

# The Good Book Guide

THE GREAT POWERS AND THE EUROPEAN STATES SYSTEM 1814-1914 by F.R. Bridge and Roger Bullen. Longman, Second edition 2005. x + 365 pp. Index. £16.99 pbk

Books on international relations can sometimes be quite dry and theoretical for the sixth form historian with the motivation of the individual lost among structural analysis. There is also, sometimes, a worry about books written by joint authors in terms of a continuity of style. Second editions are also, sometimes, minor reworkings with the bright new cover not justifying the expense.

Readers need not have any worries on these scores. This is an essential book for any school library. It is over 20 years since the original publication of this important book I remember with affection using as an undergraduate. Not only is the new edition nearly twice as long as the original it has been extensively rewritten by F.R. Bridge, the surviving member of the partnership. This is a model of a good history book. It is very well written with a sharp analysis interwoven into the detailed narrative. It is also very accessible, with chapters broken down into distinct sections with a very good index which includes a separate section for key individuals. There is also a very clear chapter by chapter bibliography, invaluable for students embarking on Personal Studies in this area. Those wanting a synoptic overview of international relations of the Vienna to Versailles era need look no farther than the opening chapter to see the essential signposts of continuity and change over this most exciting of periods.

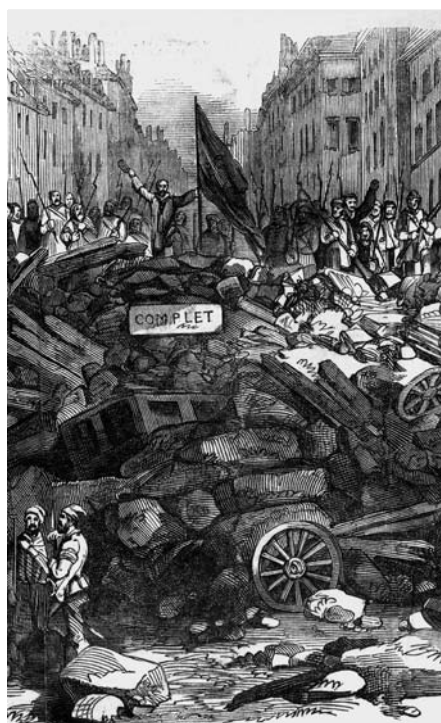
Perhaps there could have been a few more maps and a brief historiographical survey as a complement to the opening chapter, but it would be churlish to detract from a hearty recommendation of this most excellent book which was a pleasure to read.

Andrew Bamford

PEEL by Graham Goodlad. GLADSTONE by Graham Goodlad. Both Collins - Flagship Historymakers series, 2004. Both v + 64 pp. Index. £5.99 pbk each

For such compact little books the Historymaker series aim to pack a lot in. They claim in their blurb to explain how historians differ, provide three key ideas of the politician's career to analyse with recent historiographical interpretations, plus a promise of exam style questions and aids to revision. Do they do what it says on the tin?

Graham Goodlad should be



*No modern revolution, such as that in Paris in 1848 (above), has been fully free from the great antecedent, the 1789 French Revolution*

congratulated for the clear and incisive way in which he deals with the key issues such as Gladstonian liberalism and Peel's Irish policies. The text is lively and user-friendly, with a good range of diagrams, sources and definitions to aid understanding. I liked the use of the landmark study boxes to focus on the key books which changed people's views such as Boyd Hilton on Peel.

The books are good summaries without dunning down the essence of the historical debate. The one on Peel works slightly better than that on Gladstone. This is probably due to rubric and word restriction that Mr Goodlad was working to. In a career as long as Gladstone's it is difficult to pin down his impact into three main questions. While the areas on Ireland and foreign policy are effective, the chapter on his great reforming ministry needs more concrete examples to sustain the philosophical debate on the nature of liberalism. It was also surprising to find no reference to Gladstone's most recent biographer, Roy Jenkins, in the useful index to historians. Naturally, Peel's career is more easily summarised in the three sections though a little more could be said on the issue of Corn Law reform.

The books are less successful in their aim of integrating exam style questions and revision into the text. Instead of a rather bland section on why historians differ, more time could have

been devoted to worked examples emphasising the difference between an excellent and mediocre response to the questions posed with some bullet points on which to base a plan. I would also have liked to have a slightly more personal imprint from the author as to his own views about the historical debates he so lucidly described.

Nevertheless, these are highly useful, well produced and focused books which will serve students well when seeking to address the historical debate, though they will have to look farther in securing revision tips and essay/document skills' advice.

Andrew Bamford

REVOLUTIONS IN WORLD HISTORY by Michael D. Richards. Routledge - Themes in World History series, 2004. viii + 104 pp. Index. £12.99 pbk

The title of Chapter 1, 'Bringing Revolutions back into History', encapsulates the theme of this useful little book. It extends thinking, makes connections and looks forwards as well as backwards (and how else do we justify our subject?). It will challenge the pre-interview candidate, inform group discussion and contextualise much snapshot history.

In 100 pages Richards explores revolutions in Mexico, Russia, Vietnam and Iran, linking and contrasting them and judging them against the British experiences of the seventeenth century, 'the first true revolution in world history'. He is alert to recent writing, is never afraid to offer judgements and he establishes his links with conviction. We learn that the Mexican revolution after 1910 led to a highly sterile political life for several decades. In Russia, from 1905, the revolution became a costly, flawed and utopian project 'based on a fundamental misreading of human nature'. The Vietnamese experience, from 1946, was essentially about national liberation and unification; the Marxist agenda was given little attention, even by the communists. In Iran, from as early as 1906, religion shaped the revolutions, which were about resistance to reform. The later Shah alienated powerful groups and offended religious sensibilities. Similarly the British, Richards argues: the 1640s were an attempt to safeguard time-honoured rights and customs, their 'revolutionary' vehicle coming to rest at the end of the century.

Read this little book because it will provoke, inform and give pleasure. What more could you want?

Richard Miller