

GCSE (9–1)

Examiners' report

**HISTORY B
(SCHOOLS HISTORY
PROJECT)**

J411

For first teaching in 2016

J411/21 Summer 2019 series

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 exam paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 21 series overview

Many candidates have been extremely well prepared for this exam. They know their history and can present their ideas using very precise terminology and an impressive level of detail. Most candidates had a secure grasp of their site's story and situation with obvious awareness of changes over time and the nature of the site.

Their ability to use physical features as evidence has definitely improved since last year. However, some candidates, at all levels, did not read the questions carefully and have written at length about the wrong thing or talked about several points in time for question 3.

Candidates in general might benefit from referring back to the question as they write.

Each question will require candidates to use multiple factors, for example - change and understanding of original construction; physical change and causation; physical remains and typicality. Answers which only deal with one of these aspects will not score very many marks, so candidates should understand both aspects of the question they have selected and be able to give specific examples of both to reach the higher marks.

Question selection is very important, due to the varying natures of the sites under study. Some sites lend themselves better to different types of questions and candidates would do well to spend some time before starting the paper considering which of the set questions would prove most suited to the site they have studied.

Question 1

- 1 'The development of the site over time has made it impossible for historians to understand when and why people first created it.' How far is this true for your site? Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer. [20]

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

Good responses were organised and structured with three or four clear points supported by evidence. Successful approaches were typified by clear use of paragraphs and a secure knowledge of their site so that candidates could select useful and relevant information to make their points.

The most frequent issue with this question was that candidates constructed arguments based on certain things historians can/cannot understand about the site, but did not relate this to when and why people first created it, thus limiting their achievement. Achieving the balance between using their own knowledge and discussing physical features of the site was another problematic area. However, many candidates displayed an impressive knowledge about the first construction of their site and were able to use surviving physical evidence to explain to support the hypothesis or to challenge the interpretation with specific evidence.

Weaker candidates did not address the question instead they described just one aspect of changes to the site, gave reasons for those changes, described what was left visible at the site or described why the site was first created. There were many simplistic answers, 'I disagree because I can see it and historians will not struggle; over time it has fallen down.'

Mid range candidates have clearly had a reasonable grasp of the changes of their site, and what can be learnt from them but have been unable to link them to the original site evidence. Some candidates discussed how a historian might find out about later developments rather than focus on the original use.

Question 2

- 2 Explain why the physical features of your site have changed over time. Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer. [20]

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

This question was both popular and generally well answered. It gave many candidates the opportunity to write about the history of their site, showing good contextual knowledge and a feel for the past.

This was the most familiar style of question, and candidates were often well prepared for it. Regarding causation, this aspect of the question was generally addressed well and linked with concrete physical features.

Most responses were able to discuss changes to the site over time and place them in some form of order, be it chronological or by significance, with physical evidence from the site to display changes.

Weaker candidates slipped in focus from the site onto a key individual or time period in their site's history and discussed changes to their circumstances or lives that was in parallel with the site without referring to physical remains.

Mid range responses were clearly connected to the question and to the site with explanations of the reasons for change, although many gave generic reasons for change 'to improve defence' 'because wood could be easily burned down' rather than citing specific events which had prompted the changes.

Top level answers did this effectively because they focused on reasons that were peculiar to their site or used a series of themes by which to organise the physical remains such as the impact of war, wealth or individuals. Some candidates used one change to explain multiple alterations but often left the link between change to site evidence and cause of change implicit in the later examples they explored.

Good responses described at least three separate changes to the site and explained specific reasons for each.

Question 3

- 3 Choose one period in the history of your site. How far was your site typical of its type at this time? Use physical features of the site as well as your knowledge to support your answer.

[20]

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

This was the only question on the paper which required candidates to select a time period. Length of period will vary according to individual site, from a few years of specific activity, e.g. 1939-45, or an individual's ownership of the site, to more traditional definitions, e.g. 'Medieval' or 'Neolithic'. All of these are acceptable under OCR's definition but selection of an appropriate period for the site is key as observations made outside the specified period are not counted for marking.

Weaker answers did not have a clear understanding of the meaning of typicality and often just described features of the site in the given time or even history of their site over time. This was often concluded by a simple statement 'which was typical if this period'. Weaker candidates often attempted to suggest that a site was 'unique' rather than typical – a much more difficult concept to accurately support.

Mid range answers had a good grasp of typicality but often lacked specific comparisons to other sites of a similar nature or did so in passing rather than by detailed comparison to substantiate their claims.

More able candidates had a wider understanding and made sound comparisons between features of different sites or valid historical trends. It is clear that many centres do a good job of comparing their site with several others to address typicality and their candidates can answer this question confidently. There were some very competent answers to this question.

Good answers followed the standard pattern of an opening judgement, four supported comparisons with other sites (although most had but one or two comparison sites), concluding by weighing of the comparisons to support the judgement made in the introduction.

Exemplar 1

In comparison to Norwich Castle, ~~this cast~~ the Tower is similar to this as they were built around the same time of 1066-7 and have both been used for royal residency. Even though both castles have a keep that was built from stone, Norwich's is only a small rock as a consequence of it being gotted. Another common feature which makes the Tower typical is they both share the purpose of being built as a fortress to instil fear to the population. The Tower dominates the city as its on the eastern edge so it looks over the city. However, a limitation of studying the site now is that the sky scrapers in the city defeats the original purpose and reasoning for location.

Rochester Castle and the Tower of London have very similar defensive structures. Despite the fact that Rochester has been sieged so has had to have repairs done, both keeps have wooden staircases for the same purpose. This makes entry to the castle more difficult as the removal of the staircase means the tower is no longer on ground level. Also, the same person (Bishop Cole) was responsible for the construction of both towers, this is why they both have

Similar defenses such as the curtain walls. However, the Tower could not be seen as typical because it has had many developments to it throughout the years (an example would be when the Victorians tore down some medieval structures to make the tower more appealing). Rochester on the other hand has had limited development and has not been used as a place of royal residency.

Cardiff Castle and the Tower are both nearby to a water source (Cardiff is near to the sea and the Tower is next to the River Thames). This means they both were used to bring in and ship supplies easily. What makes the Tower differ is that the River was also an opportunity for an easy escape if needed for William as uprisings were common after the defeat of Harold Godwinson. Both towers have had medieval

Exemplar 1 - This answer provides a detailed comparison of the physical features and nature of the site with other specific sites. The answer does not clearly specify a period in response to the question, however the first few lines clearly indicate that the response is focused on the period of initial construction and all the examples date from this period.

There is comparison regarding purpose and construction with Norwich Castle; defensive structures with Rochester Castle and nature of location with Cardiff Castle. This places the answer in L5 – 'Demonstrates strong knowledge of key features and characteristics of the past of the site and/or its historical context in ways that show secure understanding of them - explains three or more examples'.

The answer does contain some extraneous material which is why it has not been placed at the highest mark in the level (i.e. not 'consistently focused'), however there is sound awareness of a range of features and clear knowledge of other sites of the period.

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