

Love of Country

I was born in England and proudly call myself British. Although I have not lived in England for forty years my feeling of 'being British' has not diminished. Those first years one lives in a country not only determines who you are but also how you view your birthplace.

I attended high school in the east of England and remember clearly many of my teachers and the subjects that they taught. There were three teachers that I particularly enjoyed and respected. The subjects that they taught were History, Geography and English Literature. History lessons in the first three years of high school focussed on British history from the early days of nationhood through to modern times. We learnt about wars and battles, topics that appealed to young teenage boys, and many of the evil characters that pervaded English history over the centuries. We could not get enough of stories that told of blood and torture. Nothing was left out - history is history after all.

Tales of famous events were set in geographical space and it was no coincidence that the early years of high school was the time to learn about the geography of the British Isles. There was not a part of the country left untaught. We knew the names of regions, towns, rivers, mountains and the people who inhabited those areas. Although England is a small country the variations in landscape and people are numerous. History and Geography are so closely entwined. Complementing these two subjects was English Literature. We were exposed to the most important authors, poets and playwrights over the centuries and gained insight into the world in which they lived and about which they wrote. Three subjects that focused on one theme - being British. A truly national education.

Of course, British history lessons included material on various governments and political parties and included all the bad as well as the good politicians. I did not understand at the time that some of the views might have been biased and glorified events from an English perspective. We were taught that Britain ruled a large proportion of the world and bathed in the riches of a glorious empire. The suffering and misery this colonisation brought on occasions, for example the impact on Hong Kong of the opium wars, was barely mentioned. I don't believe this was a deliberate act by the History teacher - it was simply not in the curriculum or mentioned in the text books. I cannot remember being taught specifically about political thought until I studied politics at A-level. What I do remember was that I was never told what to think. We were encouraged to reach our own conclusion about people and events in

history. Nor were there assessments designed to gauge our 'love of country'. Many of us reached that conclusion on our own - we did not need a test to determine our loyalty to the motherland.

The majority of St. Paul's boys will spend six years at the College. During that time they will be exposed to stories that tell of the fine history of our school and the people that have shaped its development over 160 years. Assemblies, heritage services, the College Song and many other examples reinforce the message that this is a fine school with a proud history. Yet there is no defined SPC history curriculum and no test at graduation to measure a boy's love for their school. Some boys will walk out of the doors never to return. Some will not wish to remain in contact with friends or teachers. Others will remain in touch with classmates and eagerly await the reunion dinners. Some might even dream of the day they become the Chairman of the Alumni Association!

No two people are the same. Nor are their views and opinions. The purpose of a balanced education is to help young people better understand a complex world and to develop the skill of analysing issues and reaching conclusions. Schools and teachers are only part of that process. Families and friends are also critical. Governments, however, should not and must not be one of those influences. Love of one's country can only come from the individual. Some people will develop an intense love for their motherland whilst some may never have such feelings. In between will be the views of millions of people. As was my experience as a young person, one should be taught the facts honestly and without omissions, and be allowed to think for oneself without being directed by others. That has always been the SPC approach and will continue to be so.

J.R. Kennard