



Work of Historians/Archaeologists

History – Junior Cert

Quick Notes

WORK OF HISTORIANS/ARCHAEOLOGISTS

History:

- History is the ‘Story of the Past’ – historians must gather evidence to know what happened just like detectives must gather evidence to solve a case
- Evidence for historians come from sources – Primary Sources and Secondary Sources
- A Primary Sources is evidence that comes directly from the period being studied – if studying Ancient Rome, a Roman coin would be a Primary Source
- A Secondary Sources is evidence that comes from after the period being studied but is related to it – if studying Ancient Rome, a documentary film on Gladiators would be a Secondary Source
- Sources can also be classified as **oral** (word of mouth), **written** (letters, diaries, newspapers), **pictorial** (photographs, films, paintings), **artefacts** (man-made objects of historical importance), **monuments** (buildings) etc
- When evaluating sources, historians must be careful about **bias** (favouring one side over another), **exaggeration** (changing of the facts to make something more exciting, shocking etc), **prejudice** (forming an opinion about something or somebody before knowing all the facts) and **propaganda** (spreading of ideas to influence people to think a certain way)
- Different sources have different strengths and weaknesses – diaries can give very personal insights into the mind of a specific person from a specific time but could be very narrow in scope or be biased
- In Western society, history before the birth of Christ is labelled **BC** (Before Christ), and after is labelled **AD** (Anno Domini or ‘Year of Our Lord’) – thus the year 1 AD to the year 100 AD is called the 1st Century AD, 101 AD to 200 AD is called the 2nd

Century AD and so on

Archaeology:

- Archaeology means ‘the study of ancient things’ – it is concerned with **material remains**, i.e. buildings, objects, skeletons etc
- Archaeology is especially useful when studying periods of history **before the invention of writing** – when there are no written primary sources to consult, all the evidence we have is what remains below or above the ground, e.g. the Stone Age
- Archaeologists find places to dig or **excavate** in a number of ways – **ruins of old buildings** can point to a promising area, **old maps** can show buildings or sites that have since vanished above ground, **old myths and stories** can have elements of truth in them, **aerial photography** can show strange features of the landscape that might be missed if looking at ground level and sometimes **blind good luck** can see people discover treasures purely by accident
- Once a site has been found, archaeologists carefully fence it off and then divide it into sections that are numbered and lettered so that any finds can be recorded accurately – e.g. “a chalice was found in section D4”
- While digging, archaeologists use a wide variety of tools – shovels, pickaxes, mechanical diggers, trowels, brushes, buckets, sieves, pen and paper, string etc
- Any finds must be carefully recorded, labelled, packed away and classified
- Archaeologists can date finds by examining and counting the layers of earth (**stratigraphy**) – the more layers down the older the find is, by analysing the amount of **Carbon 14** still in the object or by using catalogues of tree rings going back thousands of years (**dendrochronology**)
- Archaeologists may have to work almost anywhere – deserts, mountains or even

underwater – and thus are at the mercy of the weather, be it wind, hot sun, rain, damp etc

- In big cities, air pollution, traffic, construction deadlines etc make matters worse
- Archaeology can be of great benefit to the economy – spectacular finds will attract tourists who will spend money

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