



17 Shap: A brief history – Mary Hayward

'One of the excellences of the world of religious education and more broadly of the study of religion is the way we are in constant movement and debate.' (1) These words of Ninian Smart, one of the founding members of Shap, may be seen to epitomise the ethos of the working party for much of its history. In particular, among organisations having a concern for RE, Shap has probably done most to ensure an ongoing dialogue between RE and the study of religion, a dialogue invariably invigorated by debate and questioning. Accepting the status quo has rarely been the hallmark of Shap and – arguably – the need for questioning voices in education in an age of conformity and commodification remains.

SHAP or Shap?

Discerning readers will already have noted the use of the lower case for 'Shap'. Professors Smart, Hilliard and Parrinder may have been the founders of the working party, but its name derives from the small village of Shap in Cumbria. Travellers north now speed past the village on the M6, but in 1969 the village was the summit reached after the long haul up Shap Fell on the A6. Just off this road lies the Shap Wells Hotel; here in spring 1969 the Department of Adult Education of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (where John Hinnells was a young lecturer)



held a conference, 'Comparative Religion in Education'. Today the published conference papers (Hinnells ed. 1970) provide an interesting window into RE and the study of religion as it was taking shape at that time. Hinnells' report of a survey of the 'Comparative Study of Religion' in West Riding schools (note the subtle shift away from 'Comparative Religion') indicated that schools were not unsympathetic towards the study of religions – although head teachers tended to be more favourably disposed than teachers of RE. Smart's own paper, 'The Structure of CSR' – despite the passage of time – demonstrates a breadth of thinking about the subject which is not always recognised by his commentators today, and an inclusivity which would be characteristic of Shap's work. This inclusivity was demonstrated in the conference and book, which included a paper from H. J. Blackham, the first director of the British Humanist Association. But the papers also pointed to the difficulties which confronted those who wished to approach religions other than Christianity: a lack of appropriate resources and at all levels of education a lack of teachers who had an understanding of religions.

A working party

It was from the above conference and needs that a 'working party' emerged - the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education. In its beginnings the working party consisted of 3 university teachers in comparative religion, 7 lecturers in education and 9 teachers. Its stated aims were:

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



- (1) To identify the practical problems at various educational levels involved in teaching about world religions.
- (2) To study and provide relevant syllabus material.
- (3) To generate new ideas, to explore the possibilities of future conferences and in-service courses for teachers.
- (4) To act as a clearing house for information on visual aids, books, conferences or working parties on related topics

In its membership and aims the nature of the working party became clear. First, its membership ensured dialogue among all educational sectors; it was concerned with all age phases. When I first encountered Shap, I recall being particularly impressed by its bringing together of these phases – nursery school to university were represented. Second, Shap was to be a working party – and this it remains to the present. Membership has always related to this focus; invitation to membership is to active participation – to do something, to contribute. For an organisation which meets for only a day and a half each year this is vital. That members during the first 20 years or so of the working party's life willingly paid their own way to come to meetings is perhaps indicative of the passion felt for its concerns and of their commitment to the realisation of its aims. Whilst Shap benefited from funding from the Spalding Trust in its early years, today it has charitable status and a modest income from its publications – this facilitates some administrative support, but the working party has no paid members. It remains a smallish group of around 30 people, thus enabling the kind of exchange I noted above.(2)

The third part of Shap's rather long title – world religions in education – expresses the spirit and time of its foundation. We continue to debate this particular wording in the present – but more of this later. For the moment let it represent Shap's focus and concerns for over a quarter century, set in the context of debate, questioning and activity.

Early activities

Given the aims it had identified, the working party set out to meet them in a number of ways. Conferences continued for several years at Shap Wells Hotel. For many participants these provided their first encounter with 'world religions', and in some cases with members of different traditions. For example, Swami Yogeshananda, author of one of the first school texts on Hindu tradition, participated in the conference on Hinduism in 1970. Whilst northern in its origins, Shap spread south and Brian Gates launched 'Southern Shap' events at Goldsmith's College in London. Anticipating RE's later interest in artefacts, conference



participants were able to explore a Hindu shrine set up during the 1972 conference on Hindu tradition held there. Late 1972 also saw a conference on Zoroastrianism in Manchester, and in early 1973 the University of Stirling hosted a conference on Islam and Hinduism. These were exciting times, offering new visions of what RE in school might be and forging fresh thinking about its raison



d'être in the curriculum and its contribution to society. Some of this vision was shared through the pages of Learning for Living (now the British Journal of Religious Education), which for a period in the 1970s carried occasional reports of the working party (3) and a regular 'World Religions Notebook' with a pedagogical emphasis. On several occasions CEM gave over an issue of Learning for Living mainly to the papers of a Shap conference. (4)

Much early activity focused on Borough Road College Isleworth (now incorporated into Brunel University) where parallel to Shap's emergence the divinity department had been preparing to act as a clearing house for information about the teaching of world religions; the two movements fruitfully coalesced. Here beginning with 'Shap News', the idea of a 'Mailing' took shape, nurtured by Peter Woodward (later RE adviser for Birmingham). Building on foundations laid by Borough Road, the Mailing listed key calendar dates of faiths in the UK, and briefly indicated their significance; sometimes notes relevant to classroom practice were included and attention was drawn to new publications and audio-visual aids – at that time filmstrips, slides and audiotapes. Among the early contacts of Shap was Bury Peerless, a professional photographer who had travelled widely in India and had also photographed manuscripts in the British Museum and the V&A relating to religious traditions. His slides were an excellent resource which became widely known in education through Bury's membership of the working party.

The production of authoritative bibliographies on world religions and on approaches to the study of religions – many of which came to light when we recently gathered materials for the Shap Archive – was also a feature of this early period; taking forward work started at Borough Road, Shap had by the Autumn of 1970 produced twelve bibliographies – which would extend to over twenty in World Religions – Aids for Teachers (see below).

These activities ultimately led in three directions: to a Calendar, a Journal and Handbooks; but, before turning to these, one further venture from the early 1970s may be noted. This focused on the then new CSE examination, prompted by the raising of the school leaving age to 16 and need to provide opportunities for those who would not be entered for 'O' level GCE exams. This new exam offered opportunity for new thinking. Shap convened a working group of 16 people – 10 from secondary schools and 6 from colleges of education to prepare a syllabus on world religions. Syllabuses for Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and (interestingly) 'Christianity as a world religion' were proposed.(5) Owen Cole's introduction indicated the tone of the syllabus: *In our planning we have, in every case, attempted to present the faith as a living reality so that, for example, the pupil may understand what it means to be a Jew in terms of practice and belief. We have begun with the concrete, the tangible and visible, and **probed towards the abstract and conceptual***. [My highlighting] Clearly Shap was from its beginnings concerned with more than an attenuated phenomenology.

The syllabus provides a good example of Shap's collaborative working – here with schools and colleges and in service to exam boards. Other joint ventures involved SOAS, the World Congress of Faiths and SCIFDE (the Standing Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in Education) – yes, interfaith dialogue in education was on the agenda for some over 30 years ago.



Handbooks on World Religions



World Religions - Aids for Teachers and the first Handbooks offer a further example of a collaborative venture. Shap gathered and invited material for these, but was greatly helped by their publication by CRC (the Community Relations Commission, later CRE). *World Religions: Aids for Teachers* edited by Peter Woodward was published in 1972; this included a calendar of religious festivals; lists of AVA, and 'Tools for the Classroom'; its bibliographies were central and inclusive – here already was guidance, for example, for those who wished to know about Jainism, Chinese and Japanese religions, Zoroastrianism and Humanism; about Christian attitudes to non-Christian religions and books for the classroom. 'Tools for

the Classroom' included suggestions for 'a Jewish Box' and guidance on visiting a synagogue with lower secondary pupils. 'World religions in the infant school' was also addressed. All these subjects – normative now? – pointed towards the radical then. A successor to this publication came in 1976, *World Religions: a Handbook for Teachers*, edited by Owen Cole and was followed by a 1982 supplement. A new version edited by Alan Brown appeared in 1987; a whole section of this publication was given to 'New Religious Movements', a category broadly conceived, but remarkably prescient in its chosen subjects - Hindu-related New Religious Movements; Militant Islam – strengths and prospects in the 1980s; the state of Buddhism in Tibet and Exile; Sri Lanka – Buddhism and the Tamil Minority. Such matters are still with us as we reflect on our area of study. But time moves on and the function of the handbooks in terms of providing basic information had been met. It was time for a new kind of handbook. Clive Erricker headed a team which produced *Teaching World Religions* (Heinemann, 1993); a central feature of this was its attention to pedagogy in relation to some of the central concepts of religions – a perennial concern for RE.

The Shap Calendar of Religious Festivals



It is probably true to say that Shap was first in the field here; from a mailing of dates emerged a fully fledged calendar offering notes on the key festivals of (in 2006-07) twelve traditions; many readers will know Clive Lawton who over a period of ten years saw the calendar through its 'late childhood' and 'adolescence' (6). Editing the calendar is no mean task! A strength of Shap's calendar is that dates are checked with authoritative sources each year; but each year also brings new questions, challenges and decisions – so much so that in recent years the editors have offered a commentary on these in their editorial notes. It is this attention to detail which contributes to the authenticity and – we hope -

reliability of the calendar. It still remains first port of call for some 15,000 subscribers from the educational world and beyond – and (I suspect) a source of inspiration to other calendar compilers. The success of the calendar led Shap to produce a major book, *Festivals in World Religions* (Brown ed.1986; Woodward et al eds.1998); calendar notes are cross referenced to this. Additionally, 2008



will see our fifth pictorial calendar – a popular innovation offering 12 full colour pictures, designed to be a resource for RE beyond the lifespan of the calendar itself.

From ‘Mailing’ to ‘World Religions in Education’



Shap Mailing’ was for many years the name ascribed to the journal (though actually ‘the Mailing’ was the calendar and journal); by 1986 it seemed appropriate (then) to re-name the journal *World Religions in Education*. The journal had emerged in its own right in 1976 under Owen Cole’s editorship. His last - and my first - edited journal adopted a central theme as its focus – Death. Since that time each journal has been organised around a theme, and the editor(s) supported by an editorial committee; the table sets out the themes covered over the years. The tendency of the journal has been to include ‘academic’ thinking, voices from different traditions, and whenever possible classroom approaches. This last aspect has probably been ‘thinnest’ and we would welcome contributions from teachers willing to share good practice. The 2007-08 journal takes ‘Diversity and

Distinctiveness’ as its theme, again demonstrating inclusiveness – we move well beyond the six ‘principal’ religions, and in focusing on diversity within traditions reflect current trends in the study of religion, as well as a growing awareness of this in RE (Ofsted 2007:para.138). In 2008-09 we shall return to the theme of the environment, with Marilyn Mason and Angela Gluck Wood taking on editorial responsibility; Lesley Prior continues to ensure there is primary provision related to journal themes in the **Primary Supplement insert**.

Shap Journals 1980 -2007

- 1980 No specific theme
- 1981 Rites of Passage [in part]
- 1982 Death
- 1983 Pilgrimage
- 1984 Sacred Writings
- 1985 Worship in World Faiths
- 1986 Religions in Britain
- 1987 Festivals
- 1988 Women in Religion
- 1989 Humankind and the Environment
- 1990/91 Religion and Story Diversity and distinctiveness
- 1991/92 Religion and Creative Expression
- 1992/93 Religion and Truth
- 1993/94 Exploring Journeys
- 1994/95 Exploring Loss, Grief and Change



- 1995/96** From Syllabuses to Schemes – Planning and Teaching Religious Education
- 1996/97** Exploring Conflict & Reconciliation: Issues for RE
- 1997/98** Who Am I? The Search for Individual and Group Identity
- 1998/99** Faith & Values in RE
- 1999/00** Can I Teach Your Religion?
- 2000/01** Time
- 2001/02** Living Community
- 2002/03** Religion: the Problem or the Answer?
- 2003/04** Wealth and Poverty
- 2004/05** Shaping the Future
- 2005/06** Reflecting on learning and teaching
- 2006/07** Human rights and responsibilities [to mark the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act]
- 2007/08** Diversity and distinctiveness

In writing of the Calendar and the Journal I have probably touched on the two key aspects of Shap activity which are most familiar to readers – they also bridge past and present. But there have been other ventures and publications.

A golden age of in-service courses

This heading applies not only to Shap - but probably also to other organisations which from around the mid 1970s through to the early 1990s were able to offer a wide range of courses and conferences which provided teachers with the opportunity to follow interests in the field of religion at their own level, as well as considering the implications of their study for the classroom. Put another way, there was a freedom to choose and to attend courses which enlarged understanding of religions and thereby the possibilities and potential of religious education. Shap developed a very full conference and courses programme during these years. South Coast Shap flourished in Chichester (with an occasional year in Winchester); in the north Lancaster and York provided venues for residential conferences. These were often oversubscribed and saw teachers travelling long distances to participate in an intensive weekend programme. To list just a few conference titles gives a glimpse of the range of subjects addressed:

London:

- Afro-Caribbean Religion [1974]
- Violence and Non-violence in Religions [1975]

Shap Wells:

- An Introduction to Myth [1974]
- Prejudice and Tolerance in Religion [1979]



Lancaster:

- Christ and Buddha in History, Art & Ethics [1978]
- Jesus, Muhammad & Marx in Conflict and Congruence [1979]

Chichester:

- Shabbat Shalom [1981]
- Transforming the World: Christian and Buddhist Approaches [1990]
- Half the World: Women & Religion across the curriculum [1991]

York:

- Dar -al -Islam [1983]
- Christianity in World Perspective [1990]
- Learning to See [1991]

These were collaborative ventures – for example South Coast Shap ran mainly at Bishop Otter College/West Sussex Institute of Education from around 1980 to 1993, ‘York Shap’ from 1983 through to 1991 - a joint venture with York RE Centre. Substantial reports emerged from conferences, usually in York’s case comprising all the conference papers. From time to time I still run into people who speak of their recollections of Shap conferences – not least for the range of ‘experts’ they brought together and for their experiential and personally enriching elements – participation in keeping Shabbat; providing for the dietary needs of Buddhist monks over a weekend; meeting a sofer and watching him work; preparing for a local Sikh community to install the Guru Granth Sahib at a conference; participating in/participant observation of a Taizé liturgy; getting up at 6am to join a Buddhist meditation – to mention just a little of what was offered.

Study days on ‘Living as a Buddhist’ took place under Peggy Morgan’s guidance in Oxford, and in the North West (Liverpool and Manchester) ‘Primary Shap’ was coordinated by Vida Barnett, producing a number of festival packs for primary schools. It was also Vida Barnett, with Peter Woodward, who led study tours which visited Israel, Egypt, Yugoslavia and Morocco in the late 1970s and early 1980s – providing vital input into an initiative coming from Birmingham LEA. An international dimension also developed in this period with the establishing of EAWRE (The European Association for World Religions in Education); EAWRE has held many conferences and seminars and published a trilingual calendar for some years. Closer to home, a Scottish Working Party also flourished for many years.



The Chichester project

The period referred to above also saw the emergence of the Chichester research project supported by both Shap and the (then) West Sussex Institute of Education. This project’s concern was to produce materials for teaching Christianity in secondary schools; it drew on the expertise of many RE professionals as well as that of the working party. Led by John Rankin, the project critically appraised existing materials for teaching Christianity and then moved on to produce 9 books for the secondary age

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



phase on different aspects of Christianity; each book carried its author's own style, but had also been through the rigours of project discussion and debate. The series was unusual at the time in including for example books on *The Eucharist and Christian Experience*; *Teaching Christianity*, addressed to teachers, followed (Erricker ed. 1987;1996). At a later stage the project turned to meeting the needs of teachers in primary schools, and extending beyond Christianity (Rankin, Brown & Hayward, 1989; 1991).

A changing educational world



2008 will mark 20 years since the introduction of the National Curriculum; national initiatives have their own momentum and it is easy to be swept along with them and not to raise the questions one considers important; invariably such initiatives have prompted debate in the meetings of the working party – from the time of the consultation on the National Curriculum through to current discussion of the revised secondary curriculum. The non-statutory national framework for RE, QCA schemes of work and the proposed national strategy have similarly been the focus of discussion and response. Indeed the many initiatives of the last 20 years have meant that Shap's officers have given much time to meeting the latest response dates – perhaps none more so than the current Chair, Roger Butler, who

has been assiduous in responding to central initiatives and raising concerns. This brings a different dimension to 'working' from that previously enjoyed by Shap in its advocacy and passion for engagement with religious traditions in education.

As Shap welcomed links with other organisations in the past, so in the present; it is for example a longstanding member of the RE Council of England Wales, and has always welcomed its association with the Interfaith Network. We also recognise that members of the working party are often key figures in other organisations and hope that this contributes to mutual understanding among those concerned with RE.

Pragmatically, Shap like other organisations is developing its website. Look out especially for the forthcoming audio guidance on the pronunciation of the religious terms in the glossary which is already available on the website. A further dimension of the website is its advisory service – if you can't find a response to your question among answers already there, then contact us for help [www.shap.org.uk]. Past publications are increasingly available on the website, and details of how to order new items are there too.

Interest in quality resources for teaching religions has been a lifelong concern of Shap's – and many of its members have been and are leading authors in the field. This long held concern is reflected in the Shap Award, launched in 1998 and usually given annually for 'a piece of work which has been judged to make a marked contribution to the teaching of world religions'. True to Shap's 'scope', this award has been made at both university and nursery ends of education and to work developed outside the education sector, but pertinent to it.



Of anniversaries and archivesand the future

Shap marked its twentieth anniversary in 1989 with a publication of papers from its first twenty years (see note 1) and a national conference on 'Freedom and Authority in Religions and Religious Education' at St. Martin's College, Lancaster (with a dinner for participants at the Shap Wells Hotel). The theme again seems prescient – not least in John Bowker's keynote exploration of 'boundaries where religions (or subsystems within religions) meet' on a world map – and his affirmation of RE's mediating role. Bob Jackson (then Chair of Shap) in prophetic vein urged us to think of a future in which interfaith, international concerns and pedagogy were to the fore. His words too have currency in the present.

As Shap approaches 40, it has established an archive which documents most of these years. We are delighted that this was accepted for deposit in the Bodleian Library in Oxford and is thus preserved for future researchers who may wish to explore the development of the teaching of 'world religions' in the UK. Certainly the working party has more than achieved the simple aims with which it started. But the urgency of understanding the complexity of religion and religions in the contemporary world is no less than in 1969, and more hopes are placed on RE now than then. Approaching 40 is a time for reflection and re-visioning the future; and if, as they say, 60 is today's 40, then Shap is still rather young and will have new paths to tread. Is it time for a change of name – is world religions still appropriate? And should we signal new directions in a changing world by speaking of 'education in...' rather than '...in education'? Back then to debate and discussion – but watch out for 2009!

The Shap working party on World Religions in Education



Footnotes

- 1 Smart, N (1982) 'Worldview Analysis: A Way of Looking at Our Field' in Wood, A, ed (1989) Religions and Education 1969-1989, a compilation of articles from earlier Shap publications undertaken by Angela Wood with Vida Barnett, Cherry Gould & Peggy Morgan to mark Shap's 20th anniversary.
- 2 Whilst some are members of longstanding, membership is not static; I am acutely aware of how few names I can mention here, but the Shap Archive records names of members over the years, among them a great many who have given generously of their time and energy not only to Shap, but to RE in the UK and beyond.
- 3 See for example 'The Shap Working Party Report', Learning for Living, 11:3, January 1972 which provides a more extensive report of Shap's early activities than can be included here.
- 4 See for example: Vols. 11.3 (1972) Islam; 12:5 (1973) Sikhism; 13:1 (1973) Zoroastrianism; 13:4 (1974) Christianity.
- 5 These are set out in Finel, J. ed. (1974) World Religions at CSE or 16+. A Shap Working Party Publication.
- 6 An editorial team took over from Clive Lawton and many members have contributed to its work since then; Roger Howarth leads the present team.
- 7 A later publication based on the conference is Gates, B. ed. (1996) Freedom & Authority in Religions and Religious Education. Cassell.

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