

GCSE (9-1)

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

(EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

J410

For first teaching in 2016

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Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 12 series overview

This was the second series of the new Specification A Paper 12. It was clear from the majority of answers that candidates had been well prepared and were able to deploy their knowledge accurately, especially on the explain-type questions. We were extremely impressed with the high standard on this paper. Most candidates attempted all four questions, and very few seemed to have run out of time.

Section A overview

It was clear that candidates had been well prepared for their depth study on The English Reformation and we saw an enormous range of contextual knowledge being deployed in these questions, some of which was very impressive and detailed. The overwhelming majority of candidates attempted to answer both of the questions. The range and quality of responses varied a huge amount; as was the case last year, developed evaluation of the sources in Question 2 remains the most significant challenge for candidates and the area for centres to focus on to support their students.

Question 1

The English Reformation c.1520–c.1550

1 Explain why some people criticised the English church in the period c.1520 to 1534.

[10]

This question gave candidates the opportunity to select from a wide range of knowledge acquired during the first part of the course, and candidates performed highly. There was a variety of content successfully deployed from the first section of the specification, ranging from more general but valid points such as the extent of church power and wealth, to more specific reasons for criticism such as disagreements over doctrine, and financial and moral corruption. Most of these responses achieved either L3 for a valid identified reason or L4 for a valid explained reason. There were a pleasing number of candidates who explained more than one reason and reached L5. Where candidates did not move beyond L2 it was usually because they described reformers or the beliefs of reformers (such as the early Protestants and Humanists) without clearly explaining why these beliefs led them to criticise the English church. These responses were typically placed in L2. A smaller but not insignificant number of candidates thought the question was about the Church of England; they didn't recognise the significance of the dates and so wrote about why people were angry with Henry's changes to the Church. These responses were not rewardable given the dates in the question.

Advice to centres

This was a well answered question in the main. Where candidates fell down it was usually through either a lack of specific evidence or not remaining tightly focused on the precise question of why the individuals or groups they identified criticised the English church. Knowledge which is overly descriptive, no matter how detailed or extensive, will not be rewarded at the highest levels if it is not used to answer the question set. It is also vital that candidates know their chronology and take time before beginning their response so that their answer matches the parameters of the question set.

Question 2

2 Study Sources A–C.

'The Dissolution of the monasteries had an entirely negative impact.' How far do Sources A–C convince you that this statement is correct? Use the sources and your knowledge to explain your answer. [20]

(✍) Spelling, punctuation and grammar and the use of specialist terminology [5]

Candidates were well prepared for this source-based question. The vast majority of candidates engaged with all three sources and attempted to relate them to the question being asked, which was very pleasing to see. Most candidates ended up being placed in L2 or L3 for using the content of one, two or three of the sources in a valid way to address the question of whether the Dissolution has an entirely negative impact. These comments included: supporting the statement through the use of Source A, which was evidence that the loss of the monasteries hurt the poor; using Source B to argue that the Dissolution negatively affected the monks who worked there; and using Source C to demonstrate that some people profited from the Dissolution because they gained wealth through taking monastic lands for themselves (alternatively, some candidates argued that C showed that local people were unhappy enough with the Dissolution to rebel over the issue, which suggested negative impact). Most candidates did attempt to explain how the sources showed negative or positive impact, clearly answering the question, and this was very pleasing to see. A smaller number of candidates than last year did not reach L3 because they picked out detail from the source(s) but did not relate the content to the statement or the question. The most frequent misconception related to Source C, with many candidates trying to argue that profiting was a negative impact because it took away wealth from the king.

The question also required candidates to consider how 'convincing' they found the sources in relation to the statement and this continues to be the most challenging area for candidates. Although most candidates did attempt evaluation, the bulk of attempts that were made fell back on simplistic comments about provenance, such as (with Source C), 'it's a government report so we can't trust it.' There were quite a lot of candidates who used the sources as a 'springboard' for their knowledge and flooded their responses with what they had learned about the Dissolution. While the range and depth of this knowledge was often impressive, rarely was it used to evaluate the source(s) as required by the question.

The most successful candidates examined the precise purpose, motivation or context of one or more of the sources, or cross-referred between sources, in order to address the question of how convincing they were as evidence about the statement. Typically, these candidates argued that: Source A was convincing because Aske's views reflected many at the time, given that tens of thousands of people had taken part in the Pilgrimage of Grace (alternatively, some candidates argued that the source was made less convincing because Aske was trying in the speech to persuade other people to join in, or justify the rebellion itself, which meant he was likely exaggerating the Dissolution's impact); that Source B was less convincing, either because they knew that the majority of monks and friars did find alternative employment, or were pensioned off, or because the Bishop's assistant was clearly trying to gain sympathy for the monks from Cromwell, and was overstating their plight, e.g. 'they must go a hundred miles.'; and that the example in Source C of people gaining wealth from the Dissolution was widespread, with others taking the lead and other materials from the buildings (where candidates had used the content of the source to argue that the Dissolution brought social unrest, they used the Pilgrimage of Grace, or Source A, to argue it was convincing). These responses were rewarded at Levels 4 and 5.

Advice to centres

Centres need to make sure that their candidates have lots of practice in handling sources from this time period and that they can use them as evidence in addressing a particular statement/question. Candidates would also benefit from more guidance in evaluating how convincing evidence is, but more support on moving beyond the generic is required here. Responses which evaluate sources in a 'stock' way are unlikely to achieve the higher levels in this question. Getting students to consider things such as the context of each source, the purpose/motivation of its author(s), and the other sources in the collection (and critically what impact these factors may have in relation to the statement/question being asked), is important. Candidates also need to recognise that this question is assessing their skills in handling contemporary sources, so where contextual knowledge is employed, it needs to be used sparingly, and (crucially) to argue whether sources are convincing or not about this particular question.

Section B overview

Again, it was clear that candidates were well prepared for the questions on Kenilworth Castle and knew the history of the site well. Almost all candidates attempted both questions. However, Question 4 remained the question where most marks were dropped and this is clearly the question where centres should concentrate on helping their students with how to approach the question.

Question 3

Castles: Form and Function c.1000–1750

3 Explain how the main functions of Kenilworth Castle changed in the period 1120 to 1399. [10]

There was some impressive knowledge on display about the history of the site here and most candidates were able to identify at least one change in function and attain L3 – usually this was how the castle changed from being a royal fortress under Henry II and John to more of a comfortable home and status symbol under John of Gaunt. It was pleasing to see that most of these candidates were able to reach L4 by supporting their responses either by using the fabric of the building (the Great Hall and the huge kitchens installed frequently in answers) or by explaining why this change had taken place. It was clear that candidates had detailed knowledge of the site, which was excellent. However, there was only a small minority of candidates who managed to identify or explain a second change in function. Those who did so successfully explained how the castle was originally built in the 1120s to show the power and dominance of Geoffrey de Clinton (some candidates referred to Geoffrey's role in countering the influence of the Earl of Warwick) but that its function changed when it came under Crown ownership and it became a heavily defensive royal fortress. Again, where these candidates supported their responses with either detail from the fabric of the building (Henry's stone gatehouse, John's battlements, Mortimer's Tower and Lunn's Tower with its arrow loops featured most prominently) or with context (e.g. the 'Great Rebellion' under Henry II or the danger of rebellious barons under John), these responses reached L5. Some candidates limited themselves by not focusing closely enough on the changes to the function of the castle but instead spent too long discussing either the changes in ownership, events from the period, or changes to the fabric of the building. Such responses were usually rewarded at Level 2. There was also some mixing up of time periods in this question, with students picking a name of someone associated with the castle and attributing to them the fireplaces, the chapel, the mere without any precision or accuracy. There were some candidates (although not as many as last year) who wrote about the castle or events after 1399. Where this did happen, it tended to be to narrate events surrounding Robert Dudley and Elizabeth I, and these kinds of responses were not rewardable within the parameters of the mark scheme.

Advice to centres

While it was clear that certain events and personalities (e.g. the siege of 1266) had really gripped and engaged students, it is important that they are able to link such narratives to the site itself and the question being asked. The best answers were those that 'framed' their knowledge around a change in function from the outset, rather than simply describing additions to the castle and changes of ownership. It was particularly clear that many candidates were very unsure about the function of the castle at its inception under Geoffrey de Clinton, and this part of the castle's history may be an area that centres wish to revisit in their teaching. Finally, a clear understanding of the chronology of the site really benefitted the best candidates here and candidates need to make sure they pay close attention to the dates in the question and confine their responses to that particular time period.

Question 4

4 Study Sources D and E.

Which of these sources is more useful to a historian studying the history of Kenilworth Castle from c.1500 to c.1700? [10]

This was a question about source utility and it was expected that candidates would make inferences from the sources about the period in question. The most common valid inference (given at L3 and above) from Source D related to the castle's function as a stately home/ status symbol / desirable residence at this point, and where this inference was made, candidates usually went on to support it well using detail from the source to attain L4 or L5. Other responses lifted detail from the source and asserted its utility, e.g. 'it's useful because it shows us that Kenilworth had fine buildings and courtyard' (L2). However, there were many candidates who rendered their answers invalid by arguing that the source told us about the changes made to the building by Robert Dudley, or by saying that the source had been written by Dudley himself and was therefore not reliable, neither of which were accurate and therefore not rewardable. Quite often this was accompanied by long and irrelevant narratives of Dudley's attempts to court Elizabeth. There were also many responses which ignored the content of the source and used the provenance to argue that D was not useful as the writer was trying to impress Dudley, or that the source was useful as it was very detailed and descriptive and a reader could imagine what the castle looked like – it was a great shame that the majority of these answers did not go on to say which features of the castle we could indeed learn about from such a detailed description! These kinds of responses rarely moved past L1.

With Source E, a similar pattern emerged. Where candidates were able to make a valid inference from Source E, they typically commented on either its utility for studying the extent or nature of the damage caused by the slighting after the civil war, or on how the castle's function had changed by 1700 as the source revealed that it was now more or less a tourist attraction. These achieved L3 and above. Again, there were some but not many candidates who attained L2 by picking out details from the image, e.g. it's useful because we can see it's a ruin/ been abandoned, etc. Some candidates attempted to use the content of the source but attributed incorrect details to the time period in the question, e.g. it's useful because we can see the large windows installed in the Great Hall – the Great Hall and its windows having been installed in the 14th Century, on its own this was not rewardable in a question about the castle c.1500–c.1700. However, E was often used just to compare with D (e.g. it's not as useful as D because it is only a picture) rather than being discussed in its own right. Unfortunately one of the most frequent answers and rewardable at L1 only was that the source was useless because 'it's only a picture and you can't see inside/ can only see the East view', or alternatively, that 'it's really useful because you can see it for yourself unlike D where you have to use your imagination'.

Advice to centres

All candidates should be encouraged to view the sources as a historian, i.e. what can we work out from these sources? How do they help us? Weaker candidates should be encouraged to use their comprehension and observation skills to lift relevant content as opposed to attempting to say why the sources are 'reliable' or not based on their provenance alone. More able candidates would benefit from practice in making inferences from a range of contemporary sources. For example, centres might ask their students to consider whether particular sources could be used as evidence that (for example) the castle was important, valued or under threat. Or perhaps the sources might be useful as evidence about the running of the castle or the lives of the people in it. The sources might also provide evidence about the purpose or function of the castle and how that was carried out. Or the sources might provide evidence about changes in the castle. The guidance in the specification provides a helpful set of prompts to help candidates consider the ways in which sources might be useful as evidence.

Exemplar 1

Both sources are useful for a historian studying Kenilworth castle's history between 1500 and 1700. However, Source D is more useful for the 1500s and ~~Source E~~ Source E for the 1500s, although both communicate a lot about its history.

Source D is useful, as it outlines the functions and features of multiple parts of Kenilworth castle, some of which would be hard to extrapolate from ruins or illustrations. For instance, it mentions the ~~large many~~ brew house, watermill and bakehouse. This survey also helps to show how Kenilworth had become palatial, as the main focus of the extract is on ~~taxes~~ accomodating features rather than defensive. I know that when Dudley received Kenilworth, he was focussed on turning it into a romantic retreat for Queen Elizabeth I, so these features would have ~~been~~ been promising to him. However, it is likely to be biased, come across as biased, through a descriptive rather than scientific tone, and its likely to be biased as the surveyor may have been trying to please Robert Dudley with his new castle. It also describes features, but it is not explicit in their exact locations.

Source E is also useful, as it illustrates the appearance of Kenilworth castle in 1700. An

historian can use this to work out which parts of the castle had been made indefensible by the parliamentarians by showing which features were left as ruined. It also shows how Kenilworth castle became a tourist destination, as it is part of a book that suggest travel destinations to wealthy people. Although, it isn't indicative of the state of the castle prior to the drawing, and is ~~only~~ helpful to much more helpful to a historian studying the castle from the civil war to 1700. It is also biased due to the fact it is a drawing, and ~~as~~ some parts may be embellished in order to persuade people to visit. However, it is ~~no~~ helpful as it shows the locations of the different buildings in the castle, ~~as~~ as well as the attitude towards castles at the time.

Therefore, ~~the~~ source E is more useful than source D, as although source D outlines the function of Kenilworth effectively in 1563, it comes across as embellished, and does not indicate the whereabouts of these features. However, it is still useful, as it proves Dudley was very much interested in a castle of luxury to impress, and hopefully woo the Queen with queen with, with mention of expensive bay windows, made from glass; a luxury. ~~It~~ source E is more useful, as it shows

The state of Kenilworth from after the civil war to 1700, ~~at~~ a much longer time period, as little changes were made between its crippling of defences and then, apart from accommodation added in Leicester's building. ~~Therefore~~, ^{consequently} it not only illustrates the remains of the castle from ~~now~~ at the time of source D, but also the new attitudes to castles in 1700. They were a lot less ubiquitous as defence strongholds, as artillery weapons had become rendered castle defences useless in the civil war. And although it is biased to advertise the castle, so is ~~S~~ Source D seems to be also, and advertising the castle as a tourist destination is a useful point of interest in itself to a historian.

The response starts off in L2 with the use of the content of Source D – the candidate says the source is useful because it gives us information about the different features of the castle at the time, and some examples from the source are cited. An inference about the castle's function is then made from this detail where the candidate says that it tells us therefore that the castle was palatial in nature at this time. This takes the response into L4. The part about the source being biased does not progress the response any further. The next part of the response relates to Source E. The candidates say first of all that the source is useful for showing us which parts of the castle had been slighted at the end of the civil war, but they don't go on to support this point. However, they then make a further inference from Source E which is supported – that the castle has changed to become a tourist attraction and we know this because the engraving is from a book that suggests travel destinations to wealthy people. Again, the rest of the paragraph – about the bias of the source – is neither rewardable nor necessary. The response achieved L5, to improve the answer; the first inference could have been developed further.

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