

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY A (EXPLAINING THE MODERN WORLD)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History A
(Explaining the Modern World)**

J410

For first teaching in 2016

J410/13 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.

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Paper 13 series overview

Candidates have been well-prepared for this depth study on Personal Rule to Restoration with Castles: Form and Function. The majority of candidates demonstrated a good level of knowledge which they used to address the question clearly. The quality of responses varied, as would be expected, but very few missed out questions and very few seemed to run out of time, which was encouraging to note.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- addressed the question directly, therefore answering effectively - stayed within the date parameters of the question in their responses - identified two or more points in relation to the question and explained using relevant historical detail - wrote fluently so there was a clear line of argument, and so different points were clearly differentiated - in Questions 2 and 4 were able to make inferences from the given sources which enabled confident focus on the question - in Question 2 evaluated one or more sources by addressing the provenance and commenting on the author's purpose - had a clear understanding of how Kenilworth Castle has changed over the years (for Question 3) and could explain, using specific examples of alterations in form and/or function - used quotes or clear paraphrasing to illustrate points made in Questions 2 and 4 - recognised and explained the utility of the castles' ruins for a particular time period.	- did not clearly refer to the questions when answering - in Question 1, wrote a narrative of related events but they were outside the time period in question - identified points to address the question but did not explain them in sufficient detail - in Question 2, discussed the issue of reliability of sources without actually identifying the point being made in the sources, which was needed to address the question effectively - used simplistic and generic comments with regard to the nature or validity of the sources (in Question 2) which did not offer evaluation - discussed the events mentioned in Source D (Question 4) without using this to address the question - in Question 3, listed specific changes that happened to the castle over time, without showing how that reflected the castle's form or function in the particular time specified in the question - missed out one or more of the questions.

OCR support



You can find information on exam review webinars and other support events in **Training** on the horizontal menu within GCSE (9-1): History A on [Teach Cambridge](#).

Section A overview

Section A consisted of two questions, one that asked candidates to explain the short term reasons for the Civil War and the other to evaluate public support for religious reforms under Cromwell. The vast majority of candidates demonstrated knowledge of many reasons why King and Parliament fell into dispute. Higher-scoring candidates were able to clearly show a sequence of events leading to the outbreak of war, to explain the stated reason, and could do this for two distinct reasons. For Question 2, candidates could typically identify the stance of Source A and Source C but addressed Source B less effectively.

Question 1

Personal Rule to Restoration 1629–1660

- 1 Explain why events during the period 1640 to 1642 led to civil war breaking out between Charles I and Parliament.

[10]

This question focused on the years 1640-1642. In order to effectively answer it, candidates were expected to focus on events towards the end of, and after the period of Personal Rule. Those students who reached Levels 4 and 5 typically did so by identifying and explaining issues such as: the reactions to the Bishops' war, Parliament refusing to grant funds to deal with the Scots, the impeachment of the 'evil advisors', the Root and Branch Petition, the Grand Remonstrance, the Attempt on the Five, or the Nineteen Propositions (not an exhaustive list). Many candidates reached Level 3 by identifying these reasons but couldn't reach Level 4 or 5 because they didn't effectively explain why these things led to further conflict.

Some candidates did not move beyond Level 2 because they discussed general issues which caused discontent between King and Parliament which existed before the date parameters in the question. These included such issues as Ship Tax, suspicions that the king was making the country 'more Catholic', the actions of Wentworth and Laud (as opposed to their impeachment/punishment) and the 11 years of rule without Parliament. These responses did not properly address the focus of the question.

Assessment for learning



Candidates should be reminded to read the question carefully, and to direct their response to the date parameters. They should be reminded that they need to explain using specific historical knowledge about the topic in question, to go further than just identifying.

Exemplar 1

One event between 1640 and 1642 leading to civil war in England was Parliament's demands of Charles. In 1641 Pym and his junto crafted the Grand remonstrance on top of being released to the public before Parliament and openly and disrespectfully criticizing the King, it also demanded Parliament appoint Charles's ministers and that the Church of England would be reformed along Puritan lines. Charles had already given into Parliament over the impeachment of Laud (1640), the execution of Strafford (1641), the Owen Convent act (1641) and Triennial act (1641); the demands simply went too far. Furthermore the

The response in Exemplar 1 clearly identifies the Grand Remonstrances as a reason and explains (very clearly) what the Remonstrances said and why they angered the king resulting in conflict with Parliament.

Question 2

2 Study Sources A, B and C.

'Cromwell's attempts at religious and moral reform were welcomed in the period 1653 to 1658.'

How far do **Sources A, B and 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 obviously understood the need to discuss all three sources separately and to use them to address the question. Most responses correctly identified and explained whether Sources A and C supported or contradicted the statement and chose appropriate source detail to support that. Source B was done less well, with many candidates misinterpreting the message of the Puritan lawyer. Few candidates successfully evaluated the sources. When attempted, evaluation tended to be quite simplistic, and not focused on the question, i.e. if it was credible in showing that the reforms were welcome or not.

Source A was a pamphlet purporting to be written by Father Christmas, criticising the reforms and showing that people continued to celebrate, despite the repressive actions of soldiers 'ransacking ovens'. The vast majority of candidates recognised this, although some cited the source saying Father Christmas 'would not be welcomed' to support the assertion that Source A supported the statement. This was an acceptable response. Where candidates attempted to evaluate, they tended to say that since the writer was from London, he'd know what 'the people' thought. This was not accepted as evaluation. A very few used their contextual knowledge that London had been staunchly supportive of Parliament during the Civil War, which showed that the introduction of the religious reforms had gone too far that they alienated natural supporters. This was accepted as evaluation.

Source B was from a Puritan lawyer, claiming that people wanted more religious and moral reforms. This proved to be quite problematic for many candidates to understand. They focused on the first line, that said 'the people are angry'. It appears these candidates did not read on, or understand that the writer was not saying they were angry about the reforms; rather that they were angry that there were not more reforms controlling other types of 'immoral' behaviour, therefore they misinterpreted the source's meaning. Evaluation of this source was again generally simplistic, for example; since the author was employed by Cromwell, he would say these things to please Cromwell. This was not credited as evaluation. A better response would have been to address the purpose of the source; to 'promote Puritan values'.

Source C was very effectively addressed by candidates. They identified it as showing that people did not welcome the reforms since they were deliberately disobeying the rules. Very few attempted evaluation of this source.

Assessment for learning



It seems evident that centres give students regular practice in handling contemporary sources to address Question 2 style questions, since the vast majority of candidates approached this question in an appropriate way. It would be useful for students to be reminded to read the whole source thoroughly, not just to skim read, so they can correctly identify the stance each source takes on the question asked. For higher levels, students could also be reminded to focus on writer's purpose and their intended audience, as a more effective way of evaluating.

Section B overview

Candidates showed secure knowledge of castle design and function, with many producing thoughtful explanations and well-supported inferences. A stronger focus on precise time periods and further development of source analysis would have helped more candidates reach higher levels.

Question 3

Castles: Form and Function c.1000–1750

3 Explain how Kenilworth Castle changed between c.1500 and c.1750.

[10]

Effective responses to this question would have described changes during the correct period and explained, either why the changes came about, (e.g. the more peaceful nature of England during this time and so the less need for defensive features), or how this demonstrated the changed function of the castle, (e.g. becoming a status symbol).

Most candidates correctly identified and described the changes made by Robert Dudley. Many went on to explain correctly how these changes demonstrated a change in function of the castle to gain Level 4. Some said it was because he wanted to marry Queen Elizabeth, which wasn't credited as a change in function.

For candidates who went on to reach Level 5, their second point usually described and explained the slighting of the castle by Parliamentary forces. Others described the changes made by Henry VIII and explained how this showed a change in function as a comfortable palatial home.

The vast majority wrote about the correct time period as stated in the question. There were only a very few candidates who wrote about the whole history of the castle without a focus on the question. This seems to show that centres have addressed this with their students to avoid this error.

Misconception



Some candidates argued that the changes to the castle during the Civil War were because it was destroyed in the fighting, instead of explaining that it was a strategic decision to make the castle useless as a defensive structure. Such assertions could not be credited.

Exemplar 2

Stayed for 19 days. By this point, the privy garden had been constructed, with diamonds, gold, and rubies used as decorative features. Elizabeth made 4 visits to Kenilworth during her reign, showing the castle's importance as a luxury palace. This shows change as previously the castle had been a defensive fortress, though was now a home and a symbol of the wealth of the Dudley family.

The response in Exemplar 2 shows that the candidate has correctly identified the changes that Dudley made to the castle and explains how these changes demonstrate that the function of the castle had moved from a defensive structure to a home and a symbol of wealth and so at this point has reached Level 4.

Question 4

4 Study Sources D and E.

Which of these sources is more useful to a historian studying the history of Kenilworth Castle between c.1250 and c.1500?

[10]

This question directed students to discuss the utility of Sources D and E in the context of the Middle Ages.

For Source D, the more successful candidates were able to make an inference about the strength of the castle because it was able to withstand the siege despite the impressive siege engines used to attack it. However, quite a number misunderstood the source, and thought that the siege engines described were actually part of the castle's defences. Such inferences could not be credited.

For Source E, effective responses typically described the size of the windows and inferred (and explained) that the castle's function at this point was not for defence, but as a status symbol or as a comfortable home. Less effective responses identified but did not explain why having large windows demonstrated these things.

Some candidates still asserted that a photograph was not very useful because it was just a picture or it was from the 21st century, but these responses were far fewer than in previous years, which again indicates that centres have addressed this misconception with their students.

Misconception



Some candidates argued that Source E showed the castle was a ruin because of the siege discussed in Source D. This is incorrect.

Exemplar 3

The quotes 'bombaraded repeatedly' and 'this attack failed' represents the castles resillience to degence. Considering the king's wealth and weaponry access, the fact that Kenilworth stands tall proves to the historian that the fortress impressively gilled out its purpose. Despite this, Source D was written 40 years

This response shows that the candidate has made a valid inference about the strength of the castle and its ability to withstand an attack and therefore fulfilling its purpose as a defensive structure, supported by appropriate source detail, and so has reached Level 4 at this point.

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