

Examiners' Report  
January 2012

GCSE History 5HB03 3A

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## Introduction

This was the fifth opportunity candidates had to sit this Schools History Project Source Enquiry paper on the transformation of surgery, c1845-c1918. The focus this series was the development and use of anaesthetics. It was handled in the main with confidence and more awareness of the demands of individual questions than was the case in some earlier series. Few candidates were unable to produce answers that were not worthy of at least some credit and many were able to achieve the highest levels of questions, though Level 4 of question 5 proved more challenging. There were fewer problems with time management than previously, but it still is an issue for some candidates. Responses to questions 4 and 5 showed signs of undue haste or in the case of question 5 was sometimes not answered at all. There is some evidence that some candidates leave out or rush an earlier question to ensure they attempt question 5. The latter approach has the advantage of focusing on the question carrying the highest number of marks. However a more effective approach would be to allocate enough time for each question. However it is encouraging to see signs of real progress by candidates who seem to have benefited from the experience of, and lessons learnt from, earlier papers. The issue of getting the allocation of time right and ensuring all questions are attempted would be less of a problem if candidates were given more practice of answering questions under examination conditions. The increasing number of past papers should prove helpful in this process.

As in previous series some candidates experienced difficulty in putting some or in a few cases all of their responses on the correct section of the answer booklet. The main culprits seem to be candidates who put the second part of their answer to question 4 on the last page of the space allocated to question 3. This makes the process of marking more difficult for examiners. It would be helpful if candidates were made aware of the way the question booklet is organised.

## Question 1

Most candidates reached L3 in this question, very few provided only a description of the source (L1) and even fewer made unsupported inferences (L2). Candidates came up with a variety of inferences, most of which were well-supported. The most common one was 'pain', and while the majority of the candidates elaborated on the physical pain sustained during the operation, a few also attributed the 'shock' to the pain and talked about the mental strain of operations at that time. Fewer candidates picked up on the issue of the crowded theatre. Most of those assumed that operations were carried out for the public's entertainment, while some decided that the spectators were medical students eager to learn about operations and the human body. Several mentioned that having an audience meant that 'nothing was private for the patient'. Only very few took the idea of the crowded theatre to the point of including the risk of infection for the patient. Some candidates got the impression that the operation was 'chaotic' or 'unprofessional' and attributed this to the girl's struggle to break free, which would make it difficult for the surgeons to operate on her, and the uncontrolled blood loss. Lack of technology in the operating theatre was mentioned in a few papers, mainly referring to the girl being carried to her bed rather than taken in a wheelchair. Blood loss was occasionally mentioned, although not very well supported, as were the public's dread of operations in general and the importance of speed during the operation.

Look carefully at the background information and Sources A to H in the Sources Booklet and then answer Questions 1 to 5 which follow.

### 1 Study Source A.

What can you learn from Source A about surgery before the use of anaesthetics?

(6)

Source A tells me that operations in the mid-nineteenth century, before anaesthetics, was painful and could be traumatising. This is because the source says "assistants hold her struggling body down."

I can also learn that many people did not really care about the wellbeing of the patient and were simply fixated on learning. This is because in the source it says "crowded with men who are keen to see the operation and the shedding of blood."

As well as this, I can learn that the whole experience was shocking for the patient as in the source it says "the girl is carried from the operating theatre... to recover from the shock."

Also, it can be seen that patients would be extremely scared of operations as the source says that "the surgeon tries to reassure her with kind words and tells her that it will be over soon." ~~The~~ This shows that people knew that the operations could go wrong but also knew that their life depended on them.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

A solid Level 3 and worth maximum marks.

## Question 2

More candidates than in previous exams reached L3 in this question. Answers were primarily content-driven. Many candidates commented on the outcomes of the experiment being unexpected or an overall negative impression of the experiment, supporting their statements with a description of the scene. Fewer candidates made an attempt to combine positive and negative aspects of the experiment, giving a more balanced account. Few approached the source through its nature, and some commented on the choice of colours or the use of the space in the picture.

There were a number of original ideas, a popular interpretation being along the lines of a party or indeed 'substance abuse'. One perceptive comment was the following 'Simpson's experiment was harmful, dangerous and stupid. However there is some suggestion to show that the experiment was successful'. Many focussed on the broken glass, knocked over chairs etc to show the power of the drug and its success as an anaesthetic. Some candidates focused on the skulls in the background which could result in a negative impression about the deadliness of chloroform being described in detail. A surprising number believed that the figure on the left was a woman; this did not stop some of them from producing a good answer.

### **Question 3**

Some candidates simply selected details from the sources but without any linkage to the question focus. Some simply stated what each source said in their own words providing a level 1 answer. The majority of candidates were able to reach at least Level 2 on this question. Although there have been improvements in candidates' cross-referencing skills, overwhelmingly the biggest problem was a failure to move beyond matching the sources. Many answers went through each source in turn and then related the sources content to the question. Many candidates failed to cross-reference the sources, and where they did it was often done poorly. Where cross-referencing was done well it was often accompanied with a thorough consideration of both the source content and nature in order to reach a conclusion.

A fair number of candidates were able to match on both content and reliability and to do this thoroughly and in detail, but they did not take their good work one step further onto making a judgement about the extent of support that the sources offered based on the kinds of sources that these were. Where candidates did do this, they showed high levels of reasoning and could be very perceptive in their judgements.

Many borderline L2 / L3 cases cross-referenced in the opening statement and the conclusion, but treated the sources individually. Weak attempts at cross-referencing included the use of words such as 'however' or 'also' in two or three places throughout the answer, which suggests a learned response rather than an understanding of what cross-referencing is actually about.

However, most candidates were able to access Level 2 at least, by giving a supported answer. Most of these focused on content which was generally well done. Evaluation of the nature of the source was often basic. For example; 'This source is a letter, therefore it is reliable'. Perhaps letters are rarer nowadays giving them a reputation as being 'the truth'. The belief that primary sources are more reliable than secondary sources still seems unshakeable with many students. Often the provenance was repeated without development. Source E was often misunderstood as a callous treatment of soldiers by a military doctor. There were some very good examples of cross-referencing, of which a fair number did not believe that anaesthetics were accepted by most surgeons and doctors. It was good to see candidates thinking independently.

Preparation for this question needs to concentrate on encouraging candidates to develop the ability to make a judgement on how accurate a general historical judgement is, based on an accurate consideration of what sources say and how reliable they can be judged to be.

### 3 Study Sources C, D and E.

How far do Sources C, D and E suggest that doctors and surgeons accepted the use of anaesthetics in operations? Explain your answer, using Sources C, D and E.

(10)

Source C suggests that many <sup>surgeons</sup> ~~doctors~~ were against the use of anaesthetics. I know this as Simpson states 'I look back with sorrow to our reaction of anaesthetics; this suggests people didn't agree with the use of them at the time.'

Source D differs from this as there is no suggestion that anaesthetics was widely declined. I know this as this source talks about the positives of anaesthetics and how they disable pain and suffering. Source D does not mention any negatives or non-acceptance, this suggests anaesthetics was accepted.

Source E supports the point of anaesthetics was not widely accepted as it would be unmanly, as it states in the source, 'I warn medical officers against using chloroform; this suggests anaesthetics was not accepted by all surgeons or doctors. Although this source suggests they weren't accepted, it supports Source D that many surgeons would prefer to use it and my views weren't accepted among many as it states 'I know many will not agree with me'. This supports Source C and D that maybe anaesthetics was accepted among many and maybe it should be used. Suggesting that to an expert doctor accepted the use of anaesthetics. Source C suggests that anaesthetics are very

helpful towards the patient, 'all pain is destructive', suggesting anaesthetics resolve the destructiveness. This source suggests although it wasn't accepted widely, anaesthetics were the way forward.

Source D supports this as it gives many positive views to anaesthetics, such as 'will supply a ray of hope', which suggests it stops the pain and reduces the chance of having to endure it. This source suggests anaesthetics was accepted widely, and Snow was unaware that many surgeons rejected it due to reasons such as religion.

Source E also supports this as the surgeon is well aware that the patient will endure levels of pain 'better to hear a man cry out', suggesting it made men scream. This source suggests anaesthetics wasn't accepted by many as it is better to endure pain, but many people liked the idea of it, and challenged him.

All sources challenge and support each other in that anaesthetics was accepted, although the majority suggest it wasn't although being very beneficial.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This response achieved Level 3 but would have reached maximum marks except it focused only on content with no reference to nature. Cross referencing was effective however.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

Make sure you cross reference the sources. Avoid going through each source separately if you want to get into Level 3.

## **Question 4**

Although a number of candidates judged the use of the sources on content alone or less commonly just on reliability, a good number were able to consider the sources on both. However it was common for many responses to concentrate on either content or nature without considering both of them.

Source G was a challenge to many candidates but many dealt with it well, showing real imagination and ingenuity. Some were quite happy with the concept of head transplants being a viable operation in 1847. Many candidates mentioned the cartoon illustrated the respect people had for ether; that it showed how they regarded it as miraculous; that it showed that they used to be scared of operations but now were not. Others were aware that they needed to show that they hadn't taken the source at face value, but were at a loss coming up with a valid comment beyond 'It is a cartoon so it is not reliable'. Indeed, some wrote it off as being of no use whatsoever. However, many responses were able to access Level 3 by evaluating Source F alone in terms of nature and content. A considerable number of answers picked up on the point that Dickens insisted on the use of chloroform despite opposition from the doctors.

In general candidates were happier analysing the content of a source rather than its nature. Evaluation of the nature of the sources often produced shallow, formulaic answers which didn't gain much credit. This was particularly true of Source G, suggesting that more work needs to be done on analysing picture sources and cartoons. The best answers not only evaluated the sources well, but also focused on the question and looked at public attitudes.

The lesson to be learnt here seems to be that candidates need to consider both content and reliability for the highest marks, and that they need to move beyond glib generalisations about types of sources to a more measured consideration of the value of a particular source for a specific historical investigation, a consideration of what the source has to offer and the care that needs to be taken in using and interpreting it.

#### 4 Study Sources F and G.

Which of Sources F or G is more useful to the historian who is investigating public attitudes to the use of anaesthetics in the late 1840s? Explain your answer, using Sources F and G.

(10)

Source F shows that people were willing to use chloroform in the hope it would relieve pain. 'I insisted on it.' This shows that doctors weren't always listened to. The source does nothing but sing <sup>the</sup> praises of chloroform. Dickens describes all the benefits without any negative aspect. 'I am convinced it is safe to use.' This shows that some people didn't think it was safe to use and Dickens is trying to convince them otherwise. I think this source is quite useful to the historian as the writer has nothing to gain ~~to~~ from being <sup>positive</sup> ~~negative~~ about chloroform. ~~as~~ Also he describes its use on his wife during childbirth and I don't believe someone would ~~to~~ put their wife and child in danger if they thought otherwise.

Source G is a cartoon and therefore its main purpose is to entertain. Being a cartoon the picture is exaggerated. It is ridiculing the fact that now some people

felt anything could be done with the use of ether. It shows a more sceptical view on anaesthetics. This isn't as useful to the historian because it's purpose is to entertain and can't actually represent a public opinion as it's not aimed at a particular point of view, it's more observation.

I think that the letter is more useful although it's biased. The cartoon is more inaccurate and more exaggerated.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Comments

This response managed to make Level 3 and has combined both content and nature in evaluating the sources.



**ResultsPlus**  
Examiner Tip

It is important to combine content and nature in evaluating value.

## Question 5

Q5 seemed to have been the most difficult one for the candidates, evidenced by the largest number of blank scripts. Many candidates reached L3, fewer L4. Although many L3 answers did take the nature of the sources into account and made an attempt to explore positive and negative aspects of anaesthetics, they were not coherent enough to enter L4. A number of candidates remained on L2, as they treated the sources individually rather than combining them according to their content or nature. Some responses tested whether the sources disagreed or agreed with the hypothesis presented in the question rather than offering their own judgement.

There were some answers which had obviously suffered from a lack of time, some candidates having failed to answer this question at all. This was particularly sad as it contains nearly one third of the total marks for this examination. Others showed signs of good planning.

Some candidates failed to see any relevance in source A as it described surgery before anaesthetics. Sources D and H proved more fruitful (many candidates declaring that the latter was written by Lister and his wife). There was some very good cross-referencing of the sources in some of the top level answers. Many candidates showed a good grasp of relevant own knowledge, the 'Black Period', Hannah Greener and Snow's Inhaler being to the fore, although more than one explained that Queen Elizabeth had used chloroform during childbirth.

Less successful candidates adopted a formulaic approach, going through each of the sources in turn and explaining how the evidence contained within it related to the question. More successful candidates either looked at both sides of the argument in turn or looked at a range of specific factors. Many were able to incorporate elements of their own knowledge. Perhaps as expected on the final question, there were few students who managed to gain full marks as although some gave evaluative comments on the sources, often these tended to be 'add-ons' rather than using the evaluation to drive the argument and to weigh interpretations. A few made good use of some of the other sources on the paper. A very good Level 4 answer after sustained reasoning and weighing of the evidence, ended-

"Although the use of anaesthetics increased the post operation death Rate, the reduction of the trauma caused to surgeons, assistants and above all patients, as well as the opportunities it gave to Doctors to develop their knowledge meant that the use of anaesthetics brought more benefit than harm".

### \*5 Study Sources A, D and H and use your own knowledge.

'The use of anaesthetics in surgery in the years to 1870 brought more problems than benefits.'

How far do you agree with this statement? Use your own knowledge, Sources A, D and H and any other sources you find helpful to explain your answer.

It is suggested that in the years to 1870<sup>(16)</sup> brought more problems than benefits. I will explore this suggestion and come to an answer.

One of the main problems caused by anaesthetics were infection. Because surgeons could perform more complex operations with anaesthetics, and also 'operations were undertaken for smaller problems', as said in source H, sepsis occurred. The use of anaesthetics in operations before antiseptics were developed is known as the 'Black Period' of surgery due to the high death rates. Source H shows the huge problem of infection by saying 'infection and gangrene spread through the wards'. Furthermore, because more complex operations occurred, the problem of blood loss became ~~the~~ an issue that killed many people. Moreover, doses were not decided on, so many patients, for example Hannah Greener, died after an overdose. Also, ether and chloroform presented their own problems; ether was extremely flammable and irritated the lungs, and chloroform could sometimes stop the heart. Also, as shown in source E, the army were 'against using chloroform' as they felt men should bite the bullet.

On the other hand, surgery could drastically improve due to anaesthetics. Source A shows an operation pre-anaesthetics, which is described as 'the shedding of blood'.

Before anaesthetics, many patients would die from shock, so most people would refuse to go under the knife. Source D backs this up, by saying that 'the greatest danger' was pain, and sometimes patients were 'unable to recover'. Snow describes anaesthetic as a 'ray of hope', which suggests it was a great benefit to a patient to be under the influence of anaesthetics. Even source H describes the pain as 'dreadful', and says that it 'opened a new era for surgery'.

Overall, I think that the statement is untrue, as without anaesthetics, surgery may not have progressed to use the modern techniques used today, such as antibiotics, as there would have been no need to develop surgery further, due to high death rates.



### ResultsPlus

Examiner Comments

This response just managed to reach Level 4 by combining both sources and own knowledge in a logical argument.



### ResultsPlus

Examiner Tip

Need to make use of both sources and additional recall knowledge.

Make sure there is enough time to answer this question effectively.

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