

Paper 3, Option 33: The witch craze in Britain, Europe and North America, c1580–c1750

Overview

This option comprises two parts: the *Aspects in breadth* focus on long-term changes and contextualise the *Aspects in depth*, which focus in detail on key episodes.

Together, the breadth and depth topics explore the nature of the witch craze that took hold in the late sixteenth century and the changing attitudes to magic and sorcery that eventually contributed to its decline. Together, students will study the social, economic, political and dimensions of the phenomenon, and the broad intellectual changes that ushered in what is often called the Age of Reason.

Aspects in breadth: challenges to the witch craze, c1580–c1750	
Themes	Content
1 Changing attitudes to witchcraft in Britain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existence and growth of scepticism, c1580–c1750: the impact of notable frauds and doubtful cases (key developments: the case of the Boy of Burton 1597, the Pendle Swindle 1634, the Demon Drummer of Tedworth 1662, the case of Jane Wenham in 1712); the influence of Lord Chief Justice Sir John Holt, 1689–1710. The impact of notable sceptic publications, c1580–c1750: Reginald Scot's <i>The Discoverie of Witchcraft</i> 1584, Samuel Harsnett's <i>A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practices of John Darrel</i> 1599, Thomas Ady's <i>A Candle in the Dark</i> 1656, John Webster's <i>The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft</i> 1677 (key development: the publication of Balthasar Bekker's <i>The Enchanted World</i> 1691).
2 The wider intellectual context: the coming of the age of science and reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making sense of the universe and its impact, c1580–c1750: the coexistence of new and older ideas and impact of Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton. The changing approach to human understanding and knowledge, c1580–c1750 (key developments: Francis Bacon and the empirical scientific approach, the foundation of Gresham College 1597 and the Royal Society 1662, Thomas Hobbes's deductive reasoning and materialism, John Locke and his <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> 1690).

Aspects in depth: persecuting witches

Key topics	Content
1 The North Berwick witches in Scotland, 1590–91 and the aftermath to 1597	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The origins of the persecution: Gilly Duncan's confession; the impact of James VI's voyage from Denmark; the extent to which Danish witch hunting influenced events in Scotland. The widening net: the case of Agnes Sampson and John Fian; the role of the king and torture; the involvement of the Earl of Bothwell; impact of the confessions, trials and executions. Reasons for the extent of persecutions in Scotland to 1597, including judicial procedures, lack of strong central control, the role of King James and significance of his <i>Daemonologie</i>.
2 The Lancashire witches of 1604–13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The influence of social, economic and religious context of the area around Pendle in the early seventeenth century and the significance of the new witchcraft statute of 1604. The origins of the case: Alizon Device and John Law; the investigations of Roger Nowell; Old Demdike and Old Chattox and their witchcraft families; the meeting at Malkin Tower. The trial 1612: the Judges Bromley and Altham; the conduct and outcomes of the trial; impact of Thomas Potts's account.
3 The Great Witch Hunt, in Bamberg, Germany, 1623–32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The economic, political and religious context: reclaiming territory for the Catholic Church; the impact of the Thirty Years War on Bamberg in these years; economic crises. Numbers and social groups affected by the witch hunts; the use of torture and property confiscations; the roles of the Prince-Bishop von Dornheim and Frederick Forner. The reasons for the ending of the craze: the influence of the Emperor Ferdinand II and the Imperial Chamber Court; the arrival of the Swedish Army.
4 Matthew Hopkins and the East Anglian witch craze, 1645–47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic and political context: the impact of the breakdown of traditional authority and legal structures; economic crises. Geography, numbers, class and gender of victims; the roles and methods of Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne and reasons for their influence and power. The ending of the witch craze: the growing cost; the re-establishment of traditional authority; the role of John Gaule.
5 Cotton Mather and the Salem witch hunt, 1692–93	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social, economic and political context of Salem: weakened authority following the 1688 Revolution; Indian threats and economic crisis; social tensions. The influence of Cotton Mather, including <i>Memorable Providences relating to Witchcraft and Possessions</i>; instigators, including the roles of Samuel Parris, children and Tituba; the nature of the victims; the trials and executions. Reasons for the ending of the witch hunt: the roles of Cotton Mather's father and Governor Phips; the general pardon.