au cours des soixante dernières années. Elle comprend trois phases clés. De 1960 à 1975 environ, c'est un domaine qui s'est principalement structuré autour de publications emblématiques alors que de nouvelles revues et sociétés commençaient à émerger. De 1975 à la fin du siècle, alors que l'histoire de l'éducation perdait le marché que représentait jusque-là la formation des enseignants, la place des grandes synthèses a décliné tandis que la recherche dans les revues spécialisées prenait de l'importance. Au cours des premières décennies du XXI^e siècle, la spécialisation s'est poursuivie dans un champ de recherche de plus en plus diversifié, mettant de plus en plus l'accent sur la théorie, la méthodologie, les approches comparatives et transnationales, et l'ouverture aux sciences sociales. Initialement assez isolée et tendant à se concentrer sur des préoccupations locales et nationales, la communauté des chercheurs britanniques s'est activement impliquée dans les activités internationales, et a contribué à promouvoir les approches internationales, comparatives et transnationales. Dans l'ensemble, la carte de l'histoire de l'éducation en Grande-Bretagne a changé tant dans sa forme que dans son contenu, ainsi que dans le public auquel elle s'adressait.

: historiographie, sociétés savantes, colloques, Grande-Bretagne

Writing on the history of education has changed in fundamental ways over the past sixty years. In 1960, the history of education was produced mainly through texts written for a national audience, largely comprising future teachers, which gave it low status as a field of study in the academy compared to recognised disciplines such as history or philosophy. There was no national association to represent the history of education, nor any specific journal to support it. The educational past was usually represented in terms of gradual progress in the growth of schooling since the nineteenth century and the gradual improvement of the society and economy that it served. In 2020, the history of education was written mainly in journal articles rather than in texts. A national History of Education Society (HES) had emerged and grown to represent it, and was responsible for the development of a leading journal to explore different aspects of the past. The broad consensus of educational and social progress had been broken, to be replaced by revisionist approaches that sought to investigate many kinds of relationships between education and society¹.

The map of the history of education changed over these six decades in three broad phases, albeit often contested and partial in nature. In the first, roughly from 1960 until 1975, what was described as a quiet revolution took place as the area expanded, a new journal and association were created, and new topics and approaches were developed, although texts remained important. Over the following quarter-century, these gains threatened to go into reverse as the history of education lost its place in teacher education and general texts largely ceased production. In the early years of the twenty-first century the history of education began to reinvent itself as a research-based sub-discipline based in journal literature and research monographs. This encouraged a more diverse and fragmented audience across the social sciences and humanities rather than in teacher education, international as well as national in its orientation, while retaining its infrastructure in the form of its national association and journal².

The current article seeks to trace the history of education in this period as a discrete and unique knowledge formation with a distinctive identity in higher education. It has been regarded by prominent advocates as a “discipline” in itself, or a “sub-discipline” or “specialism”, requiring as Gordon and Szreter put it, “both a cognitive identity and a professional identity, the latter being at the core of its institutionalisation”³. It has drawn eclectically on the methods, perspectives and philosophies associated with the discipline of history, while exploring the content of education as a field of knowledge, and engaging increasingly with the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary facets of the social sciences and humanities. The

¹ See e.g. Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education*, London, Routledge, 2011.

² Earlier general discussions of the historiography of education in Britain include Peter Gordon, Richard Szreter (eds.), *History of Education: The Making of a Discipline*, London, Woburn, 1989; William Richardson, “Historians and educationists: the history of education as a field of study in post-war England”, Part I, 1945-1972, *History of Education*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1999, p. 1-30; and Part II, 1972-1996, *History of Education*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1999, p. 109-41; David Crook, Richard Aldrich (eds.), *History of Education in the 21st Century*, London, Institute of Education, 2000; William Richardson, “British historiography of education in international context at the turn of the century, 1996-2006”, *History of Education*, vol. 26, no. 4-5, 2007, p. 569-93; Joyce Goodman, Ian Grosvenor, “Educational research—history of education a special case?”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2009, p. 601-616; *History of Education*, special issue, “Forty years of History of Education, 1972-2011”, vol. 41, no. 1, 2012.

³ Peter Gordon, Richard Szreter, “Introduction”, in Peter Gordon, Richard Szreter (eds.), *History of Education...*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

historical development of the history of education over the past sixty years is surveyed here in relation to an extended university project, occupying not only the departmental and faculty structures of higher education but also its many accompanying projects, developed and promoted by practising academics, such as journals, societies, centres and conferences. The main sources through which this is discussed are the published works that have been produced, both as books and as journal articles, and also the societies and conferences that were established during this period⁴.

I. 1960-1975: A quiet revolution

The first of these phases, from 1960 until the mid-1970s, was one of social and political debate in Britain. The narrow defeat of the Conservative government in 1964 led to a Labour government under Harold Wilson that emphasised educational and social reform. From 1970, under Edward Heath's Conservative government, the further expansion of the educational system began to falter with growing industrial and economic problems. It was against this background that the sub-discipline of the history of education was fully institutionalised as a new academic society was established in the history of education in 1967, and then a new research journal, *History of Education*, in 1972.

In terms of the approach taken by historians of education, this phase of development was dominated by the work of Brian Simon at the University of Leicester, whose first three of his four-volume history of education in Britain since 1780 were published during this time. What became the first volume in the set, published in 1960, covered the period from 1780 to 1870, and explored the nature of educational reform in England during the Industrial Revolution, up to and including the Elementary Education Act of 1870. The second volume, in 1965, took the story up to 1920, while the third, in 1974, addressed the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s⁵. This was a story that belied the narrative of gradual social progress that had hitherto underpinned histories of education in Britain. On the contrary, it proposed that this history should be interpreted in Marxist terms, as being about a working-class struggle for education against the vested interests of the middle class. According to Simon, the originators of the education system in the nineteenth century, such as James Key-Shuttleworth and Robert Lowe, represented middle class interests in undermining those of the organised working class, in education no less than in society as a whole. Simon portrayed the contest between these

⁴ For general international trends in the history of education see also e.g. Gary McCulloch, "New directions in the history of education", *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, p. 47-56; and Gary McCulloch, "Consensus and revisionism in educational history", in John Rury, Eileen Tamura (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2029, p. 19-32.

⁵ Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1960; Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement, 1870-1920*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1965; Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920-1940*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974. See also Gary McCulloch, "A people's history of education: Brian Simon, the British Communist Party, and Studies in the History of Education, 1780-1870", *History of Education*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2010, p. 437-57; and Gary McCulloch, *Struggle for the History of Education*, *op. cit.*, esp. Ch. 4.

opposing class interests playing itself out in the sphere of education throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁶.

In the 1960s, the history of education was represented, as it had been for several decades, mainly through textbooks designed to appeal to student teachers being trained for their future profession. Simon's work was no exception to this general rule, and there were many other examples of this type produced at this time. There were no British journals focusing specifically on the history of education in the early 1960s, and so it tended to be a text-based field with its roots in teacher education rather than a journal-based one leaning towards specialised research. A further text produced in 1960 was John Harrison's history of the English adult education movement, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960*. Harrison's work demonstrated the contribution of adult education, in relation to "contemporary aspects of social policy and social change", to the growth of democracy and its ambivalent role as "alternatively a movement of protest and a means to promote social acceptance and harmony"⁷. Another key figure who produced his most significant work as texts at this time was Walter Armytage at the University of Sheffield. By contrast with Simon, Armytage's published *oeuvre* presented the history of education in England in terms of gradual progress towards a rational, scientific and civilised society. He insisted that the structures developed under the 1870 Elementary Education Act were essentially benevolent and progressive in their design. He also cultivated a strongly internationalist dimension in his work which he reflected increasingly in his comparative studies, especially in demonstrating the international influences of educational ideas and practices. Armytage produced several books that traced the origins and development of modern educational and social movements⁸. In the later 1960s, Armytage also contributed a series of short works to the Students Library of Education series on different national influences on English education: the American, French, German, and Russian⁹. Joan Simon and Gillian Sutherland are further examples of leading historians of education who produced key texts that revised earlier approaches to particular periods, and discussed new perspectives on the history of education at this time. Joan Simon's *Education and Society in Tudor England* was a benchmark text that effectively revised much earlier scholarship on sixteenth-century

⁶ On Brian Simon see also e.g. Anne Corbett, "obituary, Brian Simon", *The Guardian*, 22 January 2002.

⁷ John Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790-1960*, London, RKP, 1960, p. xii-xiii.

⁸ Walter Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964; *The Rise of the Technocrats: A Social History*, London, RKP, 1965; *A Social History of Engineering*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1966; *Heavens Below: Utopian Experiments in England, 1560-1960*, London, RKP, 1968.

⁹ Walter Armytage, *The American Influence on English Education*, London, RKP, 1967; *The French Influence on English Education*, London, RKP, 1968; *The German Influence on English Education*, London, RKP, and *The Russian Influence on English Education*. For Armytage see also e.g. his entry in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70031>>.

education¹⁰. For her part, Sutherland published significant studies on the nature of educational government in late nineteenth century England¹¹.

Nevertheless, Brian Simon in a defining contribution asserted a different and distinctive rationale for the study of the history of education. He argued that historical study of education should be primarily concerned with the study of education as a social function. Thus, according to Simon, education was “a social function, and one of primary importance in every society”¹². When viewed in this way, Simon insisted, the history of education could be recognised “as a vital contribution to social history –rather than as a flat record of acts and ordinances, punctuated by accounts of the theories of great educators who entertained ideas ‘in advance of their time’”¹³. In such a history, moreover, education would take its proper place, “not merely as an adjunct to the historical process but as one of the chief factors conditioning men’s outlook and aspirations”¹⁴.

These reflections on the nature and rationale of the history of education took place in a rapidly changing institutional context involving the expansion of higher education. Courses in teacher training were extended from two to three years in 1960 with a new Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. In these extended courses, general treatments of education as a whole gave way to specialised examination of education based on its key disciplines, including history. This led to larger numbers of staff being appointed with specialist experience in particular disciplines, and in some cases ability in research. This was therefore a period of growth which encouraged the formation of new academic societies to support the disciplinary communities that were becoming established¹⁵.

In the case of the history of education, the HES was formed in December 1967 at a conference held at the City of Liverpool C.F. Mott College of Education. This was attended by 150 participants, mainly teachers of the subject in colleges and departments of education. Armytage and Simon both lent their authority to this initiative by opening the conference. They referred in this to a growing interest in the history of education, particularly since the introduction of the BEd degree. They also proposed potential new approaches to the topic, which Kenneth Charlton of the University of Birmingham discussed further in a subsequent address to the conference. The remainder of this conference was concerned with a consideration of current syllabuses in colleges and departments of education, and with a lecture

¹⁰ Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966. See also “The history of education in *Past and Present*”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1977, p. 71-86. On Joan Simon as a historian of education, see e.g. Joan Simon, “My life in the history of education”, *History of Education Society Bulletin*, no. 54, 1994, p. 29, 33; Ruth Watts, “Obituary: Joan Simon (1915-2005)”, *History of Education*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2006, p. 5-9; and Jane Martin, “Neglected women historians: the case of Joan Simon”, *Forum*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2014, p. 54-66.

¹¹ Gillian Sutherland, *Policy-Making in Elementary Education, 1870-95*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973. See also Gillian Sutherland, “The study of the history of education”, *History*, vol. 54, no. 180, 1969, p. 59-69.

¹² Brian Simon, “The history of education”, in John William Tibble (ed.), *The Study of Education*, London, RKP, 1966, p. 92.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁵ See also Gary McCulloch, Steven Cowan, *A Social History of Educational Studies and Research*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 50-53.

on the relationship between Church and State¹⁶. This led to an annual conference held by the Society in subsequent years to explore particular themes: in December 1968, on the government and control of education since 1860; in December 1969, on the changing curriculum; and in December 1970, on history, sociology and education.

Each of the three themes selected by the HES for its early conferences held wider significance. In the case of the 1968 conference on the government and control of education, it helped to mark the approaching centenary of the 1870 Elementary Education Act. This was also an interest of the main academic education journal, the *British Journal of Educational Studies*, whose long-time Editor, Arthur Beales of King's College London, was himself a historian. In 1970, the *BJES* published a special issue to commemorate the centenary of the Act¹⁷. The centenary coincided with the culmination in Britain of a period of relative economic growth and social reform, including education. Since the 1950s, investment in educational growth had led to further development at all levels of education. The gradual formation of a national system of education with its foundations traced to the nineteenth century could be widely observed and generally celebrated as a basis for further growth. The substantial reports on different aspects of education that were published in the late 1950s and 1960s –the Crowther report *15 to 18*, the Robbins report on higher education, the Newsom report *Half our Future* and the Plowden report on primary education– could all provide a historical narrative of growth and progress in education¹⁸.

The second HES conference theme on the changing curriculum also reflected wider developments. In England during the 1960s, the school curriculum appeared to be a highly promising area for promoting radical change, alongside the organisational change offered by comprehensive secondary schools designed for pupils of all aptitudes and abilities. By the 1970s, the complexities and disappointments of curriculum reform were more clearly evident. Over this time, responding to these contemporary developments, the curriculum became a topic of increasing interest for historians of education. The introduction to the collection made the point that well defined external circumstances such as the launching of Sputnik I in 1957 sometimes appeared to stimulate curriculum change, but “often the reasons why new movements gain momentum are more complex and the skills of the historian are therefore more necessary than ever in helping to elucidate them”¹⁹. The collection itself represented an impressive range of papers contributed by leading scholars in the field, from humanist education in the Renaissance to heurism in the nineteenth century.

Thirdly, the 1970 conference theme highlighted contemporary debates over the relationship between history of education and the disciplines of history on the one hand and sociology on the other. A new form of social history was also in a phase of expansion and institutionalisation during the 1960s, expressed in works such as Edward Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class*²⁰. Innovative studies in the social history of education were included in a self-styled radical journal of social history, *Past and Present*, on such topics as the educational

¹⁶ *History of Education Society Bulletin*, no. 1, 1968, Editorial, p. 2.

¹⁷ *British Journal of Educational Studies*, special issue, “1870 Elementary Education Act”, vol. 18, no. 2, 1970.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education (1959), *15 to 18* (Crowther Report), London, HMSO; Ministry of Education (1963) *Half our Future* (Newsom Report), London, HMSO; Robbins L. (1963) *Higher Education* (Robbins Report), London, HMSO; Department of Education and Science (1967) *Children and their Primary Schools* (Plowden Report), London, HMSO.

¹⁹ HES (ed.) *The Changing Curriculum*, London, Methuen, 1971, Introduction, p. xi.

²⁰ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York, Pantheon, 1964.

revolution of early modern England and the history of literacy, by Lawrence Stone, and on working class education in nineteenth century England, by Richard Johnson²¹. At the same time sociology as a discipline, and the sociology of education specifically, were becoming more firmly established in higher education. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were several explicit and elaborate attempts to integrate historical and sociological approaches to the study of education. This was a feature of the self-styled “new” sociology of education, which sought both social and historical explanations for “what counts as knowledge” in modern societies²². The HES’s venture into this area went so far as to suggest, in the contribution by Gerald Bernbaum, that “those who work in the field of education, with its wide-ranging perspectives and tradition of interdisciplinary activity, might pioneer historical sociology in order that we might better understand not only the educational system, but also the educational process”²³. This suggested at least a partial *rapprochement*, never wholly realised, between the history and sociology of education that was not achieved between the history of education and the philosophy of education, which created a separate national society, conference and journal also in the 1960s²⁴. The HES’s interests and ideas developed in its early conferences led in 1972 to it establishing a new journal specifically devoted to the history of education. There had already appeared a journal founded by Peter Gosden at the University of Leeds in 1968 under the title of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*. The HES’s new journal, entitled simply *History of Education*, was the first in Britain to be solely concerned with this topic. The emphasis of the new Journal was clearly linked to social history, as its first issue indicated with its initial article by a leading social historian, Asa Briggs. This article concluded with a ringing declaration of intent, that the study of the history of education was best considered as part of the wider study of the history of society, social history broadly interpreted with the politics, economics and religion included²⁵. It was a key moment in the redrawing of the map of the history of education in Britain.

One sign of the nature and expansion of the field in the early 1970s was around new staffing appointments. One such was Richard Aldrich. He had read History at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge before becoming a history teacher at Godalming County School in Surrey and then senior lecturer in history at Southlands College. In 1973, while still completing his PhD, he was appointed as a lecturer in the history of education at the Institute of Education London, the first full time member of staff in this area at the largest centre for educational studies and research in the UK. The following year, Aldrich presented his hopes for his area of study in an article for the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*. Under the title of “Quiet revolution in the history of education”, Aldrich’s paper pointed out the advances made by his subject over the

²¹ Lawrence Stone, “The educational revolution in England, 1560-1640”, *Past and Present*, no. 28, 1964, p. 69-139; Lawrence Stone, “Literacy and education in England, 1640-1900”, *Past and Present*, no. 42, 1969, p. 69-139; Richard Johnson, “Educational policy and social control in early Victorian England”, *Past and Present*, no. 49, 1970, p. 96-119.

²² See e.g. Michael Young (ed.), *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education*, London, Collier-Macmillan, 1971.

²³ Gerald Bernbaum, “Sociological techniques and historical study”, in HES (ed.), *History, Sociology and Education*, p. 18. See also e.g. Peter Musgrave (ed.), *Sociology, History and Education: A Reader*, London, Methuen, 1971.

²⁴ See e.g. Alis Oancea, David Bridges, “Philosophy of education in the UK: the historical and contemporary tradition”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2009, p. 353-68.

²⁵ Asa Briggs, “The study of the history of education”, *History of Education*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1972, p. 16.

past few years. This, he proposed, was part of a much wider reorganisation and expansion of historical studies in general, although the history of education was special because it served both history and the needs of education. He suggested that wider changes “have tended to obscure the quiet revolution taking place in the history of education”²⁶. Surely the future lay with them.

II. 1975-2000: Decline and dispersal?

The final decades of the twentieth century posed significant challenges to history of education as a discrete knowledge formation, in Britain as elsewhere, and the expansion and confidence of the early 1970s soon began to fade. This was in the context, first, of changes in higher education including teacher education policy that endangered the traditional role of the history of education in teacher education. Roy Lowe of the University of Birmingham, for example, referred tellingly to “the beleaguered position of history of education in teacher-training and in-service courses”, adding that “At the close of two decades which have seen what is little short of a Renaissance, much of it conceived and carried out within Colleges and Faculties of Education, it is ironic that historians of education should find themselves under renewed attack”²⁷. By the end of that decade, its position had deteriorated to such an extent that it was virtually excluded from the teacher education curriculum.

From the 1970s onwards, education came under increasing pressure to be more directly accountable to current social and economic demands, and this encouraged a growing emphasis on approaches that had an immediate utility and relevance for schools and teachers. This general trend was witnessed in courses in education, in teacher training and continued professional development, and also in research. Disciplinary studies of education, under the umbrella of educational studies, tended to give way to a more unitary approach in educational research.²⁸ The history of education also lost its prominent place in educational reforms, as these increasingly looked forward towards the promise and challenges of the next millennium rather than backwards to the foundations of the past²⁹. Simon continued to insist that “all those professionally engaged in education” would benefit from historical understanding³⁰. Nevertheless, by 1990 Aldrich could lament that, a century after being introduced into the curriculum, “history of education has been virtually eliminated from courses of initial teacher education, at least at the postgraduate level”³¹. This gave rise to growing problems for the history of education in many institutions of higher education. As another British historian of education, Wendy Robinson, commented, its “professional niche” was at risk, with an

²⁶ Richard Aldrich, “A quiet revolution in the history of education”, *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 3 May 1974, p. 14.

²⁷ Roy Lowe, “History as propaganda: the strange uses of the history of education (1983-1990)”, in Peter Gordon, Richard Szreter (eds.), *History of Education...*, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

²⁸ See Gary McCulloch, *Struggle for the History of Education*, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8.

²⁹ See Gary McCulloch, “Marketing the millennium: education for the 21st century”, in Andy Hargreaves, Roy Evans (eds.), *Beyond Educational Reform: Bringing Teachers Back In*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1996, p. 19-28.

³⁰ Brian Simon, “The history of education”, in Paul Hirst (ed.), *Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines*, London, RKP, 1983, p. 65.

³¹ Richard Aldrich, “History of education in initial teacher education in England and Wales”, *History of Education Society Bulletin*, no. 45, 1990, p. 47.

“ambivalent location”, straddling the rival domains of history of education, which “rendered it vulnerable to accusations of reduced status, worth and respectability within the academy”³².

Despite these less than promising circumstances, the history of education was able to survive partly through the support of the national organisation that it had recently developed. The national society created an infrastructure to help sustain it, generating regular conferences and other events and also providing collegial support and stimulating new developments. It provided an institutional base for the history of education, and eventually a means of nurturing fresh approaches and supporting new recruits. Its new journal became more firmly established when the publishers Taylor and Francis took over its publication from 1975, and it then benefited from stable editorship first under Kenneth Charlton (now at King’s College London), until 1986, and then Roy Lowe over the following decade until 1996. Gary McCulloch (Sheffield) took over as Editor from 1996 until 2003, and by 2000 it expanded further from four issues to six issues per year. This provided the basis for a community of knowledge and practice, and a home for specialist research in the area. It was also a base for international research, as the HES’s annual conferences began to attract increasing numbers of overseas delegates while its home contingent began to diminish.

Indeed, just as the possibilities for research began to improve, the loss of teacher education meant a steady decline in the audience for its work. This meant a decline in staff numbers and the eclipse of the sub-discipline in a number of institutions where it had been prominent, such as Leeds, Liverpool, and even Simon’s old base of Leicester. King’s College London lost its premier position in the history of education with Charlton’s retirement in 1983, to be replaced by the Institute of Education London, now under Aldrich’s leadership. It also led to the loss of textbooks for teaching purposes. *A Social History of Education in England* by John Lawson and Harold Silver, published in 1973, covering the history of education from medieval times to the present, was one of the few new texts of this type³³.

Only Simon’s texts remained, monuments of teaching courses in full retreat if not dying. When Simon’s fourth volume was published in 1991, bringing his history up to date, it was apparent that even his sales figures were well down on those of the 1960s and 1970s³⁴. In 1995, Simon made a detailed check on the sales records of his four-volume history. The first, published in 1960, had sold well over 1000 copies in Britain in every five-year cycle until 1980, after when it began to decline. This might have been understandable as there were later volumes now in publication, but these showed the same trend. The second volume, published in 1965, sold 1500 copies or more in each five year cycle until 1980, when sales began to tail off, and it went out of print in 1990. The third volume, published in 1974, sold well over 1500 copies before 1980, but sales then declined sharply. The fourth volume, published in April 1991 in a hardback edition, sold only 529 copies by 1995, with an additional 300 in the United States. Simon’s own explanation for these relatively low sales was first, the high price of the books at 40 pounds, but second, “declining interest in history of education”³⁵.

³² Wendy Robinson, “Finding our professional niche: reinventing ourselves as twenty-first century historian of education”, in David Crook and Richard Aldrich (eds.), *History of Education in the Twenty-First Century*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

³³ John Lawson, Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England*, London, Routledge, 1973.

³⁴ Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1991.

³⁵ Brian Simon, note, “Historical books” (Brian Simon archive, London, UCL Institute of Education).

Thus, having once sustained itself mainly through teacher education, articulated in the form of textbooks, the history of education was now changing perforce to become more dependent on research and expressed in journal literature, in search of an audience for its work. William Richardson at the University of Exeter pointed out that the “professional audience” had “dried up” as government priorities had obliged teachers and educators to concentrate almost exclusively on immediate policy problems, and that “the onus is firmly on educationists specialising in history to put forward a fresh justification of their role and foster a new audience for their work”³⁶.

In terms of research focus, there were several fresh directions developed during these years. In relation to the history of education in Wales, long regarded simply as an adjunct to England, some new approaches were taken in the 1980s and 1990s led especially by Gareth Elwyn Jones at the University of Wales Swansea. In 1989, the annual conference of the HES was held at Cardiff University on the history of education in Wales, leading the following year to a special issue of the journal *History of Education*³⁷. Historians of Scottish education meanwhile began to challenge uncritical defences of the progress of education in Scotland, in particular through the work of Robert Anderson at the University of Edinburgh, especially his key study *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*, and Donald Withrington at the University of Aberdeen³⁸.

Another fresh emphasis was around the history of the school curriculum. The politics of the curriculum and the wide range of interests associated with it became central aspects of this new historical literature. A general historical account of curriculum change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton was based on their view that “curriculum change is the result of complex patterns of interaction between influential individuals and general processes of social, political and economic change”³⁹. One prominent historian of education, William Marsden, the editor of a further set of conference papers on the topic produced by the History of Education Society, pointed out that in the light of recent experience sophisticated theoretical frameworks were not enough, and that interest had therefore shifted to “the constraints imposed by economic and political factors, the conflict of personality and group interest, [...] by the level of teaching skills available, and by the sheer complexity of the exercise”⁴⁰. In this HES collection, the focus was on curriculum change since the Second World War, with Marsden suggesting that “stock-taking” was now in order after the rapid pace of curriculum development in the 1960s and early 1970s⁴¹. During the 1980s, the work of Ivor Goodson and the emergence of a self-styled “curriculum history” took such research to a new level. Goodson’s ideal of the potential contribution of “curriculum history”,

³⁶ William Richardson, “History, education and audience”, in David Crook, Richard Aldrich (eds.), *History of Education for the Twenty-First Century*, London, Institute of Education, p. 18.

³⁷ *History of Education*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1990.

³⁸ See e.g. Robert Anderson, *Schools and Universities in Victorian Scotland: Schools and Universities*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1983; and Donald Withrington, “Scotland: a national educational system and ideals of citizenship”, *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1990, p. 699-710.

³⁹ Peter Gordon, Denis Lawton, *Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Sevenoaks, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978, p. 2.

⁴⁰ William Marsden, “Historical approaches to curriculum study”, in William Marsden (ed.), *Post-War Curriculum Development*, Leicester, HES, 1979, p. 94-95.

⁴¹ William Marsden, “Introduction”, in William Marsden (ed.), *Post-War Curriculum Development*, p. vii-viii.

strongly influenced by the new sociology of education, led him to establish a book series entitled “Studies in Curriculum History”, with Falmer Press, a rising force in academic publishing in the 1980s under its managing director, Malcolm Clarkson. The flagship first volume in this series, edited by Goodson himself, was a collection under the title of *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum*⁴². This included a wide range of historical accounts of the development of subjects in the secondary school curriculum⁴³.

Other new directions for history of education research in this period included literacy, urban education, and technical and vocational education. In relation to literacy, W.E. Stephens consolidated and extended the established quantitative method of calculating literacy by estimating numbers of brides and grooms able to sign their names on marriage registers⁴⁴. On the other hand, David Vincent helped to pioneer the qualitative analysis of working-class autobiographies and a wide range of sources as a complementary approach to explore the application of reading and writing to the family, the workplace, the response to the natural world, the imaginative life of the community and the political ideology and movements of the nineteenth century⁴⁵. The history of urban education also became a common focus of attention at this time, led in particular by historians such as David Reeder, W.E. Marsden and Anna Davin⁴⁶. At the same time, a cluster of work developed around the history of technical and vocational education, reflecting on the historical failures of initiatives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to maintain Britain’s industrial competitiveness through educational change⁴⁷.

A further rich seam for research, complementing and in some cases challenging Simon’s emphasis on social class, was around the education of girls and women. June Purvis (Portsmouth) and Carol Dyhouse (Sussex) led the way in the 1980s, the former with research that highlighted the educational struggles of working class girls and women in the nineteenth

⁴² Ivor Goodson (ed.), *Social Histories of the Secondary Curriculum: Subjects for Study*, London, Falmer, 1985; see also Ivor Goodson, *The Making of Curriculum: Collected Essays*, London, Falmer, 1988.

⁴³ For further details see also Gary McCulloch, “Curriculum history and the history of education », in Pat Sikes, Yvonne Novakovic (eds.), *Storying the Public Intellectual*, London, Routledge, 2020, p. 91-99.

⁴⁴ William Stephens, *Education, Literacy and Society 1830-1870: The Geography of Diversity in Provincial England*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987. See also David Mitch, *The Rise of Popular Literacy in Victorian England: The Influence of Private Choice and Public Policy*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

⁴⁵ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography*, London, Methuen, 1982; David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁴⁶ See e.g. Gary McCulloch, “Histories of urban education in the United Kingdom”, in *Second International Handbook of Urban Education*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2017, p. 1005-1019; David Reeder (ed.), *Urban Education in the Nineteenth Century*, London, Taylor and Francis, 1977; William Marsden, *Unequal Educational Provision in England and Wales in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London, Woburn, 1987; Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914*, London, Rivers Oram Press, 1996.

⁴⁷ E.g. Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981; Correlli Barnett, *The Audit of War*, London, Macmillan, 1986; Gary McCulloch, *The Secondary Technical School: A Usable Past?*, London, Falmer, 1989; Michael Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum*, London, Athlone Press, 1994.

century, and the latter with a study of the family relationships of girls growing up⁴⁸. Purvis in particular complained that British history of education had been too slow to respond to the challenges posed by feminist history⁴⁹. However, this early work helped to paved the way for further activity in the 1990s, including two annual conferences on related topics organised by the HES in 1992 and 1999, both leading to special issues of its Journal. The special issue in 2000, on “Breaking boundaries: gender, politics and the experience of education”, guest edited by Joyce Goodman (Winchester) and Jane Martin (North London) featured substantial contributions from England, the United States, India and South Africa⁵⁰. New work on education and ethnicity was slower to develop, although Ian Grosvenor’s *Assimilating Identities* provided a significant fresh focus on racism and education policy since the Second World War⁵¹.

During this time, an increasing range of evidence began to be deployed in the history of education, with some early discussions on theoretical issues. Oral history became increasingly familiar as a methodological device, especially as a means of discovering the experiences, outlooks and alternative agendas of marginalised groups such as the working class, women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The value of such evidence was emphasised by Stephen Humphries in his study of working class childhood and youth, *Hooligans or Rebels?*, published in 1981⁵². By the 1990s, significant research was taking place on the oral history of teachers’ professional practice, with Philip Gardner and Peter Cunningham at Cambridge leading the way in this area⁵³. The annual conference of the HES was devoted to this topic in 1996, with a special issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* based on this event following soon afterwards⁵⁴. Visual history involving analysis of documents such as photographs and films also began to be deployed more widely at this time, allowing new research on the history of classrooms and of teacher and learner interactions.

More broadly, the significance of education in disseminating ideals and practices around the British Empire itself became a key theme, especially in the writings of J.A. Mangan. His early work on nineteenth-century public schools developed into research that highlighted the

⁴⁸ E.g. June Purvis, “Working class women and adult education in nineteenth-century Britain”, *History of Education*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1980, p. 193-212; June Purvis, *Hard Lessons: The Lives and Education of Working-Class Women in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1989; Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, London, Routledge, 1981.

⁴⁹ June Purvis, “The historiography of British education: a feminist critique”, in Ali Rattansi, David Reeder (eds.), *Rethinking Radical Education*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1992, p. 249-66.

⁵⁰ See *History of Education*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1993; and *History of Education*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2000.

⁵¹ Ian Grosvenor, *Assimilating Identities: Racism and Educational Policy in Post 1945 Britain*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1997.

⁵² Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working Class Childhood and Youth*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1981.

⁵³ Philip Gardner, “The giant at the front: young teachers and corporal punishment in inter-war elementary schools”, *History of Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1996, p. 141-63; Philip Gardner, Peter Cunningham, “Oral history and teachers’ professional practice: a wartime turning point?”, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1997, p. 331-42.

⁵⁴ *Cambridge Journal of Education*, special issue, “Teachers’ lives: training and careers in historical perspective”, vol. 27, no. 3, 1997. See also *Cambridge Journal of Education*, special issue, “teachers, biography and life history”, vol. 20, no. 3, 1990.

imperial role of the products of the public schools in different outposts of the Empire around the world⁵⁵. Meanwhile, British historians of education were especially active in helping to organise an international association, the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE). Brian Simon, then the chair of the HES, led an initiative that culminated in an all-European seminar on the history of education held in Oxford in September 1978. ISCHE was established the following year, with Simon elected as its first chairman from 1979 to 1982. Further discussions and seminars produced a collection published in 1987, edited by Simon with Detlef Muller and Fritz Ringer of Germany, on the rise of the modern educational system, including several case studies on secondary and higher education in England⁵⁶. The HES annual conference in 1987 was concerned with the theme of international currents in educational ideas and practice. During the 1990s, this increasing interest in international issues was maintained, guided in particular by Richard Aldrich, as president first of the HES and then of ISCHE. Comparative and international approaches were further encouraged through HES annual conferences on education and economic performance, in 1997, and on education and national identity the following year. Each of these events was followed by a special issue on the topic in *History of Education*⁵⁷.

III. 2000-2020: specialisation and internationalisation

In the first few years of the 21st century, Simon died, while Aldrich retired as professor of history of education at the IOE London, and Lowe also stepped down from his professorship at Swansea. Yet, if this seemed like the final links with its expansive phase being broken, in the first two decades of the 21st century the history of education in Britain generally maintained its position by developing in its research rather than in its teaching, and becoming increasingly specialised in its approach. It retained the strong national infrastructure that had helped it to survive in the 1980s and 1990s, while looking outwards to international, comparative and transnational perspectives. Still lacking a mass audience for its work, questions remained around its future development and identity as higher education continued to change apace.

At the turn of the century, a number of commentators could argue that the history of education in Britain was in a healthy and vigorous condition, at least in the quality of its research. For example, Roy Lowe argued that since the early 1960s, over the span of his own professional career, “the writing of the History of Education has undergone little short of a revolution”. Indeed, Lowe continued, “In recent years, History of Education has become clearly identified as a full and proper element in the study of history more generally, with a central role to play in the development of social, economic and political history, and this development can be only for the good.”⁵⁸. This general view was endorsed by Crook and Aldrich, who also insisted that

⁵⁵ Anthony Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981; Anthony Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, New York, Viking, 1986.

⁵⁶ Detlef Muller, Fritz Ringer, Brian Simon (eds.), *The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and Social Reproduction, 1870-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁵⁷ *History of Education*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1998; *History of Education*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1999.

⁵⁸ Roy Lowe, “Writing the history of education”, in Roy Lowe (ed.), *History of Education: Major Themes*, London, Routledge, 2000, vol. 1, p. xlii-xliii.

in terms of research and publications, “British history of education entered the twenty-first century in a relatively strong position”⁵⁹.

On the other hand, there were significant criticisms of the kind of research that was being undertaken. The British historian of education Kevin Brehony contended that insufficient attention had been given to social theory, in particular postmodernism⁶⁰. Meanwhile, Marc Depaepe, a senior European historian of education, registered severe reservations in relation to British history of education for showing the effects of having been excluded from initial teacher education. Depaepe described one edited collection of essays produced in Britain as “the fruit of frustration and anger at the languishing position of the history of education course in teacher training”, and argued that this represented a “corporatist defensive reflex” on the part of British historians of education⁶¹.

Overall, the position was doubtless mixed, as a new generation of educational historians came to the fore. McCulloch moved from Sheffield to be appointed as the first Brian Simon professor of the history of education at the IOE London in 2003. Joyce Goodman built up the history of women’s education into the Centre for the History of Women’s Education as a professor at University College Winchester, followed by Stephanie Spencer. Ian Grosvenor became professor of the history of urban education at the University of Birmingham, with Ruth Watts and then Jane Martin leading studies at Birmingham on the history of women’s education. The HES was now firmly established with its annual conferences and a policy for supporting research students and early career researchers. A set of six seminars funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and based on a partnership between the IOE, Winchester and Exeter, engaged in a thorough review and analysis of the history of education and of its key research priorities, leading in 2007 to a double special issue of *History of Education* on social change in the history of education⁶². The election of first Ruth Watts, and later Joyce Goodman, Jane Martin and Stephanie Spencer as presidents of the HES reflected the importance of women in the leadership of the national field, as well as the growing amount of research on the history of girls’ and women’s education⁶³. New approaches to “gendering” the history of education itself also became well established⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ David Crook, Richard Aldrich, “Introduction”, in David Crook, Richard Aldrich (eds.), *History of Education for the Twenty-First Century*, *op. cit.*, p. x.

⁶⁰ Kevin Brehony, book review, *History of Education*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2003, p. 441.

⁶¹ Marc Depaepe, “What kind of history of education may we expect for the twenty-first century? Some comments on four recent readers in the field”, *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 39, no. 1-2, 2003, p. 189.

⁶² *History of Education*, special issue, “Social change in the history of education: the British experience in international context”, vol. 36, no. 4-5, 2007.

⁶³ See e.g. Jane Martin, Joyce Goodman, *Women and Education 1800-1980*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; *Women’s History Review*, special issue, “Revisioning the history of girls and women in the long 1950s”, vol. 26, no. 1, 2017; *Women’s History Review*, special issue, “Twists and turns in histories of women’s education”, vol. 29, no. 3, 2020.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Joyce Goodman, “Troubling histories and theories: gender and the history of education”, *History of Education*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2003, p. 157-74; Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2005; Ruth Watts, “Gendering the story: change in the history of education”, *History of Education*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2005, p. 225-241; Joyce Goodman, “The gendered politics of historical writing in *History of Education*”, *History of Education*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2012, p. 9-24.

There were many other fresh directions, such as the history of learners and learning advocated in a special issue of *Oxford Review of Education* on histories of education in the modern world, and indications of a revival of interest in the history of adult education and learning⁶⁵. While interest in the history of teacher education diminished, the history of higher education as a whole increased in volume and variety⁶⁶. The history of ethnic minorities and immigration in relation education began to be explored in greater detail and depth⁶⁷. The history of disability and disabled people in education also received some detailed attention, which was overdue as Felicity Armstrong argued⁶⁸. Discussion of special education facilities became a growth area⁶⁹. The experiences of disabled people in education were examined through their own testimonies⁷⁰.

There was increasing awareness of the importance of theory and methodology in history of education research, again drawing on insights in the broader social sciences⁷¹. Visual history, analysing photographs, portraits, prints, cartoons, films and other visual evidence have been analysed in order to accompany or challenge the established prominence of written texts in historical research. This kind of approach has helped historians of education to gain closer purchase on classroom life and the teaching and learning interface⁷². Historical interest in the “materiality” of schools and other educational artefacts has also begun to be developed in a range of ways. For example, Lawn and Grosvenor have explored the history of material technologies in schools, encountering traces of past practices of teachers and pupils, including everyday technologies such as pencils, slates, exercise books, ink bottles and larger devices like

⁶⁵ *Oxford Review of Education*, special issue, “Histories of learning in the modern world”, guest editors Gary McCulloch and Tom Woodin, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010; Mark Freeman, “Adult education history in Britain: past, present and future”, *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 56, no. 3, 2020, Part I, p. 384-395; Part 2, p. 396-410.

⁶⁶ David Crook, “Teacher education as a field of historical research: retrospect and prospect”, *History of Education*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2012, p. 57-72; Roy Lowe, “The changing role of the academic journal: the coverage of higher education in *History of Education* as a case study, 1972-2011”, *History of Education*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2012, p. 103-115.

⁶⁷ E.g. Kevin Myers, “Immigrants and ethnic minorities in the history of education”, *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2009, p. 801-816; Kevin Myers, *Struggles for a Past: Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1950-2000*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015; Olivier Esteves, *The “Desegregation” of English Schools: Bussing, Race and Urban Space, 1960s-80s*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2018.

⁶⁸ Felicity Armstrong, “Disability, education and social change in England since 1960” *History of Education*, vol. 36, no. 4-5, 2007, p. 551-568.

⁶⁹ E.g. Pamela Dale, “Special education at Starcross before 1948”, *History of Education*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2007, p. 17-44; Jane Read, Jan Walmsley, “Historical perspectives on special education, 1890-1970”, *Disability and Society*, vol. 21, no. 5, 2006, p. 455-69; Kevin Myers, Anna Brown, “Mental deficiency: the diagnosis and after-care of special school leavers in early twentieth-century Birmingham (UK)”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 18, no. 1-2, 2005, p. 72-98.

⁷⁰ Derrick Armstrong, *Experiences of Special Education: Re-Evaluating Policy and Practice through Life Stories*, London, Routledge/Falmer, 2003.

⁷¹ See e.g. *History of Education*, special issue, “Theory and methodology in the history of education”, guest editors Gary McCulloch and Ruth Watts, vol. 32, no. 2, 2003.

⁷² E.g. Ulrike Mietzner, Kevin Myers, Nick Peim (eds.), *Visual History: Images of Education*, Berne, Peter Lang, 2005; Dierdre Raftery (ed.), *Celebrating Teachers: A Visual History*, London, Fil Rouge Press, 2016.

school desks, blackboards, typewriters, photocopiers and spirit duplicators⁷³. Sensory history, involving the non-cognitive dimensions of sensation, especially the five senses of smell, sound, touch, taste and sight, has also become a theme attracting novel attention in the history of education in Britain⁷⁴.

Finally, these novel concerns with theory and methodology were accompanied by another new departure receiving close attention in social science research: awareness of ethical issues. In a classic piece, Richard Aldrich presented the “three duties” of the historian in education in terms of the duty to the people of the past, the duty to our own generation, and the duty to search after the truth⁷⁵. Such concerns were given greater force in research on the history of child sexual abuse, in the context of schools, the family or beyond⁷⁶.

In the early decades of the new century British historians of education were also making an increasing contribution to the development of the history of education around the world. In 2001, the University of Birmingham hosted the ISCHE annual conference on the theme of “Urbanisation and education”⁷⁷. The HES conference and journal special issue of 2002-2003 marked the first collaborative venture of the British HES and that of Australia and New Zealand, with the unidirectional notion of “centre and periphery”⁷⁸. A special workshop at the ISCHE conference in 2007, arising from the ESRC initiative, went further in exploring the themes of postcolonialism and transnationalism, with a further special issue of the journal *Paedagogica Historica* as a result⁷⁹. In July 2014, nearly six hundred delegates were attracted from around the world to take part in an ISCHE annual conference held at the IOE London on “Education, war and peace” to mark the centenary of the First World War⁸⁰. British historians of education also made significant contributions to the further development of ISCHE in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

⁷³ Martin Lawn, Ian Grosvenor, “‘When in doubt, preserve’: exploring the traces of teaching and material culture in English schools”, *History of Education*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, p. 117-127. See also e.g. *History of Education*, special issue, “Science, technologies and the material culture in the history of education”, vol. 40, no. 2, 2017, based on the 2015 HES annual conference, guest edited by Heather Ellis.

⁷⁴ E.g. Gary McCulloch, “Sensing the realities of English middle-class education: James Bryce and the Schools Inquiry Commission, 1865-1868”, *History of Education*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2011, p. 599-613; and Ian Grosvenor, “Back to the future or towards a sensory history of schooling”, *History of Education*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2012, p. 675-687.

⁷⁵ Richard Aldrich, “The three duties of the historian of education”, *History of Education*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2003, p. 133-43.

⁷⁶ See e.g. Carol Smart, “Reconsidering the recent history of child sexual abuse, 1910-1960”, *Journal of Social Policy*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2000, p. 55-71; and Adrian Bingham, Lucy Delap, Louise Jackson, Louise Settle, “Historical child sexual abuse in England and Wales: the role of historians”, *History of Education*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2016, p. 411-29.

⁷⁷ See Ian Grosvenor, Ruth Watts, “Urbanisation and education: the city as a light and beacon?”, *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 39, no. 1-2, 2003, p. 1-4.

⁷⁸ *History of Education*, special issue, “Centre and periphery – networks, space and geography in the history of education”, vol. 32, no. 3, 2003.

⁷⁹ *Paedagogica Historica*, special issue, “‘Empires overseas’ and ‘Empires at home’: Postcolonial and transnational perspectives on social change in the history of education”, guest editors Joyce Goodman, Gary McCulloch and William Richardson, vol. 45, no. 6, 2009.

⁸⁰ See *Paedagogica Historica*, special issue, “Education, war and peace”, guest editors Gary McCulloch and Georgina Brewis, vol. 52, no. 1-2, 2016.

Nevertheless, there remained significant strategic challenges for the future. Nationally, the Labour governments under first Tony Blair and then Gordon Brown and a period of economic growth had presided over further expansion of the higher education system. The onset of financial crisis in 2008 followed by a period of austerity under a coalition government and then Conservative governments from 2010 posed question marks against a number of established institutions, with a referendum in 2016 eventually leading to Britain leaving the European Union, and there were increasing threats to the unity and security of Britain itself. Within this broader context, the history of education continued to be vulnerable to structural developments that were often beyond its control. It remained largely isolated from a mass teaching audience, although in a number of institutions the establishment of undergraduate courses in education provided a new opportunity. There were predictions of severe budget cuts and in some cases of closure of university education departments⁸¹. Martin Lawn and John Furlong had already identified what they saw as a demographic crisis that appeared more acute in education departments than in the social sciences more generally, and worse still among those working in the disciplines of education. Indeed, they suggested, “The crucial role of a discipline in education in breaking down problems into its own logics and mediating between public information and problems, and public action is in danger of disappearing”⁸². New work in the Scottish context appeared generally to be in decline despite the efforts of a special conference and journal issue, and subsequently of a comprehensive handbook on the history of education in Scotland, and an edited collection on the Catholic church and education in Scotland⁸³. In Wales, lamented the veteran Gareth Elwyn Jones, the study of the history of education was already on the brink of extinction⁸⁴.

Conclusions

Overall, the history of education in Britain has changed both in form and in content, as well as in the principal audience towards which it was directed. In some ways it had been redrawn such as to be almost unrecognisable in its key features. It found a new role as increasingly specialised in nature and mainly oriented towards research-based academic journal publications. As Goodman and Grosvenor have observed, historians of education have tended “to publish predominantly in specialized journals and for a pre-determined audience”⁸⁵. The existence of a specialist society in the history of education could also lessen regular involvement in associations with a broader orientation. At its best, research in the history of education could contribute well to wider research in the humanities and the social sciences. Yet there was a risk

⁸¹ See also Gary McCulloch, Steven Cowan, *A Social History of Educational Studies and Research*, London, Routledge, 2018, esp. Ch. 9.

⁸² Martin Lawn, John Furlong, “The disciplines of education in the UK: between the ghost and the shadow”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2009, p. 549-50.

⁸³ *History of Education*, special issue, “Education and citizenship in modern Scotland”, vol. 38, no. 3, 2009; Robert Anderson, Mark Freeman, Lindsay Paterson (eds.) *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015; Stephen McKinney, Raymond McCluskey (eds.), *A History of Catholic Education and Schooling in Scotland: New Perspectives*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

⁸⁴ Gareth Elwyn Jones, “Perspectives from the brink of extinction: the fate of history of education study in Wales”, *History of Education*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2013, p. 381-95.

⁸⁵ Joyce Goodman, Ian Grosvenor, “Educational research – history of education a curious case?”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2009, p. 601-616.

here too that with increasing erudition in its research, its audience would become correspondingly remote, limited, and distant from the concerns of an impatient world.

In terms of its intellectual contribution over these sixty years, the history of education in Britain has documented the changing and contested relationship between education and the wider society, focusing initially on the role of social class and increasingly on other themes such as gender, the curriculum, teaching and learning, and drawing explicitly on wider theoretical and methodological approaches. It has tended to focus more narrowly on the history of education in modern times rather than on earlier periods, with even the nineteenth century, and the origins of modern schooling, beginning to fade from view in much teaching and research. Initially quite insular and tending to focus on local and national concerns, it became prominent in international activities and in contributing to research with international, comparative and transnational vistas.

Unlike the situation in the 1960s, there were no longer journals catering for different audiences that were generally prepared to include articles on the history of education on a regular basis, although there remained a number of potential outlets in diverse areas as well as the now established specialist journals. Also unlike the 1960s, when there were many institutions that might have a few historians of education to provide support for teacher education, there were now fewer institutions involved, some with isolated researchers and others with a small group operating around a research niche. New leaders continued to emerge: Catherine Burke at Cambridge, Wendy Robinson and Rob Freathy at Exeter, and Stephen Parker at Worcester, among others. Looking forward to the longer term, the existential issue remained as it had since the 1980s, how the history of education in Britain could continue to sustain itself and maintain its organisational infrastructure and its strong sense of identity and purpose, forged in the 1960s and 1970s, in conditions that continued to be far from benign.