

Townsend-Warner History Prize, 2019

Paper One

I approached the setting of Paper One with a degree of trepidation, conscious of the quality of the papers that have gone before and the importance of striking the right balance between challenge and accessibility. It has been a pleasure (and relief) to see that your pupils have done a tremendous job. There were several standout performances: the top mark of 93 was scored by Rafael Leon-Villapalos (Westminster Under); only three marks behind was James O'Connell-Nash (Durham Chorister School) on 87. In total, five papers achieved a mark of 80 or more. The other three were Maximus Walker (Westminster Under), Theo Smith (Prebendal) and Rajesh Pakrashi (Westminster Under).

Candidates performed particularly well in questions covering military history and British monarchs, with impressive answers also delivered in respect of historical terminology. The most challenging group of questions required candidates to match historical events to dates. Arguably the most difficult question on the paper, as measured by the small number of correct answers, asked for the northern city that is the resting place of the Venerable Bede. A minority of candidates answered this correctly, although I am pleased to report that there was a full house from Durham Chorister School. Most significant of all, though, was the wide breadth of historical knowledge and lively interest in the past demonstrated throughout by candidates.

Following tradition, there were several entertaining answers worth mentioning: a high number of candidates thought that it was Laurel who cried, 'Kiss me Hardy'; Verdun was described by one candidate as 'a jolly big battle' and the Montgolfier brothers were credited as having invented golf. My favourite response though was to the question: 'Where was Magna Carta sealed?' Rather than Runnymede the candidate wrote (not unreasonably), 'at the bottom of the page.'

Thank you to all those involved in inspiring these young historians and encouraging them to enter the competition. As I embark on my stewardship of Paper One, I find myself hugely impressed by the calibre of the candidates and wish those proceeding to Paper Two the very best of luck with the challenges that it holds.

Mr Alastair Cook

Harrow School