

Miss J.Noakes, the Historical Association and WW1

Miss J. Noakes is listed in the delegate list to New Ideals Conference in 1917 with only her name and home address of Brooke Green, with no occupation.

She is listed next to Miss T. Noakes, London, Lecturer at Whitelands College, who seems to have suffered a typographical error in the listing, for her initial is K. not T. She is mentioned as a contributor of evidence in the Hadow Report (1931) 'The Primary School London', HM Stationery Office p217 ((B) LIST OF ORGANISATIONS AND PERSONS WHO SENT MEMORANDA, STATISTICS AND OTHER DATA FOR THE USE OF THE COMMITTEE), and part of a delegation to give evidence on schools to H.A.L. Fisher for his 1918 Education Act.

Miss J. Noakes is voted onto the Council of the Historical Association in 1918, when she addresses the annual meeting on 'The Effect of the War on the Teaching of History' p19-21. Also voted onto the Council, with her, is 1917 New Ideals delegate Mr. F. C. Snowball, headmaster of Hele School, Exeter. Miss J. Noakes becomes a member of the editorial board of 'History', the quarterly journal of the Association, and contributes book reviews.

In the report of her 1918 address it is published that she is a History teacher at St Paul's Girls School, which confirms her identity as the 1917 delegate, as St Paul's School is found in Brooke Green area. Later in the Journal, 1920, she is listed on the editorial board and teaching at The Godolphin School, Salisbury.

The report from 'History' of her speech in 1918 to the Historical Association states:

"Miss NOAKES, history mistress at St. Paul's Girls' School, said that perhaps she owed her audience an apology, inasmuch as she had formulated no theory as to how the teaching of history might have, or should have, been affected by the war, nor had she even made up her mind as to what must be the effect of the war upon the future teaching of the subject, though she was convinced that the effect must be very considerable; much that had been taught as essential would have to be "scrapped," and much that was now very imperfectly taught, such as imperial and American history, to say nothing of a more intelligent and sympathetic interpretation of European history, would have to be included; but she was confining herself to a bare statement of the way in which from practical experience she had found her own teaching in a large secondary girls' school had been affected.

"The teacher of history has had a much easier and yet an infinitely more difficult task before her during these last three years, easier in the letter, more difficult in the spirit.

"It has been easier, in as much as the subject was now absolutely living. History today interests not only the majority of the school, but also those girls who are naturally more drawn to other school subjects; that is to say that every member of the community has come to see that history is no longer a "form subject " a mere story of the past but the living interpreter of the present. For the first time, even the younger girls appreciate the working of cause and effect, they see the close interaction of the parts upon the whole, and realise the continuity of the present with the past in their efforts to find an answer to the question, "When did the war begin? "

"Their lively interest in following the course of the war in many countries and continents and in watching the careers of friends from overseas on various fronts has led them to desire knowledge as never before, not only of the smaller nationalities of Europe, but in a more intelligent way of the growth and political condition of the Overseas Dominions. Nothing evokes greater interest than a discussion as to how the ties that bind the Empire may be strengthened in the future.

“The practical teacher has found, too, that various technicalities that previously had to be explained at some length are now readily grasped. For instance, there is no need to explain the reasonableness and necessity of an Alien or Traitorous Correspondence Act to young persons living under the Defence of the Realm Act, nor to elaborate the difference between a "paper" and "effective" blockade. Never before, too, has the supreme importance and silent power of the Navy been brought home as now. The perennial disappointment at the paucity of naval engagements has been removed.

“But the difficulty of teaching history to young people is peculiarly great at the present moment, through the efforts of the teacher to foster, animate, and intensify the true spirit of patriotism, so magnificently displayed, while at the same time exorcising that false, unreflecting patriotism that can only think in terms of territorial expansion, and that is being fed by ignorant and boastful talk at the present time in some quarters; and this difficulty is linked up with the thought of internationalism.

“How is the teacher to approach this subject? It has been said that internationalism can only be taught through action: that an exchange of letters, of teachers, of pupils with an occasional school journey are the only effectual means by which the young of one country can enter into the spirit of another, and so engender mutual goodwill and understanding. These means of securing the end being no longer available, nothing can be done. But these are the very moments in which something must be done. The teaching of European history even a whole year's course on the latest period is not the panacea. It is almost pathetic to see what hopes are based upon the inclusion of a late period of European history in the history syllabus.

“How is the teacher to share the abhorrence of her pupils at the present "frightfulness" and yet so prepare their minds for the future as to enable them to look forward to that new world when the men of one nation will look upon "the things of others " with sympathetic insight? The teacher, whatever may be her own feelings upon the present, must have her eyes set upon the future. But the matter is one of supreme difficulty. One thing at least is certain: that, above all things and at all costs, the whole truth (as we see it) must be taught; the faults and failures of our own past must be frankly brought to light, and both sides be fairly stated in all matters of international disagreement. It is only by showing that mistakes have been made in the past that hopes can be entertained, of sounder decisions in the future; it is only by teaching the truth (as far as we know it) that the ignorance, whence spring passions and prejudices, can be dispersed.”

By Michael Newman, Researching New Ideals in Education community (3rd Sept 2017).

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