



John Rankin

John Rankin became an active member of Shap in the 1970s and was to remain so for over three decades. At various times he served as Secretary, Chair and was a Project Director of this eclectic religious mafia. Shap, in its many guises, reflected John's concern that the various religions and world views of the world should be taught accurately and with adequate resourcing.

I can remember very clearly when John told me he had been invited to join Shap. He was clearly moved and humbled that he should have been invited and Shap was to remain dear to him for years. John loved enjoyed the unique mixture of academics and teachers from many different religions and philosophies who were invited to be members. Shap also suited John because while there could be furious arguments and members would 'speak the truth in love' to each other it was always in the context of mutual respect and friendship. He felt respected by his acceptance into the intellectual exchanges that took place and became a leading supporter of attempts to develop a continental European equivalent of Shap.

John was fluent in French and German and his command of the German language in particular proved invaluable on the occasion of a Shap-led RE conference in Germany and boosted the development of a EuroShap/EAWRE (European Association for World Religions in Education). His linguistic skills were as invaluable as the distinctiveness of his barbed humour. I loved his sense of humour. Yes, he could be irascible and explode but it was fine if you didn't take him too seriously! He possessed intellectual clarity, a genuine warmth and concern for people. He had a passion for life and professional integrity and was genuinely loyal and collegiate in his approach to colleagues and co-workers.

John began an annual Southern Shap conference for teachers at Bishop Otter College (now the University of Chichester) during the 1970s and into the 1980s to help teachers develop a clearer understanding of religions they were being expected to teach. This was one of his most successful initiatives during his fifteen years as Head of Religious Studies at the College.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s John felt that the style of teaching about religions other than Christianity generally supported by the Shap approach should apply to Christianity so the Chichester Project was born under the auspices of Shap. A number of us met to decide on the areas of the Christian religion with which we thought secondary age students, who were unfamiliar with Christianity, should become familiar. We believed teachers wanted material to use in the classroom. The method of production of pupil material could be excruciating. One wrote a chapter and subjected it to the extremely critical evaluation of 7 or 8 members of the group. John himself was never short of a critical word but we published



10 books with the wonderful Piper tapestry from Chichester Cathedral on the cover. The Project also published two teachers' books for the primary schools and contributed to the series of children's books published in conjunction with the National Society.

Many of us felt that John did not receive the recognition within the educational world which he deserved for initiating this important work on teaching Christianity; this highlights a degree of modesty on John's part: to his credit he was not a self-publicist.

John had a meticulous concern for accuracy and detail and the Chichester Project (1977 to 1987) forms an important element in the history of Religious Education in England and is significant for anyone who wishes to trace the ways in which Christianity has been shaped in the school curriculum. He brought new dimension to Shap which projected him to the forefront of RE in those most productive years. He died in 2016.

Alan Brown