

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
History B (Schools History Project)**

J411

For first teaching in 2016

History Around Us

J411/21

Summer 2025 series

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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. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. 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 and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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History Around Us J411/21 overview

The History Around Us unit is the only unit in the Component Group 2 History Around Us GCSE Paper. The focus of assessment for the History Around Us paper is knowledge and understanding, and using sources. The paper has three questions; students choose to answer two of them. Spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) marks are given on this paper.

The History Around Us paper requires candidates to understand how the physical features of a selected site and other supporting sources inform understanding of historical events and developments.

As with every year, it is enjoyable to see how most candidates have a sound knowledge of their site and interact with the information with considerable understanding. However, some candidates do not always show off their knowledge due to simple structural errors.

Key points for candidates to remember:

- accurate identification of the site

Candidates are expected to identify the site they have studied at the top of their answer. It is important that they do so accurately so that the examiner knows the extent of the study. For example, some sites are for Cromford Mill, others for Cromford Mill and village. Identifying a site as 'Bristol' does not tell an examiner whether the site was Bristol Docks or Clifton Suspension Bridge. Some candidates do not identify a site at all, and, while it may be possible to determine the location from the answer, it is not ideal.

- remaining within the bounds of the question

Where a question requires candidates to answer from within a given time period, responses outside that time period will not be given marks. Candidates can spend considerable time crafting answers which will not get them marks if they write outside the given period.

- use of site evidence.

As this paper is primarily focused on the study of a specific site, candidates are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the features of that site – physical remains, artefacts, relevant documentation etc. Statements about usage, change, significance should be supported by reference to these features and often make a considerable difference to the mark given within the level achieved.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- selected detail and explained the link to first use rather than across multiple time periods - identified physical changes to the site and its uses and gave explanations supported by their knowledge to show why the changes took place - used site features to pose relevant historical questions which could be asked when studying the site - used background knowledge of the period to support the explanations of site features and/or changes.	- wrote about multiple time periods or selected a single time period which was not 'first use' - identified physical changes to the site without explaining how this changed the use of the site - identified change of use but without explanation of why this took place - asked questions but did not link them to features of the site - asked relevant questions but showed how the site answered those questions rather than how the site generated the questions.

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Question 1

1 Imagine you are a guide at your site.

If you wanted visitors to understand **how people first used the site**, which **features of the site and/or its surroundings** would you point out and why?

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 asked candidates to focus on the first use of their site. They were expected to select a range of features which could be demonstrated today and explain how each of those features showed something about the first use.

The best responses for this question identified the nature of 'first use' and then selected a number of current features of the site and explained how these would demonstrate that first use.

The question was framed as a guide giving a tour of the site, so to access the higher marks in each level a candidate would need to refer at least once to this idea of showing or pointing out certain features.

Common errors on this question occurred when candidates gave a straight description of the site without using the framework of a guide.

A more common error was for candidates to write about a period which was not the 'first use of the site'. Examiners were instructed to allow a broad definition of 'first use' to cover the period of the lifetime of those who constructed the site. This meant that sites which had a long period with the same 'first use' would receive equal consideration to those who had a more specific shorter 'first use' period.

Read the question carefully

It is important for candidates to note that only explanations which fitted with the criteria 'first use' could be given marks. Many candidates deviated from this requirement.

Exemplar 1

State the site you have studied Kenilworth Castle

Question number 1

There are many unique features that I could point out both within the castle and in its surroundings for the understanding of how people first used the site.

Firstly, I would point out the castle's location within the Midlands itself. The castle was first used as a strategic stronghold to strengthen a weakness known as a 'gap in the Midland chain'. This was a liability where troops could march through a town east of Warwick and ~~west~~ through the Forest of Arden onto the ancient Roman Watling Street and from there onto London. ~~Therefore, I would point out the strategic~~ As well as this, Geoffrey de Clinton built this castle due to a royal order which was caused by a need to counteract Roger de Beaumont, Earl of Warwick's growing influence in the region. Therefore I would point out the strategic location of Kenilworth Castle since it would allow the visitors to understand its initial purpose and how people first used the site.

Secondly, I would point out the geology and characteristics of the land surrounding the castle and the land upon which it was built. The Castle itself is built on a rocky knoll, allowing impressive stone structures

to be built in the upcoming years, such as the Great Tower built by de Clinton with walls ~~that~~ were 4.3m thick. Such structures made of stone would have been impossible to build on the surrounding waterlogged land. As well as this, the rocky bank provided elevation which increased its defensive capabilities since attackers would be attempting to storm a castle whilst moving uphill. The surrounding marshy land is also of note since it could be flooded to create the mare which would prove to be a formidable water defence in the years to come. The land's characteristics helped people to use Kenilworth Castle as an strategic stronghold ^{it} would be of worth to point out to visitors.

Kenilworth Castle also had abundant resources in ~~its~~ its vicinity allowing visitors to understand its strategic purpose since the castle could largely be self sufficient. Firstly, the initial building of the castle was done using wood, obtained from the Forest of Arden since it was easier to build with wood than stone during initial construction. It was also where the majority of fuel for the castle was sourced from proving to be very convenient for years to come. As well as this, nearby quarries were used to obtain red sandstone which was used for the construction of all the stone structures of the castle. Having a local source of stone made building the Great Tower a much more efficient signifying how the ~~land~~

initial use was to ~~a~~ swiftly counteract Roger de Beaumont's influence. For the castle to be self-sufficient, it would require a supply of freshwater which could be found on the Friarham and Inchford Brooks. However, after these were dammed for the mere, the keep also contained a well which allowed self-sufficiency. Finally, food could also be derived from the Chase or the fish and wildfowl such as ducks could be sourced from the mere. These abundant resources in close proximity would help a visitor understand the ~~the~~ defensive capabilities of Kenilworth Castle which was its main use in its initial stages. ~~Moreover~~ Furthermore, this was proved in the Siege of Kenilworth in 1264 where the ~~paper~~ defenders surrendered due to disease after 6 months. Although the castle was also down to its last 2 days of food, it is more important to note that the castle was able to support the inhabitants for 6 months even though it was under siege.

~~and so~~ In conclusion, I would point out the general location, ~~location and surrounding~~ and surrounding landmarks of ~~major~~ strategic importance such as Watling Road, the character of the surrounding land, and finally the local resources as these all serve to show a visitor how the castle was initially used ~~as~~ as a strategic stronghold.

This exemplar is based on Kenilworth Castle.

The candidate clearly establishes the response to the question by indicating they would be pointing out various features. Their first feature is the location of the site, explaining how its position exemplifies the first use of 'strategic military control of the area.' The candidate explains why this was a necessary feature, by referencing the need to watch over the Earl of Warwick.

The second point makes use of the geology of the site, allowing for the construction of relevant defensive features – and gives an explanation of their value in relation to the 'first use'.

The third point references the local supplies which were necessary for the construction and wellbeing of those who first used the site, naming specific features and showing how they contributed.

Each of the points is clearly linked back to their initial identification of the first use of the site and uses specific named features for support, together with an explanation for each as to their relative value. As a result, this response gained full marks.

Question 2

2 Explain the **reasons why** your site's **uses 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]

Question 2 asked candidates to explain the reasons behind changes at their site. At first glance, this appears a straightforward question, similar to previous questions, which have asked candidates to show how their site has changed over time. However, the emphasis on this year's question is subtly different. Candidates do need to use evidence from the site to show changes that have taken place over time, but the main focus is on **explaining** the reasons for those changes.

In order to demonstrate any kind of change, it is necessary for candidates to establish a base from which to measure change. Therefore, the first action by any candidate must be to describe the use of their site at a given time and indicate how this is supported by evidence from the site. It is worth noting that this does not have to be the first use of the site.

Once this has been established, candidates should:

- identify a change to the site
- link this to a site feature which demonstrates the change
- give a substantiated explanation why this change took place.

This will gain an 'explained' level on the mark scheme. A strong explanation of the reason and range of support given, will determine the place of the response within the level. Additional explanations of the reasons for changes to the site will move the answer up through the levels.

Candidates who only described changes to the features of the site, and did not explain why these changes happened, or who identified a reason but did not explain it or provide generic reasons would only gain Level 2 for that point. Candidates who gave a full explanation of a reason for change but did not demonstrate the change by reference to a physical feature of the site would not gain maximum marks in the level.

Explaining change

Candidates should provide a brief explanation of the first use they wish to consider so that future changes show from what to what.

Exemplar 2

State the site you have studied

Greenwich Park

Question number

2

One reason for uses of the park changing was due to ~~growing~~ the ~~growing~~ wealth of the nation in the Tudor era. Tudor monarchs such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth I felt a great ^{urge} ~~urge~~ to demonstrate their wealth and ~~power~~ to the nation and perhaps other countries to show off their power and money. This caused Henry VIII in particular to hold extravagant, regular events that went above and beyond, such as his legendary 1516 Christmas Party, which was the first ever masquerade party in England. The ground in front of the Queen's house is still levelled and flat from when Henry VIII had it modified to suit the jousting and banquets in order to demonstrate his valour and material wealth. Therefore, one reason that the use of the park changed was due to the wealth of the Tudor monarchs which encouraged them to display it to others.

Another reason for a change in the use of the park was ~~growing scientific~~ as the ^{increase in} ~~growth of~~ scientific beliefs in the Stuart era. The enlightenment caused religion to be overrun by science and technology, encouraging people to explore scientific advancements and explanations. ~~The same~~ One of these people was Charles II, who

desired to use Greenwich Park to solve an issue known as the longitudinal problem, which made it difficult for sailors to navigate the globe. To do this, he had Sir Christopher Wren build Flamsteed House on the ~~prime~~ Prime Meridian^{in 1675}, so that John Flamsteed could create a "map of the heavens" to solve this problem. Flamsteed House, or the Royal Observatory, then became a residence for the Astronomer Royal, uncovering even more scientific advancements over time which are now displayed within the Royal Observatory which acts as a science museum. Therefore, another reason for changes in the site's use was due to the Enlightenment and growing scientific ideologies.

A final reason for changes in the site's use is due to the ^{growing} power of the British Navy. During the Tudor and Stuart eras, the British navy was the most powerful ~~in the East~~ on the Earth, winning battles such as the Spanish Armada. It was due to this power that Queen Mary II commanded for the King's House to be converted into a hospital for retired seamen, due to the vast numbers within Britain's navy. It wasn't the best naval hospital and usually didn't take extreme injuries, but it inspired the long-lasting use of Greenwich for naval purposes, ~~becoming various~~ ^{becoming various} ~~has~~ ^{has}. Over time it had various different purposes such as an orphanage for the

orphaned children of seamen, and today it is a museum for the to the Royal Naval College, and today it serves as a museum for Royal the history of the Navy. & Therefore, one reason for a change in the site's use was the growing power and influence of the British Navy.

Overall, various reasons have influenced Greenwich Park to have very different uses over time. First, ~~the~~ the power of the monarchy led it to become a demonstration of wealth. Following this, the Enlightenment encouraged it to become a hub of scientific advancements. Finally, the growth in the Navy's power caused it to become a site of Naval Hospitality. and

This exemplar is based on Greenwich Park.

The candidate starts with an explanation of why the site was modified during the Tudor era and gives various reasons why developments were made to the site. However, as stated on the mark scheme, change has to be shown as a process from a state to another state. This part of the response does not fulfil this criterion as it does not refer to the uses of the park before the Tudor period – so this part of the answer was given Level 2. In this paragraph, minimal use is made of the site's features which is another weakness about this part of the question, although it would not have prevented the awarding of Level 3 had there been a comparison present.

The second paragraph qualifies as an explanation of change as the first paragraph has laid out an earlier usage. There is a strong explanation of changes in society which led to the building of Flamsteed House to house the Meridian. The answer is well supported by knowledge and by detail from the site and was given Level 3.

The final explanation showed how the growth and success of the British Navy was the reason for the conversion of the Kings House (Level 4). The candidate ends their response by identifying various other uses of the site but with no development. These points do not increase the mark – by themselves they would have been just Level 1 as there are no reasons given.

The final mark (15) reflects two valid explanations but with limited use of the features of the site – hence the mark in the middle of the level.

Question 3

3 What **historical questions** could someone ask after studying your site's physical remains?

Explain your answer referring to **different parts** of your site's physical remains.

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 not as popular with candidates as Questions 1 and 2. It asked candidates to select a feature or range of features from any period in their site's history, explain why they are important and pose a question or questions which someone studying the site could raise after looking at these features. Candidates could select any aspect of their site, from any time period.

Some candidates found this a challenge. They could pose questions about any aspect of their site, from any period of time, but many used the site features to answer the questions rather than showing how the features might have given rise to those questions. It was decided that candidates who took this approach should receive rather more credit than simply being held in Level 2, as they had accurately posed relevant questions and obviously understood their site, so responses which took this approach were given a maximum mark of Level 3. To move higher in the levels, candidates needed to use the site features as the springboard for their questions. Candidates who achieved this more than once, were able to move up through the levels.

Read the question carefully

Candidates should take care with the wording of the question. This question specifically refers to what questions should be 'asked,' not how they might be answered.

Exemplar 3

State the site you have studied

Coolbrookdale

Question number

3

A question which Historians may ask about Coolbrookdale could be "Why did ^{the Darby family} ~~they~~ care about education." This could be an important question as in 1830 the Darby family built the Old School House to provide kids aged from 10 ~~years old~~ an education. This shows they care about education as the Old School House was built 50 years before the ~~top~~ Compulsory Education Act in 1880 which showed that they cared for the education and futures of the kids. ~~Overall~~ Overall, Historians would question "Why the Darby family cared about education" as "Although the physical remains it is evident that they believed education was important."

Another question which Historians may ask ~~to~~ about ~~the~~ Coolbrookdale could be "Why did the Darby family care about the widows of the workers?" This can be an important question as in 1851 the Darby family built the Charity Row to provide housing for the widows of the workers which consisted of 6 cottages. This shows the care about the widows of the workers as they made rent significantly ~~at~~ low and ~~to~~ affordable ~~than~~ as the families may have not had a high income after the death of the worker at the

~~the~~ Coalbrookdale Company. Overall, Historians would question "why the Darby family cared about the widows of ~~workers~~ the workers as they may be wondering why they make the rent affordable to allow them to live there.

A significant question which Historians may ask about ~~the~~ Coalbrookdale could be "Why did the Darby family care so much about the workers?" The Darby families caring nature can be seen through ~~the~~ Carpenter's Row which consisted of 8 houses for the workers to live in as the houses were built near the ware house and Blast furnace helping making traveling to work easier for them. Another way which the Darby families caring nature can be seen is through the Coalbrookdale inn which was built in 1834 to allow the workers to have social and leisure time once finishing long working hours, this was evident for their caring nature as the Darby family were Quakers which showed they went against their beliefs to look after their workers needs. Overall Historians would question "Why did the Darby family care so much about the workers" as they evidently went against their beliefs to look after them and provide them with a comfortable living situation.

This exemplar is based on Coalbrookdale,

The candidate first looks at the issue of education within the site and poses the question about why the Darby family cared about education. They support the reason for their question by describing the school, built in 1830 and justify the validity of asking this question by pointing out that this was before the Education Act which made the provision of education compulsory (Level 3).

Their second point focuses on the site feature of Charity Row which was built to house widows of the workers at a reduced rent. The candidate poses the reasonable question of why the Darby family felt it was appropriate to do this. This point gains Level 4 but is not as well supported about why this might be a good question to ask, so did not gain the higher marks in the level.

The candidate's final point raises the question about why the Darby family cared about their workers and built Carpenter's Row. This is an example of the alternative approach to this question, where the candidate gives the answer to the question they have posed rather than explaining why this would be a valid question. Therefore, it was capped at Level 3 and so cannot raise the answer further up the mark scheme.

To improve, the candidate should have explained why it was unusual for mill owners to provide good quality accommodation (perhaps by comparison with another mill of the time). This would have supported the reasons for posing the question and raised the answer to Level 5.

The final mark of 15 marks reflects the two valid explanations of relevant questions which could be asked. Some site evidence has been used but further detail would have improved the mark within the level

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