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# The rise and fall of Jackdaws: lessons for designing source collections to teach history

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## Abstract

For more than a century, educators and historians have advocated for the importance of using primary sources for teaching history. One of the most innovative and popular collections of sources in the past 60 years were Jackdaws: Collections of Contemporary Documents, which were published by Jonathan Cape between 1963 and 1977. Jackdaws are folders that contain reproductions of primary and secondary sources focused on significant historical events, people, developments, themes and topics in history. In this article, I provide a brief history of Jackdaws, and explain why they were initially popular as a learning resource for teaching history, and why their popularity waned in the mid-to-late 1970s. I conclude by highlighting several lessons that can be learned from the rise and fall of Jackdaws that might help history teachers and educators design collections of primary and secondary sources for teaching history. The three reasons that best explain why Jackdaws became popular learning resources in school history classrooms between 1963

and 1977 are that they were aligned with innovative educational theories at the time, they were flexible and adaptable to diverse contexts, and they were interesting and exciting for students. Despite being heralded as a groundbreaking and revolutionary resource for teaching history, Jackdaws failed to transform history teaching and learning for four main reasons: they were too difficult for some students; they were an awkward fit for some school history curricula; they were expensive and difficult to manage; and there was a lack of pedagogical supports to help teachers use them effectively.

**Keywords** Jackdaw; history teaching and learning; teaching and learning resources; primary sources; historical inquiry

## Introduction

For more than a century, educators and historians have advocated for the importance of using primary sources for teaching history (Keatinge, 1910; Osborne, 2003a, 2003b; Wineburg, 1991). Throughout this time, countless collections and packages of primary sources have been developed to help teachers engage students in 'historical inquiry' that uses disciplinary methods to analyse primary and secondary sources and construct historical interpretations. One of the most innovative and popular collections of sources produced in the past 60 years were Jackdaws: Collections of Contemporary Documents, which were published by Jonathan Cape between 1963 and 1977.

Jackdaws are folders (also called wallets or kits) that contain reproductions of primary and secondary sources focused on significant historical events, people, developments, themes and topics. They were designed as learning resources for 9- to 16-year-old history students, and throughout their 15-year history, approximately 200 different sets of Jackdaws were produced, including 136 in the United Kingdom, 35 in Canada, and more than two dozen in the United States. Most Jackdaws focus on significant events in British, European, World, American and Canadian history, although others focus on historical people, history of science and themes in social, political and cultural history (York Enstam and Raack, 1974).

Each Jackdaw was created by an author who selected or 'compiled' the source materials and wrote the broadsheets and brochure. The contents included in each Jackdaw folder were:

- Six or more visual and textual facsimile primary sources relevant to the topic, including portraits, brass rubbings, woodcuts, watercolours, maps, cartoons, letters, pamphlets, newspapers, charts, sheet music, diaries, poems, public documents and others (Devitt, 1970; Ferris, 1966).
- Transcripts of illegible or difficult-to-read primary sources.
- Three to eight secondary-source 'broadsheets' written by the Jackdaw's author to provide background information, context, explanation, description and commentary about the topic and the various source materials included. Some broadsheets also featured questions, learning activities, and quizzes at the bottom of the page.
- A brochure with suggestions for teachers about how to use the various materials, a description of the materials included in the set, questions for students to consider, and a list of suggested books for further reading. Some Jackdaws had cardboard construction projects for younger students and thought problems for older students (York Enstam and Raack, 1974).

I first became aware of Jackdaws in 2006 while on a summer tour of First and Second World War battlefields with a group of Canadian history teachers. While walking on the beach in Dieppe, France, a fellow history teacher told me about a teaching resource he used to teach about the Dieppe Raid that his students always enjoyed using. I remember him enthusiastically describing a folder containing an assortment of interesting primary and secondary sources about the Dieppe Raid, including a postcard from prisoners of war and a 33 RPM record of radio news reports from the time.

A few years later, I was in the social studies book room at the secondary school I was teaching at and found a dusty folder sitting on one of the shelves with 'The Great Depression' written on the front. I remember opening it and looking at the different documents included, and being impressed by the quality and variety of the reproductions of primary and secondary sources included. Unfortunately, I was


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not teaching about the Great Depression in Canada at the time, and I never got the chance to try it out with students.

In 2014, I was visiting a different secondary school and noticed that the teacher resource section in the library contained 50 or 60 different Jackdaws. The teacher-librarian told me that they were rarely, if ever, signed out by teachers or students. I asked a friend who worked at the school to let me know if they ever decided to get rid of the Jackdaws. Five years later, my friend called to let me know that the teacher-librarian had decided to get rid of them, and I could pick them up if I still wanted them. I eagerly picked them up and moved them into my office at the University of British Columbia.

Since acquiring the Jackdaws, I have spent countless hours going through the different folders, organising their contents, and posting photographs of interesting source materials on social media. I regularly show different Jackdaws to the undergraduate and postgraduate social studies education students I teach, and invite them to discuss the strengths and limitations of Jackdaws as a learning resource for teaching history. One of the fortunate results of my social media posts is that teachers and school librarians began contacting me to offer Jackdaws they found abandoned on book room shelves and in forgotten filing cabinets, which I happily accepted. In 2023, I discovered a Facebook page devoted to Jackdaws, and I contacted the UK-based person who created it. We began sharing information about the history of Jackdaws and trading Jackdaws we were missing from our respective collections. To date, my collection consists of more than 400 copies, including 170 of the approximately 200 Jackdaws ever published.

As my collection of Jackdaws grew, I became increasingly interested in their history. One of the surprising things I noticed about some of the Jackdaws in my collection is that the source materials included were often in pristine condition and looked like they had barely, if ever, been used. Driven by curiosity to learn more about the history of Jackdaws, I began investigating several questions and lines of inquiry: When and where were Jackdaws created? Who came up with the original idea for Jackdaws, and what motivated them to create them? Were Jackdaws popular with teachers and students? Did teachers regularly use Jackdaws to teach history, and, if so, how did they use them? Why were some of the Jackdaws not used? What were the perceived benefits and limitations of using Jackdaws to teach history? When and why did Jackdaws stop being produced?

This article is my attempt to share my initial answers to some of these questions. I begin by providing a brief history of Jackdaws, and then explain why they were initially popular, and why their popularity rapidly declined in the mid-to-late 1970s. I conclude by discussing several lessons that can be learned from the rise and fall of Jackdaws that might help history teachers and educators design and use collections of primary and secondary sources to teach history.

## The history of Jackdaws

The invention of Jackdaws occurred more by accident than plan. In October 1962, Tony Colwell, Jonathan Cape's promotional manager, created a folder of display materials to help bookshops sell *The Cato Street Conspiracy*, a popular history book about the 1820 plot to murder Prime Minister Lord Liverpool and his cabinet ministers (Ferris, 1966). The book was written by John Stanhope, the pseudonym of John Langdon-Davies. Colwell reproduced several primary sources relevant to *The Cato Street Conspiracy*, including reproductions of newspaper stories, drawings of the accused, and a leaflet that provided historical background about the event, which he enclosed in a foolscap folder (Howard, 1971). He sent one of the folders to the book's author, John Langdon-Davies, an enthusiastic supporter of visual learning, who believed that younger generations disliked traditional format books (Howard, 1971). Langdon-Davies was delighted by the folder, and showed it to his schoolmaster friend Raymond Groom, who shared Langdon-Davies's enthusiasm and told him that folders like this would be a fantastic teaching aid for capturing students' interest in school history (Ferris, 1966; Howard, 1971). Langdon-Davies also shared this with other teacher friends who said: 'What a pity we can't get this kind of thing for children' (*Sevenoaks Chronicle*, 1966: 9).

Inspired by the idea, Langdon-Davies created a list of historical topics for a series of history folders, but before he could pitch the idea to educational publishers, he wanted to ensure that the folders could be produced for a reasonable price (Howard, 1971). He wrote a letter to Michael S. Howard at Jonathan Cape, who had produced two of Langdon-Davies's previous books, and was knowledgeable about the mechanics of printing. Langdon-Davies asked Howard if he could figure out a printing method

for reproducing various primary sources and the expected costs of producing the folders. Howard showed Langdon-Davies's letter to Graham C. Greene, the managing director of Jonathan Cape, who immediately saw the potential of the idea (Howard, 1971). Rather than let Langdon-Davies pitch the project to an educational publisher, Greene and Howard agreed that if they could find an economically viable way of mass-producing the folders, Jonathan Cape would publish them (Howard, 1971).

Jonathan Cape owned a small offset press in the basement of their London offices, and had an employee named Andrew Thomson who had developed considerable expertise in small offset printing techniques. Thomson was tasked with figuring out the printing methods and costs of producing the folders, and within a few days he proved that the folders could be produced for a reasonable price (Howard, 1971). Greene worked out a publishing plan and invited Langdon-Davies to meet with the directors of Jonathan Cape, who offered him a contract. Langdon-Davies agreed to produce the first series of folders, and if these were successful, he would produce additional folders (Howard, 1971). Langdon-Davies named the folders 'Jackdaws' because Penguin and Pelican books were highly successful series named after birds, and because jackdaws collected assorted objects to build their nests in the same way that writers collected assorted source materials to build Jackdaw folders (Howard, 1971).

The first Jackdaw, *The Battle of Trafalgar*, was published on 2 December 1963, along with two others, *Plague and Fire of London* and *Columbus and the Discovery of America*. Three other Jackdaws were nearly complete, and Langdon-Davies compiled a list of 40 additional topics to be included in the series. The 40 topics were listed as 'in preparation' on the back of the folders as a bluff to discourage competitors from creating their own versions of Jackdaws (Howard, 1971). Although Jonathan Cape trademarked the name 'Jackdaw', they did not own the idea, and could not prevent rival publishers from producing their own versions. The 40 proposed topics were little more than a wish list, until it was proven that Jackdaws would sell (Howard, 1971).

Initial sales were slow, and only 200 copies of Jackdaw No.1 sold around the world (Ferris, 1966). Despite the slow sales, reviews were encouraging. In an article entitled 'Now history comes to life' in *The Daily Post Merseyside Edition*, Elizabeth Newell (1963: 14) praised Jonathan Cape's 'revolutionary new educational series' for being 'In tune with to-day's spirit of history teaching'. In the 12 December 1963 *Daily Herald* (1963: 4), an author known only as 'F.L.' stated that they were 'certain' that Jackdaws 'are going to be an enormous success with our children and their teachers', and, 'I expect Jackdaws to be copied as widely as Penguins have been'. An article entitled 'New approach to history', in the 1 January 1964 *The Guardian Journal* (1964: 4) described Jackdaws as being 'designed to teach history in a new and fascinating way', and stated that, 'Only a dullard could fail to be excited by this new approach to history.'

After three more Jackdaws were published in January 1964 (*The Magna Carta*, *The Armada* and *The Gunpowder Plot*), positive reviews began 'pouring in', public interest grew and sales rapidly increased (Ferris, 1966). Jackdaws were almost universally lauded by journalists, teachers and educationists for being an original, innovative and revolutionary approach for teaching and learning history. According to Paul Ferris's (1966: para. 3) article in *The Bookseller*:

> The idea has been praised to the point of embarrassment, and although some Jackdaws are manifestly better than others, no reviewer can long escape the comment, implied or explicit, that his own education would have benefitted from these nice crisp witnesses out of the past.

By the middle of 1964, 10 Jackdaws had been published (Ferris, 1966), and by May 1965, 16 more were published (*British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1965).

Although Jackdaws were initially designed for school-aged history students, and it was initially expected that schools would buy copies of Jackdaws for each student in the class, the audience for Jackdaws ended up being larger and broader than originally anticipated (Ferris, 1966). However, given the cost of buying multiple sets of Jackdaws for each student, most schools bought a few copies of the Jackdaws most relevant to their curricula. These Jackdaws were used as a supplement to textbooks, and teachers distributed the source materials and broadsheets from each set among the students in the class (Pilger, 1965). Jackdaws were also purchased by school libraries, and signed out by students and teachers on an individual basis. A large number of Jackdaws were also sold in bookshops to school-aged children, to those who wanted to buy a child an educational gift, and to adults themselves (Ferris, 1966). By May 1966, 10 million separate pieces of paper had been printed for Jackdaws, sales increased fourfold each year (Ferris, 1966), and by June 1966, half a million Jackdaws had been sold (Fulford, 1967; *Sevenoaks Chronicle*, 1966).


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Given the incredible success of Jackdaws, Jonathan Cape created Jackdaw Publications Limited in 1966 as a separate company to manage the development and sales of Jackdaws. Graham C. Greene was appointed chairman, and Michael Howard, Tom Maschler, Howard Loxton and Andrew Thompson were appointed to the board of directors (Howard, 1971). The formation of Jackdaw Publications was celebrated with a party held at the Tower of London, which was attended by distinguished guests, including Sir Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin Books, former Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Anthony Crosland, the Minister of Education. Although it was highly unusual for a cabinet minister to give a speech at a commercial event, Anthony Crosland agreed to speak after receiving several sample Jackdaws from Greene and witnessing his children's interest in them (Howard, 1971).

Jonathan Cape was clearly 'aware of being onto a good thing', and, given that 'History, after all, is inexhaustible and so is curiosity', they made plans for developing dozens more Jackdaws (Ferris, 1966: 2). John Langdon-Davies compiled and wrote 26 of the first 34 Jackdaws between 1963 and 1966, and, in total, produced 29 Jackdaws by the time of his death in 1971. The process of creating a Jackdaw was time consuming and difficult because it involved examining countless historical sources and selecting less than a dozen of the most interesting and relevant. The editorial team of Howard Loxton (the Jackdaws Series Editor), Michael Howard, Tom Maschler and Graham C. Greene reviewed the selected sources and written text for the broadsheets and pamphlets, and historians and teachers vetted the materials before they were published (Ferris, 1966).

In 1966, Jonathan Cape began hiring other authors to compile Jackdaws about a broader range of topics, including geographical, scientific and literary subjects (Hastie, 1972). In 1967, Jackdaw Publications produced its first 'Jackdaw Special', a controversial folder entitled *The Assassination of President Kennedy*, which was compiled and written by Howard Loxton, Michael Rand, and thriller writer Len Deighton. It was the first Jackdaw focused on a contemporary event, and was created to coincide with the publication of Mark Lane's Penguin book *Rush to Judgment*, which aimed to discredit the Warren Commission (*Daily Mirror*, 1967). In 1968/9, six Jackdaws were created about the history of science, including *Darwin and Evolution*, *Newton and Gravitation* and *Faraday and Electricity*. Historical topics were extended beyond Great Britain and the British Empire to include European history (for example, *The Spanish Inquisition*, *Assassination at Sarajevo* and *The Russian Revolution*), the New World (for example, *The Conquest of Mexico* and *The American Civil War*) and ancient history (for example, *Tutankhamun and the Discovery of the Tomb*). By March 1968, Jackdaw Publications had produced 50 Jackdaws (Blishen, 1968), and by November of the same year, they had published 68 (Goldsborough, 1968). In the five-year period between 1968 and 1972, Jackdaw Publications produced 73 Jackdaws in the United Kingdom, an average of almost 15 per year. This period was undoubtedly the golden era of Jackdaw production, and few could have predicted that within five years, Jackdaws would no longer be produced.

Jackdaws were also exported throughout the Commonwealth, and in 1966, Jackdaw Publications signed a deal with Canadian educational publisher Clarke, Irwin & Company to distribute and sell Jackdaws in Canada, and to produce their own series of Jackdaws focused on Canadian history. Clarke, Irwin & Company sold 8,000 Jackdaws between their introduction in September 1966 and February 1967 (Fulford, 1967), and published 35 different sets of Canadian history Jackdaws between 1967 and 1976. Clarke, Irwin & Company regularly set up displays of Jackdaws and other educational books in hotel banquet rooms across Canada, and teachers and principals from surrounding areas would come to purchase learning resources (*Calgary Herald*, 1970; *The Kingston Whig Standard*, 1969, 1972).

In 1966, Jackdaw Publications also signed an agreement with Putnam to distribute Jackdaws in the United States. When the agreement with Putnam ended in 1968, Jackdaw Publications and Grossman Publishers (which was sold to Viking Press in 1968) reached a deal to sell Jackdaws in the United States. In 1971, Grossman signed an agreement with Jackdaw Publications to design and publish their own sets focused on American history. The first nine sets of American history Jackdaws were published in 1972.

By 1973, the creation of new Jackdaws in the United Kingdom and Canada had slowed considerably as the result of declining sales and the changing landscape in the publishing business. In 1969, Jonathan Cape merged with Chatto & Windus to protect each company against the threat of a corporate takeover by an American conglomerate, and The Bodley Head joined the merger in 1973 (Howard, 1971). Only 23 Jackdaws were published in the United Kingdom between 1973 and 1977, when the final Jackdaw, *Elizabeth II: The work of the Queen*, was published. By the 1970s, Clarke, Irwin & Company was also in decline in Canada as the result of changing rules on textbook purchasing introduced by the Ontario provincial government, which accounted for 75 per cent of their total business (Donnelly, n.d.). In 1970, the editorial staff was reduced from 42 to 9, and there were only 10 educational projects in progress,


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compared to 47 in 1963 (Donnelly, n.d.). Only six Jackdaws were published by Clarke, Irwin & Company between 1972 and 1976, and the final Jackdaw, *Newfoundland & Confederation*, was published in 1976.

In the United States, Viking Press sold the rights to Jackdaw Publications to Roger and Mary Jacques of Golden Owl Publishing, Inc. in 1973, and they published 20 Jackdaws between 1973 and 1977. From 1973 until 2015, Roger and Mary Jacques and their children continued to operate Jackdaw Publications as a subsidiary of Golden Owl Publishing, and sell newly developed and previously created Jackdaws during this time. In 2015, they sold Jackdaw Publications to Rosen Publishing, who are still operating the company today and selling Jackdaws on their website (https://www.jackdaw.com/).

## The popularity of Jackdaws

In this section, I describe three main reasons why Jackdaws became popular learning resources in school history classrooms between their introduction in 1963 and their decline by the mid-1970s. They were aligned with innovative and popular educational theories at the time; they were flexible and adaptable to diverse contexts; and they were interesting and exciting for students.

One of the explanations for the initial popularity of Jackdaws is that their invention serendipitously coincided with the development of innovative educational theories emerging at the time. In *The Process of Education*, Jerome Bruner (1960: 33) hypothesised that 'any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development'. Bruner (1960: 14) believed that 'intellectual activity anywhere is the same, whether at the frontier of knowledge or in a third-grade classroom … The difference is in degree, not in kind.' He emphasised a pedagogy of 'active discovery rather than the passive consumption of knowledge', which embodied a different spirit and attitude towards students as learners (Bruner, 1960: 18). Students were encouraged to learn physics as physicists, and history as historians, rather than being consumers of the conclusions of specialists in the subject. Bruner (1960) hypothesised that if students were taught to grasp the mode of inquiry and the structure of the discipline, they could work with historical evidence and analyse evidence, consider probabilities and draw reasoned conclusions.

Bruner's (1960) structure of the discipline approach inspired widespread curriculum reform in a variety of school subjects, including the 'New Social Studies' (NSS) in the United States (Fenton, 1966, 1967). NSS reforms involved a reorganisation of content that reflected academic disciplines, and a teaching–learning methodology that emphasised reflective thinking, discovery, inquiry and problem solving (Rice, 1992). Several innovative curriculum projects and collections of primary sources were developed as part of the NSS. Edwin Fenton created an American history textbook called *A New History of the United States: An inquiry approach*, which was comprised entirely of primary sources, and the Amherst History Project created widely used resources focused on primary sources (Osborne, 2003b). In the United Kingdom, P.H. Hirst's (1965) theory of academic disciplines as different forms of knowledge with their own body of concepts and ideas, distinctive ways of relating these concepts and ideas, ways of establishing truth claims, and distinctive forms of inquiry also inspired curriculum reforms.

The alignment between Jackdaws and new educational theories led many reviewers to describe Jackdaws as novel and innovative. In a 1967 article about the invention of Jackdaws, *Toronto Star* education columnist Robert Fulford (1967: 29) explained how the Jackdaw 'fits snugly into current theories of teaching':

> Jerome Bruner, of Harvard, one of the leading writers on education, argues persuasively that any subject can be taught in an intellectually honest way at any age level. 'Intellectually honest' implies, in the case of history, a sense of disagreement about certain facts; and disagreements come through clearly in the Jackdaws.

A review in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (1965: 234) described Jackdaws as a 'revolutionary new series', and praised each new Jackdaw for being 'fresh, exciting, and comprehensive' and 'exact and up-to-date in its scholarship, resourceful in the questions and the reading suggested'. Jackdaws were described in *The Birmingham Post* (1964: 4) as 'a new approach to history', and *The Guardian Journal* (1964: 4) said that 'Jackdaws are designed to teach history in a new and fascinating way'. *The Daily Mirror* described them as 'a wind of change' (Pilger, 1965: 11), and *The Sevenoaks Chronicle* (1966: 9) claimed that 'most people will now associate the name Jackdaw with one of the most revolutionary methods of teaching history'. Jackdaws were described in *The Edmonton Journal* (1967: 53) as 'a novel

approach' for schools where history teaching is 'still too often mired in sterile formalism, and lifeless prose'. Similarly, Edward Blishen (1968: 14) argued in the *Guardian* that history has 'persistently failed to be taught', which explains why many people, including history teachers, believe that history cannot be taught to young people. For Blishen (1968: 14), 'the spirit of the Jackdaws, of looking a topic full in the face' and investigating 'the original material of history' makes them 'the best of the new texts designed for young people'. Fulford (1967: 29) also argued that Jackdaws were unique because they emphasised controversy, which brings students 'closer to the subject' and presents 'its ambiguities raw'. In an interview with Robert Fulford (1967: 29), Graham C. Greene, the Chairman of Jackdaw Publications, stated that this approach to history, 'seemed like the most obvious idea in the world. One just wondered why it hadn't been done before?'

When students learn from the words of eyewitnesses and contemporaries about the events and personalities of the past, they are presented with the 'groundwork of history' from its source (Devitt, 1970: 9). According to Florene Cooter (1968: 104) of *The Fort Worth Star Telegram*, the advantage of Jackdaws is that they remove the narrator and allow students to see the primary sources relevant to a given subject for themselves, which 'provides an insight into the aura of the day'. No arbitrary barrier is placed between the student and the writer who reinterprets the long-vanished past (Devitt, 1970). This helps history students understand that 'every time a historian has set adjective to paper, he has editorialized' (Cooter, 1968: 104). Thus, the source materials in Jackdaws are not just about the past, they are from it. Rather than presenting 'pre-digested condensations of information offered in textbooks', Jackdaws offer students 'some of the materials that a working historian might examine in order to research a subject' (Diehl, 1974: 535). Instead of having students blindly copy from secondary sources and 'handing it to them on a plate', Jackdaws encourage students to correlate evidence, make up their own minds and discuss their conclusions with others (Devitt, 1970: 13).

Another explanation for the popularity of Jackdaws is that they were adaptable and flexible for classroom use. Teachers could modify how they used them to suit their contexts, purposes and topics of study, and the age and ability level of students. Several reviews highlighted the adaptability of Jackdaws as a key feature. In her review of Jackdaws in *The History Teacher*, American historian Elizabeth York Enstam commended Jackdaws for being flexible to individual and group projects, and suggested that several students can use one set at a time because they contain a number of documents (York Enstam and Raack, 1974). A review in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (1965: 234) stated that each Jackdaw 'leaves the enterprising teacher free to make the most of it in line with his own enthusiasms'. In her review of Jackdaws in *The Vancouver Sun*, Mari Pineo (1967: 84) explained that 'A teaching aid is, of course, only as good as the teacher who uses it', but that Jackdaws provide the means for teachers to 'make history come alive.' Another reviewer commented that although each Jackdaw appears to be a complete and ready-made course on a subject, it is more accurate to say that they provide 'first-class raw materials with which teachers can exercise their own skill, taking what they judge suitable for the needs and capabilities of their own pupils' (*The Birmingham Post*, 1964: 4).

In her book *Learning With Jackdaws*, Margaret Devitt (1970: 9) explained that Jackdaws do not provide 'a complete coverage of any given time period or topic', but offer 'flexible collections of material, appealing not only to a wide range of ages but also to the demands of numerous school courses being developed in response to the need for curriculum reform'. Devitt (1970: 9) outlined a myriad of ways in which Jackdaws could be used to teach history in school settings:

- To stimulate historical curiosity, interest, and imagination in a topic or historical time period.
- To introduce and guide units of study.
- To support a unit of study along with other equipment such as tape-recordings, films, slides, books, and broadcasts.
- As companions to school visits to places of historical and geographical interest.
- As templates for teachers to prepare other units of study not addressed by existing Jackdaws, or for student projects.
- Science-focused Jackdaws present opportunities for scientific investigation and multi-disciplinary study.
- To provide teachers with a starting point for self-directed research into a topic.
- To use the large, brightly coloured and well-annotated visual sources for display materials and bulletin boards.
- To provide an overview of a time period, topic, or theme before investigating it in more detail.
- To supplement a textbook.


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- To adapt history instruction for different ability levels and classroom situations.
- To engage disaffected students in history.
- To initiate class discussions and student oral reports.
- To help students review and prepare for exams.
- As exams or tests that evaluate students' background knowledge and ability to seek and assimilate evidence from various sources.
- As a group project focused on a specific Jackdaw or a broader theme that uses multiple Jackdaws.
- To create dramatic readings of primary sources, or model making using sources from a Jackdaw.

A former history student in Canada remembered creating their own Jackdaw as a student, and also using them when they became a teacher:

> In a 1971 history class we had to make our own [Jackdaw] as a project. A friend and I chose to do the history of the town we went to school in and got a perfect mark, much to our surprise, perfect marks not given out freely in those days. It was a lot of fun to do! I also used them as a teacher later on. (DianaCanada, 2020: n.p.)

One of the simplest and most straightforward explanations for the popularity of Jackdaws is that the high-quality reproductions of primary sources included in each set were 'stimulating and fascinating' for students (MacArthur, 1966: 14). Almost every article written about Jackdaws in the 1960s and 1970s described the benefits of learning history from the visually appealing sources included in each folder. In a review in *The Daily Post Merseyside Edition*, Elizabeth Newell (1963: 14) confidently declared that 'there are few children whose imaginations will not be caught by such a vivid and topical presentation of history'. She also proclaimed that Jackdaws would make history 'a live topic to the school child', which will 'surely deepen his comprehension of the subject, and appreciation of the contemporary problems' (Newell, 1963: 14). *The Birmingham Post* (1964: 4) described the 'immense pleasure … an intelligent and enquiring child' would get from these 'raw materials of the times'. It is also important to point out that many of the source materials included in Jackdaws would have been difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher to find at the time (York Enstam and Raack, 1974).

The benefits of including high-quality facsimiles of primary sources from the time is that students can 'observe historical events in some of the same ways the actors in those events observed them. You get inside the act, get involved' (Fulford, 1966: 6). A reviewer in *The Kingston Whig Standard* (1969: 2) praised Jackdaws for providing students with a 'you-are-there' concept of history. By focusing on one event, topic or person in depth, Jackdaws also give students the experience of handling material that was produced during the time under investigation, which can serve as an excellent introduction to historical evidence and the historical methods for analysing it (Devitt, 1970). For York Enstam and Raack (1974: 288), the documents included in Jackdaws 'succeed in sparking that almost mystical sense of having touched the past, which got many of us hooked on history in the first place'.

Howard Loxton, the Series Editor of Jackdaws, described the importance of selecting historical sources that are not only relevant, but also exciting in the way they look and feel when you hold them in your hand (Ferris, 1966). Historical documents can be reproduced in books, but Jackdaws replicate variously sized documents in a way that is 'not possible on a typical book page' (Cooter, 1969: 124), and which are more tangible when printed as separate documents. Devitt (1970) agrees that one of the great advantages of Jackdaws is that each source in the package can be opened, handled and examined, and laid out beside the others. They present a variety of stimuli, and they encourage students to respond in thoughtful ways that do not involve the 'dead routines of unthinking note-taking or copying' (Devitt, 1970: 21). In this way, Jackdaws were an early example of interactive publishing design, and part of their appeal is that they are a 'treasure trove' that invites the reader to become 'an explorer, a detective investigating the past, with the opportunity for happy accidents and personal taste to affect the sequence in which information and images are discovered, revealed, and examined' (Walters, 1998: 79). Students like the idea of having their own folder packed with treasures 'selected from museums and libraries all over the world' (Cooter, 1969: 124). *The Times Colonist* (1967: 8) in Victoria, Canada, described Jackdaws as 'packages of fun' and 'miniature private archives' that are both 'fine teaching aids and fun for the entire family'. Digby Diehl (1974: 535) explained the allure of Jackdaws in a similar way:

> From the simplest standpoint, these materials are simply much more stimulating and exciting for the student than page after page of text: the variety of source material is aimed at the

> kind of experience we all had opening Grandmother's trunk in the attic. Wonderful bits and pieces from another age offer more hints to us about life in that segment of history than many paragraphs of description by a historian who has rummaged in the same trunk or worse, a teacher who has merely read the historian.

Jackdaws made an impression on the students who used them during the 1960s and 1970s. I found several posts on online message boards from past students who describe how Jackdaws stimulated their interest in history. One person wrote: 'I remember I had one of the Armada and another of London around the time of the Great Fire. Both had a lot of facsimile documents which really piqued my interest in history' (Carom, 2020: n.p.). Another wrote: 'They were truly brilliant. Honestly, I think they inspired all my subsequent interest in history, and especially in archives. If it wasn't for the Jackdaw folders I would never have become our de facto family archivist' (Beck, 2020: n.p.).

## Reasons for the decline of Jackdaws

Despite being heralded as a groundbreaking and revolutionary resource for teaching history during the 1960s, by the mid-1970s sales were in decline, no new sets of Jackdaws were being published, and it was apparent that Jackdaws could and would not achieve the unrealistic predictions to transform history teaching and learning. From the available evidence, it appears as though Jackdaws were often used as a supplement to textbooks in history classrooms, rather than as the main resource. In this section, I discuss four main reasons why Jackdaws declined in popularity and failed to transform history teaching and learning: they were too difficult for some students; they were not aligned with some school history curricula; they were expensive and difficult to manage; and they lacked pedagogical supports to help teachers use them effectively.

Although many students found the materials included in Jackdaws interesting and exciting, the reading level of the primary sources and secondary source broadsheets was too difficult for some students. The textual primary sources often included several hundreds or even thousands of words of text written in archaic language and difficult to read handwriting and fonts that even the most advanced students had a difficult time decoding and comprehending. York Enstam and Raack (1974) believed that Jackdaws could be used by advanced junior high school students, but also noted that some college students found them difficult. Transcriptions and translations were provided to make it easier for students to understand the most difficult to read primary sources, but this did not address the problem of overly long documents that used words students did not understand. An article in *The Birmingham Post* (1964: 4) praised the Jackdaws while also highlighting the difficulties some students had with them: 'Mr. Langdon-Davies has achieved a miracle of popularisation, without sacrificing intellectual standards; but some children could find the Jackdaws demanding more concentrated attention than they could easily give'. In a chapter on using original sources in the classroom, Peter Bamford (1971: 209) praised Jackdaws for being an 'excellent concept', but 'found them to be of very limited value with children of only average ability, since the nature of the material, and more particularly the level of the text, is generally too difficult'.

Another possible explanation for the decline in popularity of Jackdaws is because they focused on historical topics that were too specific for school history curricula. Many history curricula in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States focus on periods of a hundred or more years of history, innumerable events and people, and multiple geographic areas and countries. Given the pressure on teachers to 'cover' the mandated curriculum and to prepare students for comprehensive final examinations, many teachers did not have the time to devote to an in-depth study of a particular historical event, person or theme. This finding is supported by a review in *The Birmingham Post* (1964: 4) that described how each Jackdaw required 'an absorption in detail that could play havoc with the syllabus if it were not carefully controlled'.

There are several other practical issues that prevented Jackdaws from being fully utilised in history classrooms. Although Jackdaws were relatively inexpensive (in 1970, they cost 60p in the United Kingdom, $2.50 in Canada and $2.95 in the United States), most teachers did not have access to generous budgets for purchasing learning resources and could not buy sets of Jackdaws focused on all the topics relevant to their curriculum. As a result, school libraries often purchased sets of Jackdaws relevant to the history curricula taught in their school, but they were often unable to order enough sets of a particular Jackdaw for individuals or small groups of students to have access to the same one. As a result, it was

difficult for teachers to use the same set of Jackdaws with a class of 20–30 students unless the different source materials were divided among the students.

Another common practical issue was that teachers often complained about the challenge of keeping the assorted sheets included in Jackdaws organised after students used them (*The Birmingham Post*, 1964). *The Birmingham Evening Mail* (1963: 8) described Jackdaws as a 'fascinating break from history books, though obviously scatterable'. In the book *Learning With Jackdaws*, Devitt (1970: 21) described how some teachers avoided using Jackdaws because 'they feel that there are practical disadvantages to them which books do not have'. Devitt (1970) minimised these complaints and offered several tips for protecting the different sheets of paper from being damaged, ensuring the contents do not go missing, and storing them for safekeeping.

Perhaps the most significant reason why Jackdaws failed to transform history teaching and learning is that teachers were unsure how to use them to teach history, and the pedagogical supports provided by Jackdaw Publications in each folder were inadequate. In their review of Jackdaws for upper elementary and secondary school teachers, York Enstam and Raack (1974: 288) argued that Jackdaws were only useful in the hands of a skilled teacher who had already developed a classroom approach for dealing with 'the interpretations and explorations of meaning that come from the students who have examined them as historical evidence'. York Enstam and Raack (1974) recognised the value of having students analyse primary sources, but felt that expert teacher guidance was required to design activities that helped students learn how to analyse and correlate the different source materials. Devitt's *Learning With Jackdaws* was published by Jackdaw Publications in 1970 to describe various ways teachers could use Jackdaws to teach school history. Given that the book was published seven years after the first Jackdaws were published, one can conclude that Jackdaw Publications created the book in response to concerns and questions from teachers about how to use Jackdaws effectively, and a decrease in the use and sales of Jackdaws. Although the basic comprehension questions at the bottom of the broadsheets were replaced by a list of problems for further thought (Wood, 1971), and a brochure was included in each set of Jackdaws with suggestions about how to use the various materials and questions for student consideration, teachers were unsure about the value of using Jackdaws to teach history (Hastie, 1972). Jackdaws were undoubtedly flexible and adaptable to a variety of teaching contexts, approaches and strategies, but perhaps the problem was that they were too flexible. Furthermore, the Jackdaws did not feature an intuitive pedagogical design, and it was not evident how exactly they should be used when first encountered by teachers.

According to Devitt (1970: 13), one of the benefits of using Jackdaws is that they introduce students to the 'real meat of historical investigation', self-directed learning and assessing documentary accuracy. Lamont (1971: 199) disagreed, and called Jackdaws 'ornamental' and an 'elegant irrelevancy' because the source materials are used as an 'illustration of historical facts', rather than to solve historical problems and questions. Despite their 'obvious attractiveness' and value for classroom display and for stimulating student interest, Edwards (1972: 216) also maintained that Jackdaws 'mainly miss the opportunity to use contemporary material to pose problems of comparison and interpretation', and 'are more useful as illustrations to a narrative than as an introduction to the "real meat of historical investigation"'. The suggested activities included in Jackdaw brochures did not ask students to analyse primary and secondary source evidence to arrive at reasoned interpretations, but asked them to gather historical information on the topic. Moreover, they did not provide teachers with useful strategies, tools or methods for teaching students how to engage in the process of historical inquiry and utilise historical methodology. And finally, some historical sources included in the Jackdaws were difficult to analyse as historical evidence from which to draw conclusions. For example, what conclusions can students make about the American Revolution from a portrait of King George III or George Washington? It is unclear how the secondary source broadsheets were an improvement on, or substantially different from, the 'pre-digested condensations of information' included in history textbooks (Cooter, 1968: 104). The creators of Jackdaws did not provide any guidance for teachers about how to use the primary sources in combination with the broadsheets. Should the broadsheets be read prior to analysing the primary sources, or should the primary sources be used to challenge the interpretations and conclusions made in the broadsheets?

Devitt (1970: 23) provided a sample worksheet for secondary school students on *The American Revolution* Jackdaw that included 33 questions 'indicative of the range of work *immediately* possible from one Jackdaw'. She stated that teachers should not include all the questions, but that they should select those 'that give most help to the particular topic' (Devitt, 1970: 23). Some questions ask a direct

question (for example, 'What difference do you think that it made to the colonists' attitude that a large minority were not English?'), while others suggest learning activities (for example, 'Indicate on a world map the overseas possessions of France and Great Britain and areas of special interest to them'). The quality of the questions and activities provided were also uneven. Some required basic comprehension and recall (for example, defining terms, labelling a map or answering basic informational questions), some asked students to create a product or performance (for example, make art, dramatise an event or build a model) and others invited students to complete historical empathy activities that placed them in the past and created a product. For example, one task asks students to: 'Imagine you are *either* Paul Revere *or* one of the raiders in the Boston Tea Party and describe your famous exploits, explaining why you acted as you did.' Some activities had little to do with the topic of the Jackdaw itself. For example, the *American Revolution* Jackdaw includes an activity that asks students to: 'Refer to the *Mayflower* Jackdaw and consider what qualities were needed to live in the developing lands of North America. A sense of adventure would certainly be one – can you show how modern man finds adventure?' (Devitt, 1970: 23). There are also counterfactual questions that are difficult to answer because the answer is obvious to the point of being ridiculous. For example, 'An historical *IF* – do you think America or Britain would be different today *IF* Britain had won the American War of Independence?' (Devitt, 1970: 25).

## Conclusions

There are several conclusions that can be made, and lessons drawn, from the rise and fall of Jackdaws between 1963 and 1977. Like many unsuccessful educational innovations over the past century, Jackdaws suffered from unrealistic and perhaps impossible expectations imposed on them by their authors and the employees of Jackdaw Publications, and also by overly enthusiastic journalists and educators. It is both unfair and unreasonable to expect one teaching resource to transform how history is taught and learned in schools, especially considering the entrenched continuities in history teaching and learning since the 1950s (Cuban, 2016). As discussed in this article, a teaching resource is only as effective as the teacher who uses it. Jackdaws can be used to effectively engage students in historical inquiry and problem solving where they analyse evidence to construct their own interpretations, but they could also be used as a source of historical information where students are asked to locate and record predetermined conclusions.

If I summarised the history of Jackdaws in a pithy phrase, it would be 'brilliant idea, flawed execution'. The idea of publishing high-quality reproductions of original primary sources about significant historical events, people and themes in attractive folders for school-aged children was remarkable. I am regularly in awe of the ability of Jackdaw Publications to reproduce diverse primary sources for reasonable prices using the offset printing technology that existed at the time. That people still remember specific Jackdaws and the source materials included in them more than 50 years later illustrates the power of tangible primary and secondary sources. However, despite the brilliance of the idea, the pedagogical design of Jackdaws was flawed and posed numerous obstacles to effective implementation in history classrooms. The source materials included in Jackdaw sets were often too long and difficult for students. The historical topics focused on were too specific and detailed for history curricula that often cover vast swathes of time in a cursory manner. Practical issues such as cost and folder design made it difficult for teachers to use numerous documents in classrooms of 30 or more students with varying abilities, exceptionalities, background knowledge and levels of interest. The most notable design flaw is that Jackdaws lacked the pedagogical supports needed to help teachers implement effective historical inquiry and problem solving. Jackdaws were flexible and adaptable to a variety of teaching contexts, approaches and strategies, but ultimately they lacked the intuitive design features needed to support teachers in using them effectively.

Given these issues, there are several lessons that can be drawn from the rise and fall of Jackdaws that can help educators design primary and secondary source collections that support students in doing historical inquiry:

- Rather than suggest several questions and learning activities for each set of sources, centre the set of sources on one inquiry question that is evaluative, focused on a disciplinary thinking concept and addresses a significant historiographical debate about the topic. Evaluative questions require students to arrive at reasoned judgements that consider relevant evidence and are consistent with principles of logic and rational argument (Van Drie et al., 2006). Disciplinary thinking concepts

(for example, evidence, interpretations, cause and consequence, continuity and change, historical perspectives, ethical judgements) are essential for framing questions and guiding inquiry (Gibson and Miles, 2024). Centring an inquiry question on a significant historiographical debate about the topic increases authenticity, relevance and significance. Communicating responses to the central inquiry question can involve various products (for example, essays, narratives, models, posters, political cartoons, graphic novels, blogs, documentary films) or performances (for example, role-playing, debates, tableaux, oral presentations, town hall discussions) that can vary in terms of difficulty and the amount of time required to complete them.

- For each set of sources, select primary sources that provide sufficient and relevant evidence to answer the inquiry question being investigated, are accessible for students in terms of reading level and presentation, and represent different perspectives on the topic being investigated. To increase authenticity, it is helpful to provide students with the original source and an edited version that has been excerpted, transcribed, simplified, reduced and annotated to support students of varied reading levels.
- Select relevant textual and visual secondary sources that provide different historiographical interpretations of the inquiry question and topic (Chapman, 2017). The selected primary source evidence can be used to deconstruct and challenge the historiographical interpretations provided, or students can be invited to construct interpretations from the primary source evidence and compare their interpretations with the selected historiographical interpretations.
- Rather than provide overly detailed and dense secondary source broadsheets that often provide answers to the inquiry question, create brief background notes to contextualise the topic and help students understand important themes, concepts and chronologies needed to understand a historical topic and place it in time and space (Halldén, 1997). Providing broadsheets of varying reading levels might also be helpful.
- Provide teachers with more pedagogical tools and strategies for helping students understand the substantive content knowledge each Jackdaw focuses on, analyse historical evidence and respond to the inquiry question. Lee (2005) argues that if students are going to learn how to do history, then teachers need to scaffold the substantive knowledge, metacognitive strategies, dispositions and disciplinary knowledge that students require to engage in historical inquiry. Procedural scaffolding involves providing guidance on how to apply disciplinary concepts throughout the inquiry process (Brush and Saye, 2014). For example, a question focused on the most important consequences of the Great Depression requires teachers to teach students about the consequence concept so they can identify the different consequences and analyse which ones were more notable.

There are many impressive aspects of Jackdaws, and I hope that the lessons learned from their rise and fall, and the suggestions offered for improving their design and implementation, will lead to the creation of new and improved collections of primary and secondary sources that support historical inquiry in becoming common practice in history teaching and learning.

## Declarations and conflicts of interest

### Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

### Conflicts of interest statement

The author is a member of the editorial board to this journal. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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