

Can we learn from history?

Quote from Winston Churchill:

The further back you look, the further forward you can see.

and

Happy is the man who can learn from the mistakes of others.

This last quote implies it is not everyone who can learn from the mistakes of others or themselves.

Being aware of history enables people to reflect on what is happening now. For instance, it seems that Trump has no capacity to reflect on the different possible outcomes of his decisions.

Personal history

Do we need a sense of history to live a good life? I have worked with people who have been adopted at birth or soon after. Often their quest in life is to find out where they came from and why they were put out for adoption. If they discover this, it may be a source of great happiness or not as the case may be. But what it does is to give them some sense of place, and that is usually a very settling experience.

History gives us a sense of identity

Last weekend I was at a re-enactment of the Battle of Lewes, a 13th century battle between Simon de Montfort and Henry III. About 60 or 70 men dressed in mediaeval armour with axes and swords (wooden) enjoying themselves enormously, while bashing each other to hell. It seems the identities of these 21st century men were deeply tied up with their 13th century counterparts.

Thankfulness in relation to history

Recently, there was a programme about the history of Saint Bartholomew's hospital in London. St Barts was founded in 1283 and is now one of our most important and modern NHS hospitals. We saw the horrors that were inflicted on people in the interests of health and the advancements of medicine, for example, the amputated hands of early radiographers showing the skin and bones being eaten away, Pepys' bladder stones being extracted before the use of chloroform. How thankful we should all be for all that our forebears went through as it has resulted in the wonderful treatments available today.

Knowledge of history

Following on from the last example, knowledge of history tells us how fortunate we are to live in the age we do with all our Modern conveniences. Few of us would have been able to cope with life in the time of Simon de Montfort!

But the question is, does knowing all these things about our past actually help us in dealing with our lives today?

Daphne Wilbraham