The Robert Robson History Prize is a competition for interested school students in Year 12 or the Lower 6th who are considering studying History (or a related degree course) at university.

The Prize is organised by Trinity College, Cambridge. It is established in memory of Robert Robson, a dedicated teacher of history at Trinity for many years. It aims to encourage students with an interest in History to cultivate that interest through researching and writing a specialist essay, and to recognise the achievements both of high-calibre students and of those who teach them.

Essays should provide references to sources of information, and include a bibliography at the end of the essay. Essays may be up to 3,000 words, including all footnotes and references but excluding the bibliography.

The Prize is for students in their penultimate year of school at the time the questions are released. Thus to be eligible for the 2023 competition, you should be expecting to receive your final school results in the year from September 2023 to August 2024. This condition is held to strictly and, in the interest of fairness, no exceptions will be made. Each entrant to the competition is allowed to submit only one essay.

Essays must be submitted by 12 noon (UK time) on Tuesday, 1 August 2023. Please submit essays using the online form below. Please include your name on the document and save the file as “Surname, First name”.

The competition carries a First Prize of £600, to be split equally between the candidate and his or her school or college (the school or college’s portion of the prize to be issued in the form of book tokens), and a Second Prize of £400, which again is to be shared equally between the candidate and his or her school or college. Prize-Winners and Highly Commended candidates will be announced in September, and will be invited to visit the College to meet some of the teaching staff.

Any queries from students who may be interested in submitting work for the prize, or their teachers, should be directed to Dr Richard Serjeantson by email to robsonprize@trin.cam.ac.uk.
Answer one question. Essays should supply references to the evidence offered, ideally in the form of footnotes. A bibliography of works consulted should also be appended. Essays must not be longer than 3,000 words, including footnotes, but excluding the bibliography.

1. What use can the historian of Archaic Greece make of poetic texts?

2. Does Aristotle have an answer to the question he himself asks in the *Politics*, whether the best law or the best man should rule?

3. Does the divide between ‘Classical’ and ‘Hellenistic’ periods conceal the fundamental continuities between them?


5. Why, and how effectively, did the Roman authorities persecute Christians?

6. To what extent did Justinian ruin the empire he set out to restore?

7. What was the nature of the Roman legacy in fifth- and sixth-century Britain?

8. What factors best explain the emergence and expansion of Islam in the seventh century?

9. How reliable a witness is Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* to the impact of the adoption of Christianity upon the character and practice of kingship in seventh-century England?

10. What do the legal sources reveal of the nature of early medieval Irish society?

11. Why did King Alfred consider wisdom so important a quality for those who exercised power and authority?

12. How did the nature and impact of Scandinavian settlement vary across the islands of Britain and Ireland?

13. What was the impact of the Norman Conquest on Anglo-Saxon women?

14. Why do queens appear to play a more prominent political role in tenth- and eleventh-century England?
15. Were the immediate political effects of the Norman Conquest in 1066 more devastating than those of Cnut’s conquest in 1016?

16. To what extent was Norman rule in England ‘colonial’?

17. How useful is the concept of ‘Renaissance’ for understanding the intellectual developments of the twelfth century?

18. Were foreign incursions the greatest cause of political instability in medieval Ireland?

19. ‘Technological innovation had a sporadic but significant impact on agriculture in the Middle Ages.’ Discuss.

20. Were relations between the Mongols and the Rus in this period necessarily adversarial?

21. ‘Works of art in medieval Britain were commissioned more for the benefit of the dead than for the living.’ Discuss with reference to two or more forms of art and/or architecture.

22. Why were there schisms in the Church during the late middle ages in Europe?

23. Why were some Jewish communities treated better than others across medieval Europe?

24. Is it more useful to the historian to understand the politics of later medieval England within a national, a British or a continental context?

25. Has the Protestant complexion of the Elizabethan regime been overstated?

26. In what ways were the early modern Spanish and Portuguese empires different from each other?

27. What role did seventeenth-century natural philosophers regard experimentation as playing in natural science? Discuss with reference to one or more of Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle, and Isaac Newton.

28. Was the criminal law in early modern England a tool of the elite?

29. To what extent were gender roles shaped by understandings of human bodies in the early modern period?

30. When and why did the execution of Charles I become inevitable?
31. What is the relationship between sovereignty and government in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*?

32. To what extent was the Ottoman Empire a military threat to Christian Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?

33. How did London maintain such a dominant role in Britain’s urban system?

34. ‘Historians have more to learn from the origins of rebellions than from their consequences.’ Discuss with reference to any one or more early modern territory.

35. Which was more important in driving overseas expansion from early modern Britain: trade or religion?

36. What account does John Locke’s Second Treatise of Government offer of the ‘end’ of civil government?

37. ‘Enclosure was a necessary precondition for raising agricultural productivity in England.’ Discuss.

38. Why, according to Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, is the general will always right?

39. Does the American constitution owe more to the ideas of whigs or of royalists?

40. ‘The collapse of the French Old Regime and the French Revolution were independent yet interdependent events.’ Discuss.

41. What justifies revolution, according to Edmund Burke?

42. How close did Britain come to revolution in the 1790s?

43. To what extent does Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* serve as a precursor to her later *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*?

44. How ‘balanced’ was the British constitution? (Answer with reference to either the eighteenth or the nineteenth century.)

45. What, for Hegel, is the difference between civil society and the state?

46. Why were there significant changes in the principal diseases affecting the population of Britain before and after c. 1830?

47. What did ‘the West’ mean for Russian élites in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

49. Why did concepts of race shift over the period between 1715 and 1890?

50. When and why did class relations become a dominant force in British society?

51. ‘The Empire is ephemeral’ (J. R. Seeley, 1883). How far does this reflect the attitude of political leaders towards Britain’s imperial mission up to 1919?

52. Did new forms of transport and communication really bring eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europeans together?

53. How significant was the Easter Rising in determining the collapse of the Union with Ireland?

54. ‘The best possible monument to the last war would be to pull down all the monuments that were erected in the Boer War’ (Edwin Lutyens, 1925). Discuss.

55. ‘Labour was back on the path to electoral victory as early as 1935.’ Discuss.

56. Is the onset of the Cold War best interpreted as a Soviet land grab?

57. Why did divorce rise so dramatically over the course of the twentieth century in Britain?

58. Discuss the account of the relationship between imperialism and violence in one or more of Lenin, Césaire, Fanon, and Schumpeter.

59. How influential was feminism in shaping the appeals that British political parties made to women since their enfranchisement?

60. ‘The primary role of the English education system was to reinforce economic distinctions with social and cultural distinctions.’ Discuss with reference to any period since 1880.

61. To what extent was there a sexual revolution following 1968? (Discuss with reference either to Europe or to North America.)

62. Is John Rawls’s liberal theory of justice structurally unable to understand racialised oppression?

63. ‘This is a nation founded on the Bible’ (Margaret Thatcher, 1988). Discuss the implications of this statement for her vision of politics.