**The Townsend Warner Prize 2025**

As I comment every year, the arrival of the Townsend Warner Prize scripts brings much cheer to this rather cold and gloomy term. Boys whom I teach, who took the Townsend Warner Prize at prep school, always ask how my marking is progressing, forgetting just how much I have to say on the matter. What always amazes me though is how many boys still get excited when the Townsend Warner Prize is mentioned, can recall their score from years ago, and request question papers to attempt in their own time. This is a potent reminder of how special an undertaking the Townsend Warner Prize is, and how much of a privilege it is to set and mark Paper 1. This year is even more meaningful for me as I assumed responsibility of The Grove at Harrow School, the house that was led by Edward Bowen, the founder of Townsend Warner’s antecedent prize, for many years.

The overall standard this year has been very high, and while only one paper secured over 90 there were far more in the 60-80 band than last year, which is very encouraging. Candidates handled the questions on terminology, British monarchs, and significant dates well. Those relating to the Tudors and Stuarts were dealt with impressively. Section 1, which challenged pupils to explain what the figures are famous for, was completed particularly well, demonstrating good depth of knowledge across a wide date range. I had feared that Section 6 (Vive la revolution!) and 7 (The reason is treason) might be too inaccessible for a wide audience but this was unfounded: the vast majority of candidates scored well here and many were able to identify the more esoteric revolutions and attempted assassinations.

The hardest questions on the paper as measured by the fewest correct answers, asked pupils to identify The Pale (English settlement in Ireland), the Schwerer Gustav (giant German railway gun), and the identity of Sir Joseph Bazalgette (civil-engineer, who masterminded London’s sewer system in the 19th century). I must confess that I was pleasantly surprised how many pupils knew what a press gang was – I had thought this would be rather challenging although one candidate reported that it is also the name of a laundry in Chiswick. This was the first of many entertaining responses: The Domesday Book was started “when William I ordered it”, The Pale was thought to be “a bucket down a well”, and Harold Godwinson defeated Harald Hardrada at Chelsea football ground (not far off, but no mark awarded…).

Thank you for all your support with the Townsend Warner Prize and I wish those continuing to Paper 2 the very best of luck.

Mr Alastair Cook

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