

Townsend-Warner History Prize, 2017

Paper One

After constructing the paper, I must confess to being a little concerned that it was harder than previous years, but it seems that students certainly rose to the challenge. While the top score this year was four marks lower than last year, the mean average of the top 250 students was 56.3 compared with 55.2 in 2016. The highest overall mark was 90, which was impressively produced by Brendon Bethlehem (Westminster Under). Only one mark behind him was Hari Collins (St Paul's Juniors) on 89, with only five candidates in total scoring 80 marks or higher. The other three were Rafael Leon-Villalpos (Westminster Under); Magnus Taylor (Summer Fields) and Robert McGlone (Downsend).

The two areas where students performed particularly well were questions on British monarchs and European military history. As is typically the case, the cultural section posed a number of challenges with few knowing the author of *City of God* or *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most knew that Shakespeare had written *Much Ado about Nothing* and Tolkien had written *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Questions that drew from Asian or African history often posed some difficulty, not least of all the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and the country over which Idi Amin governed. On the final question of the paper, a number of candidates confused Iran and Iraq, thinking that Saddam Hussein ruled over the former rather than the latter.

As ever, there were a few entertaining answers. A number of candidates thought that the Magna Carta was signed at "Honeymede" rather than Runnymede, while more than one student suggested that it was Tony Blair rather than Alexander Litvinenko who was poisoned by Polonium-210.

May I thank all those involved in teaching the candidates so effectively and providing them with such a firm knowledge of the past. I continue to be thoroughly impressed by the breadth of knowledge that has been demonstrated which stretches across a wide number of centuries, continents and cultures. I would like to wish the very best of luck to those who will go on to face the rather different challenges of Paper Two.

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