

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

The Elizabethans, 1580–1603

J411/12, J411/15 and J411/18

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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The Elizabethans, 1580–1603 overview

The Elizabethans, 1580–1603 is one of three British Depth Study units in the Component Group 1 British History GCSE paper. The focus of assessment for the British Depth Study is knowledge and understanding, and understanding interpretations.

To do well in the British Depth Study, candidates need to be able to identify and explain how producers of interpretations portray historical events, utilise second order concepts to develop an enquiry (Question 6 (a) and 6 (b)), analyse and compare historical interpretations (Question 7) while recalling and applying their knowledge in an essay-style question from either Question 8 or Question 9.

This depth study focuses on the latter part of Elizabeth I's reign when she was faced with dangers both at home and abroad. Topics examined this year included the Elizabethan nobility focusing on Hardwick Hall, the treatment of Catholics by comparing interpretations, the extent to which Elizabeth's reign was 'a story of many major successes' and weighing up whether it was 'untrue' that 'witch-hunting was really women-hunting'.

There was a wide range of responses with some candidates demonstrating a very good knowledge and understanding of the topics. This year Question 6a proved difficult for some candidates as they were unable to just focus on one way in which the historian provided an impression. Question 6b continues to present problems as candidates find it difficult to make it clear what they want to investigate as many are omitting what they want to find out. They are also not using a second-order concept. Question 7, unlike last year, proved to be less accessible with many candidates unable to make inferences from the interpretations and to focus on the treatment of Catholics.

Questions 8 and 9, as usual, produced a wide range of responses. Question 8 attracted more candidates, presumably as they were enticed by the wide focus of the question. Many candidates displayed a wide knowledge of the successes and failures of Elizabeth's reign producing balanced, well-explained answers. It was interesting to note the different approaches they adopted to a question that provided them with so much scope. Question 9 answers were generally of a lower standard with many only having a superficial knowledge of the topic. However, candidates who knew the topic provided some interesting well-explained points of agreement and disagreement.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- ensured that they had three valid points. Started with a specific feature from the source followed by two points about the impression this gave of the wealth and luxury associated with the Elizabethan nobility. Alternatively, they began with a more general point followed by an example and details of how this captures the wealth and luxury of the Elizabethan country house.(Question 6 (a)) - selected an historically valid investigation that would enable them to analyse and understand the Elizabethan nobility. Many chose to compare the nobility with the middling sort or labouring poor or focused on housing types.(Question 6 (b)) - made valid inferences about the treatment of Catholics. Compared the differences and	- many did not go beyond producing a quotation from Interpretation A usually referring to 'diamond-pane windows' or the hall 'crafted from golden stone' but often struggled to add further points. A few tried to make three points but referred to three different ways. (Question 6 (a)) - stated what they were going to investigate without giving any information of what they wanted to find out, for example, 'I would investigate the High Great Chamber'. They then went on to describe it. Some set a question not based on a second-order concept.(Question 6 (b)) - tried to compare specific points referred to in the interpretations but often did not compare like with like. Many answers did not address

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
many also explained the purpose of Interpretation B. Such responses were well supported from the interpretations to produce valid comparisons. (Question 7) • demonstrated a sound understanding of the topic to enable them to provide detailed explanations on how far Elizabeth I's reign 'is a story of many major successes' carefully selecting appropriate aspects of her reign. Produced balanced answers. (Question 8) • produced well-explained responses which supported both sides of the argument on whether it is 'untrue' that 'witch-hunting was really women-hunting'. Demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the reasons for witchcraft accusations. (Question 9).	the difference in the treatment of Catholics. Some candidates just focused on the provenance of the interpretations or attempted to compare their purpose. (Question 7) • lacked the knowledge to provide full explanations. Many did little more than identify the successes and failures of the reign or described events without linking them to the question.(Question 8) • mostly, had some general understanding of the topic but lacked specific information to provide explanations.(Question 9).

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Question 6 (a)

6

- (a) In **Interpretation A**, historian Suzannah Lipscomb gives an impression of the wealth and luxury associated with the Elizabethan nobility (upper class).

Identify and explain **one** way in which she does this.

[3]

Candidates who managed to attain 3 marks either began with a specific feature and then made two points of development or began with a more general point such as the size of the hall, supported this from the interpretation and concluded by explaining how this made it impressive. Better responses, for example, made use of 'the magnificent Hardwick Hall, 'like a palace' 'this vast space' and 'queen of all she could see' which allowed them plenty of scope to develop their answer. Many focused on the use of words that gave the impression of grandeur for their first point. Less successful responses often chose the 'diamond-pane windows' or 'golden stone' and proceeded to comment on how they demonstrated wealth as diamonds and gold were expensive. Some responses simply included as many words as possible from the interpretation that they associated with wealth or luxury and restricted themselves to one mark.

Points for centres to consider

- Candidates need to make sure that they are able to make three points about the impression they focus on.
- Remember that material selected from the interpretation is only worth one mark.

Question 6 (b)

- (b) If you were asked to do further research on **one** aspect of **Interpretation A**, what would you choose to investigate?

Explain how this would help us to analyse and understand the Elizabethan nobility (upper class).

[5]

Candidates who performed well ensured that they knew which second-order concept they were going to focus on and then composed a suitable question. Level 3 responses were usually based on comparing the lives of the nobility or their houses with those of the middling sort or labouring poor. They then referred back to how it would help us to analyse and understand the Elizabethan nobility. Another approach was to consider why Bess of Hardwick was able to live in such a house or even why the nobility had so much wealth.

There were many Level 1 responses mainly because the candidates had questions that did not make use of a second order concept including wanting to find out how Bess acquired her wealth or how big the grounds were. Candidates often answered their own question instead of focusing on the one that was set. There were many who scored no marks because they just stated what they wanted to investigate giving no indication of what they wanted to find out. Examples include 'I would investigate the windows' or 'I would investigate the turrets'.

Exemplar 1

6	b	
		I would investigate why did the Elizabethan nobility feel as though they had to show off with impressive homes and intricate designs. It would help us further understand what they were like as a class as a whole. If there was almost a rivalry between them; trying to impress the most or if they only did it for self pleasure. It would also help us to further understand what they were like as people at the time.

This exemplar is a useful one to demonstrate how to approach the question. The candidate has decided to investigate why the nobility feel the need to have such impressive homes which would help to gain an understanding of their class. It is clear from the outset that the candidate is focusing on causation as their chosen second-order concept. The response further states that they would hope to find out whether it was just for their own pleasure or to impress other people and to gain some insight into the nobility. It was awarded Level 3, 5 marks.

Points for centres to consider

- Candidates still find it difficult to come up with valid investigations. In some cases, they do not appear to have read the question with its focus on the nobility.
- Practising how to frame a suitable investigation would benefit some candidates.

Question 7

- 7 Interpretations B and C** both focus on the treatment of Catholics in England during the reign of Elizabeth I.

How far do they differ and what might explain any differences?

[12]

Better responses were well focused on the questions and made inferences about the treatment of Catholics from the interpretations. They inferred from Interpretation B that the treatment of the Catholics was harsh or even cruel. Inferences from Interpretation C included that the treatment of Catholics was far more lenient or fair to those who were not a threat to Elizabeth. Candidates then selected appropriate material from the interpretations to support their inference. On Interpretation B this included English Catholics 'lived in terror' and the priests 'endured cramped, cold and dark conditions', 'the terrifying sounds of the priest hunters' and 'often with awful consequences'. For Interpretation C the usual selection was that the Church of England was 'flexible and moderate', that Elizabeth tried to prevent Catholic rebellion 'without following a policy of intense religious persecution' and 'Elizabeth was a model of religious tolerance'. Some candidates then continued to consider successfully the purpose of Interpretation B usually highlighting that it was from a tourist website designed to attract visitors thus it was made to sound exciting and dramatic. A smaller number of candidates considered that the Catholic owners wanted to portray the Catholics as martyrs who were brave and treated badly.

Responses that did less well ignored the word treatment in the question and usually proceeded to consider how Elizabeth was portrayed perhaps thinking back to previous questions. Alternatively, they found similarities when the question clearly stated difference. For example, they picked up on the fact that both interpretations referred to priests and people who hid them. Some answers were unnecessarily long and repetitive. However, the majority managed to at least provide a valid comparison for a Level 2 mark. Only a few responses were confined to Level one because they confined their answers to comparing simplistic provenance. Alternatively, they did not find a like-for-like comparison.

Exemplar 2

7	Both interpretations 3 and C explore how catholics were treated under Queen Elizabeth I however the ^{interpretations} sources prove to have greatly contrasting views on the matter with interpretation 3 having a negative view of the treatment of catholics and interpretation C has having a far more positive outlook this leads to the same interpretations being greatly different
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	Beginning first with interpretation 3 a vastly negative outlook on catholic treatment is observed describing how 'catholics lived in terror' under Elizabeth something we know priests were forced to hide or else they'd face death & this being due to Elizabeth's 1581 act against priests meaning anyone found to be hiding a priest would be executed. This fear is greatly explored in interpretation 3 as priest hunters role is explained the audience is left to feel pity on the priests. Undenially we can understand why this interpretation is taking a more negative angle through exploring its intended purpose. As a tourist website it is designed to draw more guests in, how dramatic language is used to highlight the vast suffering faced by catholics furthermore the house and website is shown to be run by the catholic church undeniably they would be greatly critical of Elizabeth and the resultant suffering of catholics taking an angle to truly highlight the suffering felt by the catholics so
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		Alternatively however interpretation C explores Elizabeth's treatment of Catholics as more positive and through the lens of a historian. In the interpretation it explores how Elizabeth was doing what she did to clamp down on the 'Catholic threat' how her actions were lenient for monarchs of the time. However it still explores the negative ways she treated Catholics through once again the act against priests how she did what she must to remain safe on the throne. This interpretation it was intended to educate perhaps showing how it serves as more of a source of information to learn from viewing the bigger picture. It It could be argued that this ^{interpretation} source compares to interpretation B as it is coming from a historian and factual evidence over trying to draw tourists in.
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This response is a good example for demonstrating how the candidate comes straight to the point and immediately refers to the treatment of Catholics. The contrasting views are referred to as positive and negative which if the answer ended there would just be Level 1. However, the candidate proceeds to explain why Interpretation B can be regarded as negative referring to the fact that the Catholics 'lived in terror' and then considering the priests and the fear they experienced. The answer is further developed by considering the purpose of Interpretation B which as a tourist website wants to attract visitors but also as a site run by the Catholic Church wants people to feel pity for these Catholics and to highlight their suffering. At this point in the answer the candidate has attained Level 2. However, the candidate then refers to the more positive treatment in Interpretation C and comments that Elizabeth treated Catholics more leniently. The candidate has now met the requirements for both Level 3 and Level 4 and attained Level 4, 11 marks. The one omission which would have made the answer even better would have been to have included a quotation from Interpretation C such as 'without following a policy of intense religious persecution'. Nevertheless, the candidate has met the requirements of Level 3 and from there can proceed to Level 4.

Points for centres to consider

- Candidates must focus on the question that is set and not assume it will be similar to previous years questions.
- Practising how to make inferences from the interpretations with relevant support would improve the performance of some candidates.
- Some candidates would benefit from following a specific order for answering the question by making their inferences, comparing the two interpretations with support, ensuring that they have answered the question and then consider the purpose.

Question 8*

- 8* In his 2011 book 'A Brief History of Britain, 1485–1660', historian Ronald Hutton argues that 'Elizabeth's reign is a story of many major successes'.

How far do you agree with this view of Elizabeth's reign **between 1580 and 1603**?

Give reasons for your answer.

[20]

This question proved to be the more popular choice providing candidates the opportunity to select the aspects of the reign that they felt more confident about. Better responses demonstrated a sound knowledge of their selected topics and this was reflected in some very good explanations. Exploration proved a particularly popular choice and some candidates were able to focus their whole answer on this. They explained the contributions of various explorers to the success of her reign and then concentrated on the failures. Sir Francis Drake, Sir James Lancaster, Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh figured prominently in answers as did John Dee and his advocacy of a British Empire. Other popular topics were the Spanish Armada and the Catholic Plots against Elizabeth. However, a wide range of topics were used including some very good explanations on how Elizabeth successfully portrayed her image to her subjects. Such responses identified an argument supported it with evidence and ensured it was related to the question. Many candidates are now comfortable with this format.

Responses that did less well were generally those who did not have a sound grasp of the period. This question provided them with an ideal opportunity to demonstrate what they knew as they were not restricted to a particular topic. However, they seemed to know a little bit about everything and were trying to include this in their answers. They often ended up with no more than a series of points and confined themselves to Level 1. For example, some chose to explain that the Poor Law was a major success but they were unable to provide any details of it. The same was true of the Spanish Armada with many being able to provide an outline of what happened but not enough for an explanation. However, some realised that they could not manage four explanations and took on board the advice from previous years that two good explanations could still earn them more than half marks.

Exemplar 3

8		I agree to a moderate extent with this view of Elizabeth's reign given that while there were many successes for her and her people, there were still lots of issues and problems that needed dealing with, as well as many events that would suggest that she wasn't exactly liked by some people at all.
		On one hand, I do agree with the above statement given that during Elizabeth's reign there were many successful stories and acts, one of which being the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. As a result of Elizabeth killing Mary Queen of Scots (Catholic), converting England to a Protestant country, being very mean to Catholic priests and Catholics in England by making them pay huge sums of

money and sometimes killing them for heresy, along with many other factors, Phillip II of Catholic Spain decided to invade England to try and restore catholicism. They had an army of 50000 men with 130 giant vessels, and were ready to attack, however, in 1587 due to an attack on Cadiz by Francis Drake, they had little fresh food and gunpowder as much of it was destroyed. This, along with factors like their cannons not being able to shoot very far and not being able to pick up the Duke of Arizun in Calais, they were greatly weakened compared to England, which had fresh food, longer firing cannons, and better tactics. All of these factors caused England to successfully defend the coast of Plymouth from the attackers, which was a major success for Elizabeth, and caused a great surge in patriotism and loyalty to her, which demonstrates one of her great successes.

Another success for Elizabeth in this period was as a result of the many explorers she had at the time, who grew England's empire, and strengthened connections with other countries. For example, one sailor, Francis Drake completed his circumnavigation of the earth in 1580, the first person ever to have done this, as well as claiming the territory for England along the way. Another sailor, Walter Raleigh managed to establish a colony at Roanoke in this time which was useful in this period for keeping an eye on the Spanish near the Americas, and occasionally enabling them to steal from Spanish ships for England's gain. Another example of a sailor

with success in this period was James Leicester, who established trade routes with countries like Indonesia and India for things like spice and cloth, leading to the formation of the East India Trading Company, which set England up for trade then and for the future. All of these routes caused huge success and wealth for England by boosting their economy and global dominance by claiming and setting up establishments in new areas which clearly shows that this period was full of major success for England.

However, unfortunately, there were some problems in Elizabethan England that could allow some people to disagree with the statement. For example, the problem of the Elizabethan poor at this period 1580:1603 was not very good. At this time a combination of things like a rising population leading to higher food prices and inflation, bad harvests which caused food prices to soar further, changes in farming as many yeomen switched to sheep farming because wool was more profitable, causing a decrease in farm labourers, and many other factors all led to a huge increase in vagrancy. This caused lots of begging and an increase in crime which was a huge issue in towns and cities, and was quite difficult to sort out. This could demonstrate that Elizabeth's reign at this period wasn't all success.

In addition, another way that this period wasn't all success was due to the number of people plotting to overthrow the Queen at this time, which put huge pressure on her.

and her parliament. For example, one plot was the Throckmorton plot in 1553 where Francis Throckmorton planned to invade England with a small army and overthrow the Queen. Fortunately, the plot was discovered before it occurred, and Throckmorton was executed. However, this did not mean others tried even harder to restore England back to Catholicism, which is what occurred in 1586 with the Babington Plot. This was where Babington sent letters to Mary Queen of Scots, saying that he planned to break her out of her castle to try and then kill Queen Elizabeth to put her on the throne so England would be Catholic again. Luckily, these letters were again discovered by William Cecil, so Babington and Mary were executed. This caused further hatred for Elizabeth by other Catholics, and shows that this period wasn't all success and triumph.

This exemplar demonstrates what can be achieved when candidates know the topics well and make use of their knowledge to produce a well-balanced response that answers the question. The first explanation focuses on the Spanish Armada. The candidate begins by explaining the reasons why Philip II sent the Armada and his aim to restore Catholicism in England. They then move on to the problems that the Armada encountered and how England was able to defeat it. At the end of the paragraph the candidate relates why this was a major success for Elizabeth as there was a surge in patriotism and loyalty. At this stage, the answer has attained Level 2. The next paragraph focuses on exploration referring to a number of explorers including Sir Francis Drake and Sir James Lancaster as well as the establishment of the East India Company. The candidate explains how this brought great wealth to England and takes the answer to Level 3. The next paragraph highlights an area which was less successful referring to poverty linked with high inflation and a series of bad harvests. Vagrancy is also included. This is another good explanation focused on the question which raises the mark to Level 5. The final explanation is on the plots that Elizabeth faced in the 1580s. Both the Throckmorton and Babington Plots are included as well as the execution of Mary Queen of Scots concluding that Elizabeth's reign was not just made up of success and triumph. This is clearly a Level 6 response and 19 marks were given. The only omission was a clinching argument.

Points for centres to consider

- Candidates need to make sure that they can provide an explained response which involves not only answering the question but providing accurate evidence to support the answer.
- Candidates know how to approach the questions but are still producing vague responses in an effort to provide four explanations when one or two detailed explanations can attain more marks.
- Too many candidates are restricting themselves to Level 1 by identifying points or by lacking knowledge.
- Avoid writing conclusions that just sum up what has been written.

Question 9*

- 9* In a recent article on the English Heritage website, historian Diane Purkiss argues that it is 'untrue' that 'witch-hunting was really women-hunting'.

How far do you agree with this view of accusations of witchcraft in Elizabethan England?

Give reasons for your answer.

[20]

Candidates who did well on this question had a detailed knowledge of the topic and were able to argue both for and against the view to produce a balanced response. Those who agreed with it were able to offer alternative explanations for the accusations of witchcraft. These included village tensions, blaming someone for natural disasters like bad harvests, lack of scientific understanding and Puritans and their concerns about the devil. However, the reasons for agreement usually involved how women were perceived by society at the time. Reference was usually made to the patriarchal society and the misogynistic attitudes of some men.

Candidates who did less well simply did not know the topic and were just including anything they could remember about witchcraft. Often this was outside the period being examined and usually involved Matthew Hopkins who was paid to find witches. Many answers remained in Level 1 as candidates would identify a point and then not provide the knowledge to support it. While Question 8 provided candidates with a wide scope of possible topics, this question was focused on one specific topic. For some it was perhaps a question of making the wrong choice. Responses tended to be repetitive as candidates struggled to come up with different explanations.

Exemplar 4

9		I disagree with the statement that witch-hunting was not really woman-hunting, overall.
		The main reason why I disagree with the statement is that it was mostly women who were accused of witchcraft. After witchcraft was criminalised in 1568, most accusations of witchcraft were made by rich villages against older, usually poorer women who

lived alone. ~~Because~~ These women were often widows and so were isolated. Additionally, because England was a patriarchal society, men had all of the power so if a man made an accusation of witchcraft, the woman was almost always found guilty and executed. ~~This, therefore, is evidence to agree~~ disagree with the statement as it shows how women, ~~were targeted~~ in particular those who did not fit into society, were targeted.

However, a reason I ~~disagree~~ may be inclined to agree with the statement is that accusations of witchcraft increased during times of hardship. For example, Elizabethan England ~~it~~ suffered from numerous bad harvests during the decade the 1590s. It was often during these times that more people were blamed for ~~being~~ ~~write~~ these events by people calling them witches. ~~as this was bad harvest were~~ Bad harvests led to famine amongst the poor who relied on farming for both food and work. This therefore suggests to me that ~~see~~ a cause of people being witchcraft accusations was that people were struggling and suffering immensely and so needed something or someone. It can be said that it was not specifically women who were blamed, ~~they just~~ it was just that women who were older and widows and so did not have a place in society, were an easy target for the blame in these times of hardship.

Furthermore, ~~a reason~~ another reason why someone may agree with the statement is that the growth of ~~the~~ Puritan beliefs caused more people to become weary of the Devil ~~and~~ and magic and therefore witches. Throughout Elizabeth's reign, there were many influential people who held strong Protestant or Puritan beliefs and so these spread to the general population. Even if ~~not~~ people did not become Puritan themselves, the fear of witches and the Devil spread significantly, causing more people to ~~accuse~~ make accusations of witchcraft. As they had likely been told or had heard the signs of ~~a witch~~ ^{witchcraft}, these ~~often~~ caused such as having an animal (known as a 'familiar') that, these accusations were often placed on women, especially those who ~~it~~ what I have been describing.

However, a final reason why I do overall disagree with the statement is that Elizabethan people did believe in good magic as well and tried to use it. This was in the form of so-called 'cunning folk' who were thought to be able to perform spells, had healing powers and ~~would~~ be able to bless or curse people on someone's request. The fact that not all Elizabethans disagreed with magic suggests to me that witch-hunting was women-hunting because it only occurred when a woman went against society's rules or did something that another village disagreed with. ~~Triumph the Witch~~

		Witchcraft accusations seem to me to have been
		a way for more powerful peop and richer people to
		punish lower-class and older women who they
		disliked as often there was very little to no genuine
		evidence that a women was a witch.

This exemplar demonstrates one way in which the question can be answered well. It is a balanced response and the candidate clearly has a sound grasp of the topic and deploys their knowledge to good effect. It begins by disagreeing with the view and commenting that it was mostly women who were accused of witchcraft. It continues with an explanation about the patriarchal society taking the response to Level 2. The candidate then focuses on a point of agreement explaining about increased numbers of accusation during times of hardship using the example of bad harvests and accusations which were not necessarily confined to women. The answer is balanced and has reached Level 4. Another explanation on agreement is then included which highlights the increase in Puritan beliefs which included fear of witchcraft and the devil. This is now a Level 5 response. The final explanation is another one on disagreement arguing that Elizabethans believed in magic and used it in healing. Therefore, witch hunting only occurred when a woman went against society's rules so 'witch-hunting was really women-hunting'. The answer was awarded Level 5, 19 marks.

Points for centres to consider

- Candidates need to make sure that they can provide an explained response which involves not only answering the question but providing accurate evidence to support the answer.
- Candidates know how to approach the questions but are still producing vague responses which are confined to Level 1 in an effort to provide four explanations. However, one or two detailed explanations can attain more marks.

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Question 8, adapted from Ronald Hutton, A Brief History of Britain 1485-1660, p. 134, Robinson, 2021.

Question 9, adapted from www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/histories/eight-witchcraft-myths/.

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