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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.

Subject information update

We have amended the Study of the Historic Environment component of OCR GCSE History A (J410) to fix the site studied from June 2019 (Castles) and June 2020 (Urban Environments).

Following consultation with and feedback from teachers, we are changing the way the Study of the Historic Environment will be assessed on GCSE History A. At the moment, the site to be studied changes each year of the qualification. From now on, candidates will study either Kenilworth Castle or an urban environment (South Shields in 2019 and Spitalfields from 2020 onwards).

What this means is that teachers of the Castles option, who are already preparing candidates to be examined on Kenilworth Castle in 2019, will continue to prepare each cohort of candidates for an examination on Kenilworth Castle in all future examination series.

For teachers of the Urban Environments option, they should continue preparing candidates to be examined on South Shields in 2019. For the June 2020 examination, and in future series, teachers should prepare candidates for an examination on Spitalfields.

We hope these changes will make the Historic Environment component of the qualification more straightforward for teachers to plan and teach. The teachers' site packs for Kenilworth and South Shields are already available on the website here: http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse/gcse-history-a-explaining-the-modern-world-j410-from-2016/planning-and-teaching/ and a site pack for Spitalfields will be available in Spring 2019.

The OCR set site will be reviewed after three years and may be subject to change. Each OCR set site will remain on the specification for a minimum of three years, unless the review process identifies a necessary change. If an OCR set site is to be changed and replaced with a new set site, centres will be notified in September two years prior to the examination being sat.

If you have queries about any aspect of these changes, please contact the History Subject Advisors at history@ocr.org.uk

Paper J410/12 series overview

This was the first examination of the new 9-1 Specification A Paper 3. The new paper was very different from what has gone before, both in terms of content studied and question styles. All British depth studies were taken from the pre-1750 period, whereas legacy British studies were all 20th century. Thus candidates faced the new challenge of working with a new period and, further still, sources from a new period. There was also a reduced focus on contemporary sources, with just two questions dedicated to this historical skill. There was also a new Study of the Historic Environment, with candidates in this unit being assessed on Framlingham Castle.

Given such changes, centres should be congratulated for their work in supporting candidates. It was clear from the majority of answers that candidates had been well prepared and they were able to deploy their knowledge accurately, especially on the explain-type questions.

Section A overview

It was clear that candidates had been well prepared for their depth study on The English Reformation and knew what was expected. The overwhelming majority attempted to answer both of the questions. The range and quality of responses varied a huge amount.

Question 1

1   Explain why the monasteries were dissolved between 1534 and 1540.   **[10]**

This was a well answered question on the paper with the vast majority of candidates able to reach Level 3 and above by identifying or explaining one or more reasons why the monasteries were dissolved. The most common reasons identified or explained were Henry VIII's need to boost the crown's income and a desire to stamp out corruption as 'revealed' in the visitations. Some candidates explained how the Dissolution would increase Henry VIII's power and reduce the influence of the Pope, although some of these attempts were unsuccessful as they ended up merely describing the Break from Rome and Henry's wish to obtain a divorce. These were usually placed in Level 2 or Level 3. Other weaker responses cited a genuine desire for religious reform (which was valid) but invariably did not tie this closely enough to the Dissolution to be credited at Level 4 and Level 5.

Advice for Question 1

This may well be an area of the specification that centres wish to return to in order to help candidates see that the process and causes of the Dissolution need to be seen slightly separately from the causes of the Break from Rome. To tackle this question thoroughly, candidates needed to be secure in their knowledge of developments such as: the role of Thomas Cromwell, the wealth of the monasteries, the Valor Ecclesiasticus, the visitations and the oath of allegiance. It is also vital that candidates remained tightly focused on the precise question being asked.

Question 2

Study Sources A–C.

'People welcomed the religious reforms of Henry VIII and Edward VI between 1534 and c.1550.' 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]**

This was a source-based question and it was clear that candidates were well prepared for it. There were very few who ignored the sources and just wrote a knowledge-based essay. 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 Level 2 or Level 3 for using the content of one, two or three of the sources in a valid way to address the question of whether or not Cromwell was a popular ruler. These comments included: using Source A to show that people did not welcome the reforms because the priest did not accept the Act of Supremacy by saying he will pray for the Pope as the head of the Church; using Source B to infer that people welcomed the reforms because the woodcut showed Edward bringing back 'true religion' and showed support for plain Protestant churches; and using Source C to demonstrate that Catholics were very bitter about Henry and Edward's reforms, referring to them as 'evil practices.' Most commonly, if candidates did not reach Level 2, it was because they picked out detail from the source(s) but did not relate the content to the statement or the question. For example, some candidates struggled with Source C because they understood that Bonner was critical of Protestantism but did not relate this to Henry or Edward's reforms anywhere in their response.

The question also required candidates to consider how 'convincing' they found the sources in relation to the statement. Unfortunately, this was not successfully done by the majority of candidates, with many not even attempting to evaluate the evidence they were presented with. The bulk of attempts that were made fell back on simplistic comments about provenance, such as (with Source C), 'it's biased/unconvincing because it was produced by a Catholic.' There were also some candidates who used the sources as a 'springboard' for their knowledge and proceeded to recite general information about the context of the Reformation. Whilst the range and depth of this knowledge was impressive, rarely was it used to evaluate the source(s) in question.

The most successful candidates examined the precise purpose or context of one or more of the sources in order to address the question of how convincing they were. Typically, these candidates argued that: Source A was even more convincing given that it was reported by a spy, the need for a spy network revealing the government's concerns that the reforms were not popular; that Source A was made more convincing given the priest's location in London, which was known as hotbed of radical ideas; that Source A was more convincing given their knowledge of the treason laws which must have meant that this priest's feelings were very strong; that Source B was less convincing given it was produced in order to convince people to support the reforms, thus revealing the need for such propaganda; that Source B was less convincing given it was produced in the same year as the Prayer Book Rebellion, showing it was not necessarily typical; that Source C was more convincing given the context of Mary's rule, i.e. Bonner was now able to speak freely about the reforms; or, alternatively, that Source C was less convincing because Bonner was an important figure who had already defied several reforms and therefore not representative of the population at large. These responses were rewarded at Levels 4 and 5.

Advice for Question 2

Centres need to ensure that their candidates are familiar with 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 practice at evaluating how convincing evidence is, but a tailored approach is required here. Responses which evaluate sources in a generic way are unlikely to achieve the higher levels in this question. Getting candidates to consider things such as the context of each source, the purpose 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), would be a good starting point.

Section B overview

Again, it was clear that candidates were well prepared for the questions on Framlingham Castle and knew the history of the site well. Almost all candidates attempted both questions.

Question 3

3   Explain how Framlingham Castle changed between 1100 and c.1250.   **[10]**

Most candidates seemed to find this question quite straightforward. There was some impressive knowledge on display about the history of the site. It was pleasing to see that very few strayed out from the date range identified in the question. Some candidates limited themselves by not focusing closely enough on the changes to the castle (i.e. the fabric of the building) but instead spent too long discussing the history of the Bigod family generally, changes in ownership and description of events from the period. Such responses were usually rewarded at Level 2. More candidates were able to list changes to the building (e.g. features that were added during this period), or identify the nature of the changes that took place (e.g. the changes that took place were made to improve Framlingham's defence). However, most candidates were able to reach Levels 4 and 5 because they organised their answer coherently, identifying the nature of or reason for a change, and then supporting this with valid examples. Most frequently credited were: the changes to the castle to improve it as a home/status symbol under Hugh Bigod (supported by examples such as the addition of the chapel, chamber block and Great Park); and the changes under Roger Bigod II which improved its defences (supported by examples such as the curtain walls, ditches, gatehouse and towers).

Advice for Question 3

A clear understanding of the chronology of the site really benefitted candidates here. Whilst it was clear that certain events and personalities (e.g. Hugh Bigod's rebellion against Henry II in 1173 and John's siege of the caste in 1216) had really gripped and engaged candidates, 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 had clearly thought about how to structure their response and organised their answer coherently.

Question 4

4   Study Sources D and E.

Which of these sources is more useful to a historian studying the history of Framlingham Castle from c.1300 to 1750?   **[10]**

This question proved challenging for many candidates. This was a question about source utility and it was expected that candidates would make inferences from the sources about the period in question. Most valid inferences (credited at Level 3 and above) came from Source D, the most common ones being that we can learn about the castle being taken into ownership of the crown; and we can learn about the importance of the castle, given that the king had ordered its repair. Weaker responses lifted detail from the source and asserted its utility, e.g. 'it's useful because it shows us that Framlingham underwent repairs in 1310' (Level 2), or made simplistic comments about the provenance of the source, e.g. it's useful because 'it's an official document so we can trust it' (Level 1). Some candidates incorrectly assumed that the source revealed that the castle had fallen into dereliction by the point.

Fewer candidates were able to make a valid inference from Source E, but those that did typically commented on its utility for studying the changes that took place during this period which turned the castle into a prestige home under the Howard family. Most candidates pointed most often to the ornate brick chimneys. Other candidates pointed to how the Red House in the image points to the changing use of the castle by 1750. However, many candidates seemed to ignore the dates in the question and simply describe the castle's location on a hill, arguing that the image was useful because it can tell us why the castle was built there, or why it was good for defence. This was not creditable as an inference about the period in the question. Happily, a minority of candidates limited themselves to undeveloped comments on provenance, e.g. 'it's a photo so it's not from the right time period.'

Advice for Question 4

Again, candidates need to make sure that they read the question carefully, particularly the specifics of the time period(s) involved, and ensure that the comments they make address the question being asked. Inference from sources is a difficult skill, and candidates might also benefit from practising with contemporary sources and being given prompts, e.g. asking candidates to consider whether particular sources could be used as evidence that 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.

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