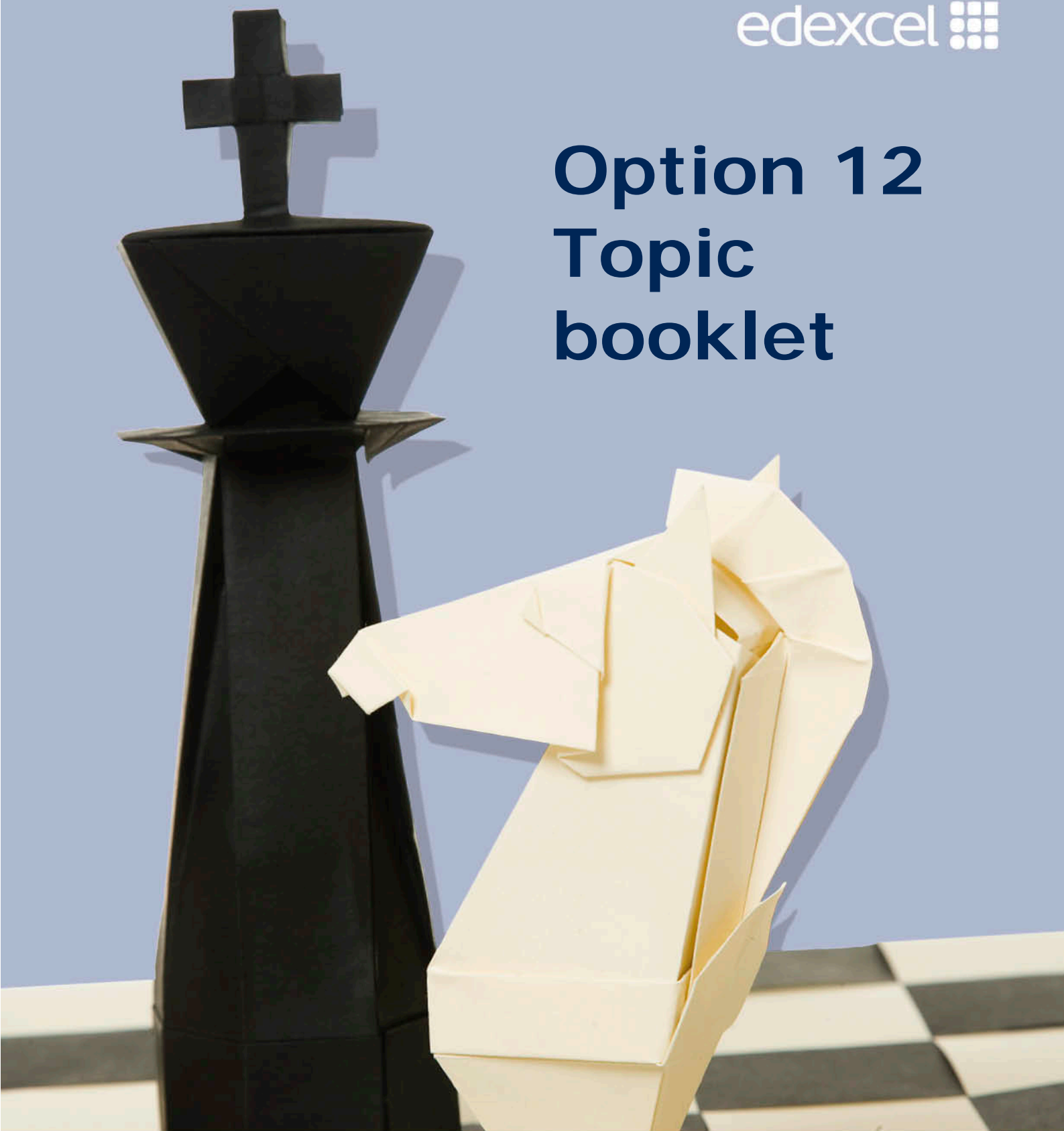


Option 12

Topic booklet



**Warfare and British society, c1250–present
and London and the Second World War, 1939–45**

GCSE (9-1) History

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in History (1HI0)

Contents

Version 4 (March 2025)	2
1. Overview	3
1.1 Assessment	3
Section A Historic environment	3
Section B Thematic study	3
2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 Content guidance	5
c1250–c1500: Medieval warfare and English society	6
c1500–c1700: Warfare and English society in the early modern period	6
c1700–c1900: Warfare and British society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	6
c1900–present: Warfare and British society in the modern era	7
Key terms	7
2.3 Content exemplification and mapping	8
3. London and the Second World War, 1939–45	16
3.1 Introduction	16
3.2 Content guidance	16
Sources	17
4. Student timeline	18
5. Resources	19
5.1 Free support materials	19
5.2 Endorsed resources	20
5.3 Resources for students	21
5.4 Resources for teachers	22
5.5 Resources for the historic environment	23
Educational Recording Agency	24
Our Migration Story	25

Version 4 (March 2025)

This topic booklet has been updated to include changes made to new issues of the specification and sample assessment materials.

- Issue 5: language and assessment changes, for first assessment June 2025.
- Issue 6: content changes, for first teaching September 2024 and first assessment June 2026.

Information on new resources has also been added.

Summary guidance on the changes can be found [here](#).

1. Overview

This option comprises a thematic study, Warfare and British society c1250–present day, and a study of the historic environment, London and the Second World War, 1939–45.

Many of the defining elements in our history have been linked to warfare. William Wallace, Henry V, Wellington and Churchill all acquired a national importance in time of war. The victory at Agincourt and the tragedy of the Charge of the Light Brigade have been commemorated by Shakespeare and Tennyson. Landmarks and street names highlight the important role played by war in our past. Our annual Remembrance services began as a mark of respect for the dead of the First World War but now include not just the Second World War but later conflicts such as the Iraq War.

Meanwhile, computer games and television programmes reflect our interest in weapons and battle tactics. Which was more important in battle – the mounted knight or the archer? How did gunpowder lead to changes in weapons and tactics? Has the use of computers produced a new style of warfare?

There has also been huge interest in the lives of ordinary people in the past. What was it like for a peasant farmer who had to serve in a feudal army, what was it like to fight under Wellington at Waterloo, why did men volunteer in the First World War and what happened to conscientious objectors when conscription was introduced?

This course covers the themes of developments in the nature of warfare, including the composition of the army, the weapons, battle tactics and overall strategy. It also looks at the experiences of both combatants during recruitment, training and battle, and civilians in wartime. The course uses case studies to illustrate these key themes. The impact of war on civilians is also studied with an in-depth study of how the Second World War affected London being the focus for the study of a historic environment.

1.1 Assessment (from June 2025)

Section A Historic environment

For the historic environment, students answer two questions requiring them to describe features (AO1) and a two-part question targeting AO3 (analyse, evaluate and use sources). Question 2 uses two contemporary sources; one of them may be visual, but at least one will be written.

- Question 1(a): students describe one feature.
- Question 1(b): students describe one feature.
- Question 2(a): students assess the usefulness of two sources for a specified enquiry, making use of their knowledge of the historical context.
- Question 2(b): students suggest a follow-up area of investigation for the specified enquiry.

Section B Thematic study

Students answer three questions for the thematic study: Question 3, Question 4 and either Question 5 or Question 6.

- Question 3: this focuses on similarity or difference over time.
Questions will cross sections and will normally span at least a century (and may span much longer periods).
- Question 4: this focuses on the process of change (e.g. why there was a rapid change/slow change/why change continued).

1. Overview

Questions will normally span at least a century and may span much longer periods.

- Questions 5/6: require a judgement and may focus on any of the following: the *nature or extent* of change (similarity/difference or change/continuity); *patterns* of change (turning points, i.e. significance); the *process* of change (factors bringing it about, i.e. causation); or the *impact* of change (i.e. consequence).

Questions will normally span either a complete period named in the specification or at least 200 years and may span much longer periods.

Detailed information and guidance on assessment can be found in the separate [Getting Started Guide](#).

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

2.1 Introduction

Warfare may be undertaken offensively – to conquer land and people – or defensively but the basic aim of defeating an enemy through combat does not change. However, the composition of the army, the weapons used, the tactics and strategy employed have all changed greatly during the last 1,000 years. Feudal armies of untrained peasants required to serve for 40 days have changed to a professional volunteer army. Weapons developed from the spear, sword and bow to the cannon and gun and then the computer-guided missile. Yet even when change is dramatic, there are often elements of continuity, for example cavalry was still used during the First World War.

There are two main strands to the warfare and British society thematic study:

- 1) the nature of warfare
- 2) the experience of war

To encourage students to see broad trends over time, the timescale of c1000–present has been divided into four sections: c1250–c1500, c1500–c1700, c1700–c1900 and c1900–present day.

Students should develop an understanding of the nature and process of change. This will involve understanding patterns of change, trends and turning points, and the influence of factors inhibiting or encouraging change within periods and across the theme. The key factors here are:

- governments and individuals;
- science, technology and communications;
- attitudes in society.

The case studies in each time period allow students the opportunity to understand how factors worked together to bring about particular developments at particular times and make detailed comparisons over time. These case studies include significant battles, such as the Battle of Agincourt, 1415, and the role of key individuals, such as General Haig. However, not every case study is capable of illustrating all of the key factors or elements of the content strands, and so the relevant aspects of the case study should be explored as appropriate.

2.2 Content guidance

As the Paper 1 unit forms part of the requirement that the GCSE focuses on a minimum of 40% British content, the focus of the thematic study is on warfare and English society (first two key topics) and then British society (last two key topics). This thematic study is about wars involving Britain, and therefore knowledge about the Vietnam War (part of one of the Paper 3 modern depth studies) is not relevant here.

It is important that students have an understanding of the context and of society during each time period and how these influenced developments in warfare. Prior to teaching the specification content it may be useful to produce a timeline to cover the basic chronology needed for this unit. Within each time period it would be useful to draw out key terms associated with each one, for example medieval, Middle Ages, early modern Britain, Industrial Revolution and 'modern period'. Students also need to be able to associate these labels with chronological periods, so they need to understand that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries broadly coincide with the Tudor and Stuart periods, the term 'nineteenth century' applies to the 1800s, and the 'modern period' in the thematic studies means 1900–present.

In addition to this it would be useful to draw out some of the key political, economic and social developments associated within each one for example: the feudal

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

system, the Civil War, urbanisation, industrialisation and the First and Second World Wars.

A grasp of the contemporary societies being studied will also help students to avoid misunderstandings. For example, students should realise that archers ‘shoot’ or ‘fire’ their arrows long before the invention of gunpowder. They should also understand that the role of the king or the government in 1250 was very different from their role in today’s society and that ordinary people had few rights or freedoms before the twentieth century. Therefore, concepts such as the role of the king, feudal society, the physical lifestyle of ordinary people, the level of literacy and the uncertain aspects of food and health are all important when explaining the composition of a feudal army.

There is no requirement for students to have knowledge of developments in warfare and society in Britain before c1250, except in relation to the starting point of study. They also do not need to know the technical details of changes in weapons, for example changes to muskets, as long as they recognise the overall impact of such developments.

c1250–c1500: Medieval warfare and English society

Students should also understand the key features of weapons in order to appreciate their impact on battle tactics. In the period c1250–c1500 they should know about the shortbow, crossbow and longbow, the spear, pike, schiltrons, gunpowder and cannon, and the protection of the armour of the mounted knight and the helmet and breastplate of foot soldiers. The focus is on the impact of weapons, so students do not need to be able to name different parts of armour or provide technical details of the schiltrons but do need to be able to explain how they affected combat and battle tactics. The case studies of the battles of Falkirk and Agincourt offer the opportunity for more detailed analysis of leadership, weapons and tactics. The recruitment, training and composition of the army should be also understood as well as the impact of recruitment and requisitioning on the lives of civilians.

c1500–c1700: Warfare and English society in the early modern period

In the period c1500–c1700, students should recognise the broad elements of continuity in the social hierarchy and formation of the army, despite technical developments such as the printing press, gunpowder and cannon. Students do not need to know the details of why the Civil War happened but they should understand why a war fought within a country has a greater impact on the civilian population than one fought abroad against another country. They should also understand that the need for an experienced military commander was recognised in this period and that the development of a standing army placed a greater emphasis on training and discipline.

c1700–c1900: Warfare and British society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

For the section c1700–c1900, students do not need to know the details of why Britain was at war in Europe in the nineteenth century but they should understand the logistical difficulties of fighting a war abroad and the growing importance of industry, steam power and improved communications. They should also be aware of the increasing professionalisation of the army, the role of the military commander, the growing importance of government and the decline of the personal role of the monarch. The growing importance of social attitudes is also highlighted by improvements in communications and the development of war reporting.

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1900–present: Warfare and British society in the modern era

During the modern period, students should understand the increased role of government and the importance of military commanders but also the importance of changes in social attitudes and the effect on recruitment and the 'war effort' during the world wars. The impact of new weapons and total war on both combatants and civilians should be understood and the increasingly technical nature of warfare. Students will not need to explain specific differences between models of guns, tanks or other weapons but they should be able to explain the impact of such weapons. They should also be able to explain changes in recruitment, the need for specialised training and the impact on civilians of the fear of nuclear war and developments in war reporting.

Key terms

It may be useful to provide students with a list of key terms and concepts that they will need to be familiar with at the start of the course. Students should be familiar with the terminology found in the specification content.

The list of terms below is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist, rather simply a useful starting point for teachers to produce their own list of terms that their students may not fully understand or have difficulty spelling.

Students should understand chronological terms such as the nineteenth century, medieval, early modern, modern (1900–present in the thematic studies).

Other key vocabulary for this option includes:

- commander
- conscientious objector
- conscription
- feudal levy
- government
- monarch
- National Service
- parliament
- professional
- propaganda
- recruitment
- volunteer

Specialist terms that should be known include:

- archer
- artillery
- billeting
- cannon
- cavalry
- crossbow
- dragoon
- explosive
- foot soldier
- foraging
- guerrilla war
- high-tech
- Home Front
- infantry
- knight
- logistics
- longbow
- mercenary
- musketeer
- pike
- pikeman
- provisioning
- requisition
- schiltrons
- shortbow
- shrapnel
- spear
- total war
- Western Front

Some key vocabulary for the Historic Environment includes:

- air-raid precautions
- Blitz
- censorship
- evacuation
- incendiaries
- rationing
- safeguard
- shelters
- underground stations

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

2.3 Content exemplification and mapping

This section provides additional guidance on the specification content. It should be remembered that the official specification is the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance. Any examples provided here do not constitute additional specification content, and other relevant material illustrating aspects of change within periods can be used.

The role of key factors in change: students should develop an understanding of the nature and process of change. This involves understanding patterns of change, trends and turning points, and the influence of factors inhibiting or encouraging change within periods and across the theme. The exemplification in the third column below is designed to support this.

c1250–c1500: Medieval warfare and English society	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>1 The nature of warfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The composition of the army, including the roles of the infantry, archer and the mounted knight. The link between social structure and army command.• The impact on warfare (strategy, tactics and combat) of new weapons and formations, including the longbow and schiltrons. The importance of gunpowder and the development of cannon. The decline of the mounted knight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The link between the feudal system and the hierarchy of army command in England.• The importance in battle of the mounted knight and the role of the archer and infantry; the use of mercenaries.• Strategy: offensive and defensive army formations and tactics.• The advantages of the crossbow and the longbow, their impact on battle and the decline of the mounted knight.• Defensive formations, the use of the pike and the schiltron.• The development of gunpowder and cannon – the advantages and limitations of their use in battle and sieges and the need for trained personnel and logistical planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The role of government and individuals: monarch's leadership of a medieval army (e.g. roles of William Wallace, Edward I and Henry V in planning strategy and deciding tactics in battle). Limited role in provisioning or equipping a feudal army.• The role of science, technology and communications: developments in the greater power and accuracy of the crossbow and longbow, the features of the schiltron and the effects of gunpowder.• The role of attitudes in society: influence on the authority and role of the monarch and the knight.

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1250–c1500: Medieval warfare and English society	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>2 The experience of war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recruitment and training of combatants in the medieval feudal army. • The impact of war on civilians, including the impact of feudal duties and army plunder on civilian lives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The link between the feudal system and the feudal levy, the role of the monarch, the role of the local lord and the terms under which individuals at each level served in the army. • Approaches to recruitment, provisioning and equipment. • Daily routine, training, equipment and weapons of the knight, infantry and archer, including the peacetime training of knights and the introduction of compulsory archery practice. • The effects of requisitioning and plunder on civilians. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of government and individuals: the structure of government and attitudes towards authority. • The role of science, technology and communications: the effect on training of technological developments in weapons and the need for new tactics.
<p>3 Case studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Battle of Falkirk (1298): reasons for its outcome; the roles of William Wallace and Edward I. • The Battle of Agincourt (1415): reasons for its outcome; the role of Henry V. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Battle of Falkirk may be used to exemplify: the role of the commander through the decisions of Wallace and/or of Edward I, the failures to engage with the Welsh archers and of the Scottish nobles; the relative size of the armies, the nature of the battleground and the disposition of the troops; the importance of cavalry and of archers; the impact of the new longbow and of the schiltron formation. • Since the development focus in the early sections is on changes in the English army, it is not necessary to study the recruitment of the Scottish army but its composition, weapons and tactics during the battle should be known. • The Battle of Agincourt may be used to exemplify the importance of the leader; the choice of battleground; the relative size and disposition of the troops; the role of the cavalry and of archers; the importance of the longbow; attitudes towards warfare and chivalry. 	<p><i>As above</i></p>

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1500–c1700: Warfare and English society in the early modern period	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>1 The nature of warfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity and change in the composition of the army in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the role of the musketeer, pikemen and the cavalry. The development of a standing army. The impact on warfare of developments in weaponry, including new muskets and pistols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity in that recruitment was on a similar basis to the feudal army, with each section owing loyalty to their own leader but more likely to be paid for their service. Change in the development of a standing army and clearer structure of army command. Change as armies became more professional and training was needed for specific weapons such as muskets and cannon, and for effective use of formations and tactics. Continuity in the basic role of the infantry and cavalry. Change in the way that training for the use of the musket could be done in days, rather than the years of practice needed to become a skilled archer. Change in Cromwell's emphasis on ability as the key to command rather than the previous emphasis on social status. Change in the way that the use of muskets led to the development of a new role for cavalry as mobile dragoons. Changes in the way new weapons led to the use of new formations and new tactics in battle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of government and individuals: development of standing army and structure of army command and attitudes towards authority. The role of science, technology and communications: developments in weapons, especially the shift from the bow to muskets and further use of cannon.

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1500–c1700: Warfare and English society in the early modern period	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>2 The experience of war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recruitment and training of combatants, including the New Model Army. • The impact of war on civilians, including recruitment and requisitioning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity in the link between the local society and central authority for recruitment and the terms under which individuals at each level served in the army. • Continuity and change in the problems of recruitment, provisioning and equipment. • Continuity and change in the daily routine, training, equipment and weapons. • Continuity and change in the effects of requisitioning and plunder on civilians, especially during the civil wars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of government and individuals: the structure of government and attitudes towards authority. • The role of science, technology and communications: the effect on training of technological developments in weapons and the need for new tactics.
<p>3 Case study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Battle of Naseby (1645): reasons for its outcome; the role of Oliver Cromwell. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This case study can be used to exemplify the role of the commander, the importance of the choice of battleground; the relative size and disposition of the troops; new weapons, training and tactics in battle, changes in the composition of the army and the role of cavalry. • Comparisons may be drawn with other case studies to identify change and continuity. 	<p><i>As above</i></p>

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1700–c1900: Warfare and British society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>1 The nature of warfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity and change in the composition of the army, including the decline of the cavalry. Impact on warfare of changes in weaponry, including the use of rifles and bullets, and the development of field guns and heavy artillery. The impact on warfare of industrialisation, including steam-powered transport and the mass production of weapons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change in the development of a professional standing army with some elements of specialisation e.g. rifles, cavalry, artillery and a clear command structure. Change as armies became more professional, soldiers enlisted for a fixed term and training was needed for specific weapons such as rifles and cannon, and for effective use of formations and tactics. Continuity in the basic role of the infantry and cavalry. Change as a result of the development of field guns and artillery and their impact on tactics and formation, such as the use of the volley, infantry squares at Waterloo and the development of trench warfare in the Crimean War and the decline of the cavalry. Change as a result of the standardisation and mass production of weapons. Change as a result of the use of steam engines for rail and sea transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of government and individuals: Changes in the development of a professional standing army. The role of science, technology and communications: developments in weapons especially mass-produced and standardised weapons. Improvements in transport.
<p>2 The experience of war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recruitment and training of combatants, including Cardwell's army reforms and professionalisation. The impact of war on civilians, including recruitment and requisitioning. The impact on popular attitudes of the growth of newspaper reporting and photography in the nineteenth century, exemplified in the Crimean and Boer Wars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change as a result of the need to recruit a large standing army during the nineteenth century and the nature and impact of Cardwell's army reforms on recruitment, terms of service, and promotion. Change as a result of the development of the telegraph, war photography and reporting and the impact on civilian attitudes within Britain, in particular the articles by Russell and photographs by Fenton during the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of government and individuals: recruitment and army reforms; Cardwell's reforms. The role of science, technology and communications: the effect on training of technological developments in weapons and the need for new tactics. The role of attitudes in society: attitudes towards warfare from

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1700–c1900: Warfare and British society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
	<p>Crimean War but also media reports during the Boer Wars.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact on public attitudes of Crimean War and Boer War reporting in daily newspapers and satirical publications such as <i>Punch</i>. 	<p>civilians, especially the effects of war reporting (e.g. highlighting the poor conditions and lack of supplies at the start of the Crimean War; early losses and the treatment of Boer families during the Boer War) and the link between popular attitudes and government action.</p>
<p>3 Case studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Battle of Waterloo (1815): reasons for its outcome; the role of the Duke of Wellington. The Battle of Balaclava (1854): reasons for its outcome; the role of Lord Raglan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These case studies can be used to exemplify the role of the commander (Wellington and Raglan), the importance of the choice of battleground; the relative size and disposition of the troops; new weapons, training and tactics in battle, changes in the composition of the army and the role of cavalry, infantry and artillery. Both battles could be used to illustrate the changing role of artillery and the decline of cavalry (exemplified in the Charge of the Light Brigade) and also formations such as column, line and infantry squares. Comparisons may be drawn with other case studies in order to identify change and continuity. 	<p><i>As above</i></p>

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1900–present: Warfare and British society in the modern era	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<p>1 The nature of warfare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuity and change in the composition of the army, including the growth of a logistics corps and specialised bomb disposal units. The impact on warfare of developments in weaponry, transport and surveillance, including machine guns, tanks, chemical and nuclear weapons, the use of radar and aircraft. The impact of computerised high-tech warfare. The increasing use of motor and air transport and aerial support. Dealing with guerrilla warfare in the twenty-first century. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change as a result of increased specialisation within the army as a result of the development of heavy artillery, tanks, mobile units, engineers, logistics corps, bomb disposal units, technical and support staff. Change, involving the decline of the cavalry, changing role of heavy artillery and changing relationship of the professional army with the Territorial Army. Change as a result of new weapons such the tank, gas, chemical warfare, possible use of nuclear weapons and the use of computerised missiles. Changes in the nature of warfare and tactics of attack and defence from static trench warfare to the mobile warfare of the Second World War, then to computerised war and recent cases of guerrilla war. Changes involving the idea of total war, involving civilians in the war effort and the idea that they are a legitimate target and therefore precautions need to be taken to protect them. Change as a result of the impact of developments in transport, aerial developments and surveillance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of government and individuals: creation of a professional standing army, a voluntary army and introduction of conscription and national service. Mobilisation of the population for total war. The role of science, technology and communications: developments in weapons, especially the mass-produced and standardised weapons. The impact of chemical, nuclear and computerised weapons. Improvements in transport and communications. The use of drones and satellites.
<p>2 The experience of war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recruitment and training of combatants, including the introduction of conscription, national service, the recruitment of women and the development of a professional army. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in recruitment moving from a small professional, standing army to the larger volunteer army and then the introduction of conscription within the First World War. Changes in methods of recruitment, including the use of propaganda, the creation of PALS brigades, the use of national service, the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of government and individuals: changes in recruitment and army reforms. The role of science, technology and communications: the effect on training of technological

2. Warfare and British society, c1250–present

c1900–present: Warfare and British society in the modern era	Exemplification	Exemplification of the role of key factors in change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The impact of war on civilians, including recruitment and the organisation of a Home Front during the First and Second World Wars and fear of nuclear war post-1945. Attitudes to Conscientious Objectors. The influence of war reporting in the period on attitudes, including increased concern for casualties. Government use of censorship and propaganda in wartime. 	<p>return to a voluntary professional force, the role of the Territorial Army.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in the use of propaganda on the 'Home Front' for recruitment, mobilising the population for the war effort in a total war and for taking precautions against attack in the First and Second World Wars and against potential nuclear attack. Continuity and change in popular attitudes towards Conscientious Objectors and fears of attack, e.g. enhanced fear of nuclear war in the early 1980s. Continuity and change in the influence of war reporting. Continuity and change in the role of the government in propaganda and censorship 	<p>developments in weapons and the need for new tactics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of attitudes in society: Attitudes towards warfare from civilians, especially the role of the media and effects of war reporting during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the link between popular attitudes and government action.
<p>3 Case studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Western Front during the First World War and the Battle of the Somme (1916): the nature of trench warfare and war of attrition; reasons for the outcome of the Somme; role of General Haig. The Iraq War (2003): reasons for its outcome; use of high-tech weaponry and surveillance techniques. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These case studies can be used to exemplify the role of the commander (Haig), the importance of the choice of battleground; relative size and disposition of the troops (nature of deployment); new weapons, training and tactics in battle, changes in the composition of the army and the role of cavalry, artillery, tanks, aerial surveillance and computerised weapons. Both case studies could be used to illustrate the changing role of artillery, tanks and the impact of new weapons. Comparisons may be drawn with other case studies in order to identify change and continuity. 	<p><i>As above</i></p>

3. London and the Second World War, 1939–45

3.1 Introduction

During the Second World War, London was a key target for attack because of its role as the capital of Britain and its position in south-east England. Although other cities suffered attack, there was a sustained Blitz on London during two separate periods of the war and therefore the effects of the war were intensified and, at times, unique.

The content is assessed through two questions on features of the period and also through a historical enquiry.

For the historical enquiry, students will need to develop the skills necessary to analyse, evaluate and use contemporary sources to make substantiated judgements, in the context of the historical events studied. To aid teaching, the content is divided into two sections: the first covers the site in its historical context; the second covers knowledge, selection and use of sources relevant to this historic environment for enquiries.

There is a wide range of contemporary source material that can be used to investigate London and the war: photographs, drawings, diaries, letters, national and local newspaper articles, official records and publications, memoirs and records of oral history.

3.2 Content guidance

Students need knowledge of this environment and the situation during the Second World War – events, places, individuals and significant developments that need to be covered are outlined in the specification. Questions 1(a) and (b) each asks students to identify one key feature of one aspect of the content with some related supporting evidence. Developed explanation of the key feature is not required. Question 2(a) requires students to use only sufficient knowledge to support their criteria for judgement, e.g. using contextual knowledge to validate the accuracy or typicality of the source content. Question 2(b) requires knowledge of the potential sources available. The Historic environment (Section A) does not require candidates to write extended amounts of contextual knowledge but to select and apply knowledge appropriate to the question asked.

The context of this work is the unique experience of people in London during the Second World War, which was a result of London's role in government, industry and its geographical position. German bombers could reach London fairly easily because it was within range of the continent and the Thames made it easily identifiable. Industries and the docks made London a strategic target and its role as the centre of government, organisation, communication and propaganda meant that large-scale destruction would have a significant impact on the ability of the country to wage war and on morale.

Students should be aware of the emphasis placed on the level of morale in London, the use of propaganda and censorship, and the role of official posters and leaflets, newspapers, magazines and the BBC. They should understand the impact in London of the precautions that were taken from 1939, such as the provision of gas masks and air-raid shelters; the organisation of evacuation and rationing; campaigns such as 'Dig for Victory' and its use of public spaces like Victoria Park and the Tower of London moat; and systems of wardens, fire watchers and emergency services. They should also realise that some precautions were unique to London, such as the creation of the Cabinet War Rooms and the use of underground stations as air-raid shelters and that people sometimes took action independently, for example, the creation of 'Mickey's shelter'.

3. London and the Second World War, 1939–45

The nature and purpose of the Blitz should be understood, including some knowledge of the types of bomb used in 1940–41 and 1944–45, their effect, and the scale of attack and extent of devastation in London. This should include the development of the V1 and V2 rockets but technical details of different planes and bombs will not be required. Specific examples of attacks and devastation include Black Saturday, the V2 attack on Deptford, the Hallsville School disaster and the Bethnal Green disaster.

The civilian experience of the Blitz in London should be covered, including people's attempts to continue their leisure activities, such as dance halls and the theatre, while daily life was affected by disrupted travel, devastation to buildings, rationing and government efforts to mobilise the civilian population.

Coverage should also include measures taken to organise the civilian population for work, the 'war effort' and the maintenance of morale in London. The appearances of the royal family, of Churchill and of government ministers in the East End were publicised while efforts were privately made to protect important people.

Sources

Students should be aware of the range of types of local sources available to the historian, the sort of information they can yield and their strengths and weaknesses. Personal accounts such as diaries, letters, oral histories and memoirs will provide good insight into specific events and popular attitudes. However, they are all from a personal perspective and therefore may be slightly distorted while sources produced at a later date can be affected by the clarity of memory, their audience or purpose and the influence of hindsight and added knowledge of events.

Public local sources could include local government records about the distribution of gas masks or Anderson shelters, local newspaper reports of events, charity records of help provided after bombing, employment or financial records to show the impact of the bombs, and attendance at cinemas or theatres to show the attempts to continue normal life.

Both public and private sources could include drawings and photographs. These can provide excellent detail but they may have been censored or used to promote morale.

In order to appreciate the significance of local records, students also need an awareness of how national records such as government records, national newspapers, Mass Observation reports, newsreels, memoirs and illustrations can be used to establish context and a basis for comparison between the local and national situations.

For more information on sources, please refer to the [Guidance on sources and interpretations](#) and [Paper 1 guide](#), which look at question types, common problems, and teaching approaches and ideas.

4. Student timeline

The timeline below could be given to students, and could be further edited and added to by them. Inclusion of dates and events in this timeline should not be taken as an indication that these are prescribed: the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

c1250	<i>Start of the specification</i>
1298	Battle of Falkirk
c1350	Use of gunpowder, cannon and 'guns' became more common in warfare
1415	Battle of Agincourt
1645	New Model Army; Battle of Naseby
1815	Battle of Waterloo
1854	Battle of Balaclava; Charge of the Light Brigade
1870s–80s	Cardwell's army reforms
1880–81 1899–1902	Boer Wars
1914–18	First World War
1916	Battle of the Somme; introduction of conscription
1939	Start of Second World War Conscription Evacuation
1940	Start of Blitz Black Saturday (7 September) South Hallsville School disaster
1943	Bethnal Green disaster
1944	V2 attack on Deptford
1945	Atom bomb End of Second World War
1960	National service ended
2003	Iraq War

5. Resources

The sections below list a range of resources that could be used by students and teachers for this topic.

The first section lists information on free support materials available on the Edexcel website. On the [GCSE History \(9–1\) from 2016](#) page:

- select the [Teaching support](#) tab, where resources are separated out by Plan, Teach, and Track and Assess;
- or select the [Course materials](#) tab, and then select the appropriate tab for [Specification and sample assessments](#), [Exam materials](#), or [Teaching and learning materials](#).

The table below provides a selection of the free support materials available on the Edexcel website. Details and links for all the free support available can be found in [this document](#). It is updated regularly, so worth bookmarking.

The second section lists publishers who have been endorsed for GCSE (9–1) History. Endorsement means that a resource has been through our quality assurance process to confirm that it meets the teaching and learning requirements a specification is aimed at. Endorsement of a resource doesn't mean it's the only suitable material available, or that it is required to achieve the qualification.

The remaining sections list both endorsed resources and those that have not been endorsed. While these resources – and others – may be used to support teaching and learning, the official specification and associated assessment guidance materials are the only authoritative source of information and should always be referred to for definitive guidance.

There has been a rapid growth in podcasts in recent years, and we have added below links to a few well-known ones. Some may not be suitable for younger listeners, so please check carefully before sharing with students. Similarly, there are plenty of useful videos for History students on online sharing platforms, and any links below have been checked, but please exercise care before sharing social media links with students.

5.1 Free support materials

Resource	Details
Specification and sample assessment materials	The starting point for information on content and assessment in GCSE (9–1) History.
Past papers, mark schemes and examiner reports	An Edexcel Online login is required to access files with a silver padlock – check with your exams officer if you can't open them.
Getting Started Guide	An overview of the specification, to help you get to grips with the content and assessment requirements of the specification. Updated for Issues 5 and 6.
Summary guidance on changes for 2025 and 2026	Summary guidance with links on the changes being made for Issue 5 (first assessment 2025) and Issue 6 (2026).
Content changes for 2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic guidance • FAQs 	Guidance for each option on the changes being made to the content for Issue 6 of the specification (first assessment June 2026), and FAQs.

5. Resources

Resource	Details
Assessment changes for 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide FAQs 	Guidance on the changes being made to the assessment model for Issue 5 of the specification (first assessment June 2025), and FAQs.
Specification language changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track changes on Rationale FAQs 	Guidance on the language changes made for Issue 4 of the specification (first teaching September 2023, first assessment June 2025).
Guidance on sources and interpretations	Guidance on AO3 sources and AO4 interpretations, looking at question types, common problems, and teaching approaches and ideas.
Paper 1 Guide	Teaching approaches and ideas for the thematic study and historic environment, with case studies from practising teachers.
Schemes of work	Sample outline schemes of work for each topic in the specification, in editable Word files. A digital interactive scheme of work is also available for both KS3 and GCSE.
Mapping documents	Mapping documents to help support teachers in moving to Edexcel GCSE History.
Exemplar student answers	Exemplar student answers, with examiner commentaries and mark schemes.
Student walkthroughs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 1 playlist 	A series of pre-recorded student walkthroughs, created in collaboration with Harris Federation. <i>Updated for Summer 2025.</i>
Revision tips	Some useful revision tips for students.
Command words	A series of student-friendly files exploring each command word in turn, plus a summary document paper-by-paper.

5.2 Endorsed resources*

[Pearson](#) – Designed to help develop confident, articulate and successful historians.

[Hodder Education](#) – The Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel students' book helps students achieve their full potential while ensuring pace, enjoyment and motivation.

[Oxford University Press](#) – Oxford's Edexcel GCSE History student books help to develop young historians who have the confidence to succeed, with the most up-to-date exam practice and a tried-and-trusted, accessible approach.

[Zigzag Education](#) – Photocopiable resources for learning, revision and exam practice.

[Anglia Tours](#) – A range of fully-guided History tours which enhance both teaching and learning for the related Pearson qualification.

[NST Tours](#) – Guided History tours to support teachers and students with GCSE History.

* You don't have to purchase any resources, including those from Pearson, to deliver our qualifications.

5. Resources

5.3 Resources for students

Resource	Details
<i>Edexcel GCSE History (9–1) Warfare through time, c1250–present</i> (Pearson, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the specification.
<i>Revise Edexcel GCSE (9–1) History: Warfare and British Society c1250–present Revision Guide and Workbook</i> (Pearson, 2017)	A combined revision guide and workbook written for this option in the specification.
<i>Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel: Warfare through time, c1250–present</i> (Hodder Education, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the specification.
John Child, Steve Waugh, <i>Edexcel GCSE History B, Schools History Project, Warfare and the Impact of War</i> (Pearson 2009, revised edition 2014)	Textbook produced for the previous version of this thematic study, good on broad themes of change and continuity.
Paul Turner, <i>War & Warfare</i> (Folens, 2003)	KS3 textbook but contains relevant information on certain aspects of the specification and easily accessible.
Aaron Wilkes, James Ball, <i>Technology, War and Identities, A World Study After 1900</i> (OUP, 2009)	KS3 textbook but contains relevant information on certain aspects of the specification and easily accessible.
Paul Dowswell, <i>Weapons and Technology of World War I</i> (Heinemann, 2002)	Good detail on developments in weapons and tactics during the First World War.
Ruth Brocklehurst, Henry Brook, <i>Usborne Introduction to the First World War</i> (Usborne, 2007)	Very visual book, attractive and informative.
Paul Dowswell, <i>Usborne Introduction to the Second World War</i> (Usborne, 2005)	Very visual book, attractive and informative.
DK Eyewitness, <i>Soldier</i> (Dorling Kindersley, 2009)	The Eyewitness series is very visual and informative; titles also cover Knight, Castle, World War I, World War II.
https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/	Good general website, with pages on individual battles and key developments.
BBC Bitesize https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zfmny4j/revision/1	BBC Bitesize, The Development of Warfare, c1250–present day.

5. Resources

5.4 Resources for teachers

Resource	Details
Osprey Publishing https://www.ospreypublishing.com/UK/	A range of titles on specific wars.
Peter Browning, <i>The Changing Nature of Warfare</i> (Cambridge University Press, 2002)	A-level textbook covering 1792–1945.
Geoff Stewart, <i>The Experience of Warfare in Britain 1854–1929</i> (Pearson, 2008)	AS textbook covering Crimea, Boer and the First World War.
Richard Holmes, <i>Redcoats</i> (Harpercollins, 2001)	Richard Holmes is an authority on warfare and the British army.
John Lewis Stempel, <i>The Autobiography of the British Soldier</i> (Headline publishing, 2007)	Good use of detail to illustrate different aspects of warfare during different periods.
Imperial War Museum https://www.iwm.org.uk/ Western Front: https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/the-western-front	Website has excellent details and sources on a range of conflicts and aspects of warfare.
National Army Museum https://www.nam.ac.uk/ Specific pages include: Naseby: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-naseby Waterloo: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-waterloo Balaclava: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-balaklava Somme: https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/battle-somme	Website has good detail on aspects of warfare and the experiences of soldiers.
Battlefields Trust https://www.battlefieldstrust.com/default.asp	Detailed accounts of individual battles.
https://spartacus-educational.com/	Good general website, with pages on specific battles and often providing primary source extracts.
https://www.agincourt600.com/	Website includes articles and places related to Agincourt.
The National Archives, Learning Curve https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/sessions-and-resources/	Resources are available on key people and events, especially during the First and Second World Wars, for example,

5. Resources

	conscientious objectors, General Haig, evacuation
National Portrait Gallery King Charles I Oliver Cromwell	National Portrait Gallery resources, introducing these key figures and guiding students step-by-step through analysing their portraits as historical sources.
School History Website http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk	A very comprehensive website with resources for teaching history. GCSE resources are arranged by exam board and cover most modules. Some resources are free but to get the full range available there is a subscription payment.
https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/hub/secondary	A comprehensive bank of resources for teachers, some free, some paid-for.
Podcast series Historical Association , free to members The Rest Is History Dan Snow's History Hit History Extra You're Dead to Me	There are lots of History podcast series available these days through various platforms. We have listed here a few well-known ones, and you can search for relevant episodes. There are also revision podcasts available. Please check they are suitable before sharing with students.

5.5 Resources for the historic environment

Books covering the Second World War usually have a section focusing on the Blitz. In addition to the resources that relate to the Second World War, the following resources may be useful for the historic environment.

Resource	Details
<i>Edexcel GCSE History (9–1) Warfare through time, c1250–present</i> (Pearson, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the new GCSE specification.
<i>Hodder GCSE History for Edexcel: Warfare through time, c1250–present</i> (Hodder Education, 2016)	Student book written for this option in the new GCSE specification.
Philip Ziegler, <i>London at War, 1939–45</i> (Pimlico, 2002)	Draws on a range of sources, and includes a selection of photos and a useful bibliography.
London Museum https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/	Good information and good primary sources.
London Museum Docklands Docklands at War 1939–1945 https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/docklands/free-galleries/docklands-at-war/	Permanent exhibition on how the Docklands survived and helped the Second World War effort, from Dunkirk to D-Day.
Imperial War Museum, London in the Second World War https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/london-in-the-second-world-war	Includes a good range of primary sources.

5. Resources

<i>Blitz Street</i> (Channel 4, 2010)	Documentary exploring what it was like to live through the Blitz, using a reconstructed street. Clips can be found on YouTube.
BBC, The Blitz https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009sjsh	Witness History – The Blitz 10-minute recording about The Blitz
EyeWitness to History, The Blitz http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/blitz.htm	Primary account.
Bomb Sight www.bombsight.org	Maps bombings during 7 October to 6 June 1941. The 'Explore London' section allows for more detailed exploration of specific areas, including images from each area.
British Pathé www.britishpathe.com Clips relating to war in London 1939-45: https://www.britishpathe.com/search/?searchQuery=war+in+london+1939-45	Large bank of film clips.
<i>London can take it</i> (October 1940) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/theartofwar/films/london_take.htm	Film about London during 1940.

There is no requirement to visit the historic environment site, but for those wishing to, a number of tours offering guided walks of London focusing on the Blitz can be found by searching online. A trip could also incorporate visits to the Imperial War Museum, and to the Museum of London Docklands, including the gallery 'Docklands at War 1939–1945' (see above).

Educational Recording Agency

Transform History Teaching with Multimedia Resources from the Educational Recording Agency (ERA)

[The ERA Licence](#) provides seamless access to television and radio recordings, offering a single point of clearance for the rights needed to create and use authentic media resources in your classroom. With [ERA's free video streaming platform](#), licensed institutions can explore a rich library of curriculum-mapped TV and radio clips tailored to GCSE, AS, and A-level teaching.

Engage your learners with curated clips, full-length documentaries, and programmes that bring historical contexts to life. The platform also includes exclusive access to the **BBC Shakespeare** and **Literary Archives**, offering unique cross-curricular opportunities to enrich your lessons with impactful media—perfect for both homework and classroom activities.

To access this free resource [registration is required](#) - but is quick and simple. State schools in England are licensed under a central agreement with the DfE and the vast majority of independent schools also hold a current ERA Licence.

Our Migration Story

Our Migration Story (<https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/>) has been designed with teachers in mind to support opportunities for teaching students to understand and appreciate the range of peoples, from all places, who have journeyed to and helped to shape the British Isles. It is a free, online resource, created and curated by academics to share source evidence of real individuals and their experiences of migration.

This range of stories and supporting sources will be of most value to teachers delivering our new *Migrants in Britain* thematic study; in addition we have identified *Our Migration Story* resources that could be used whilst teaching other topics on the GCSE (9–1) History specification, some of direct value, some more tangential. They are an interesting way to open up discussion, or to offer different perspectives on the history that you are teaching. More information on the resources and how to deliver them can be found at: <https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/information-for-teachers/>.

For this topic, you might wish to consider:

- Germanophobia and World War I
<https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/germanophobia-and-germans-in-britain-in-the-early-twentieth-century>.

This looks at the impact of WW1 on German immigrants.

- Global Britons at war: from service to settlement
<https://www.ourmigrationstory.org.uk/oms/british-servicemen-from-around-the-world>.

An article about the Commonwealth troops who supported Britain in WWII, some of whom chose to settle in Britain after the war.