Foxford Learning

YEAR 12 History
Paper 3, Option 33: The Witch Craze in Britain, Europe and North America, c1580–c1750

Over the course of the topic, I will be able to: -

Breadth Theme 1: Changing attitudes to witchcraft in Britain, c1580–c1750

Key Vocabulary

Scepticism	Doubt or disbelief in widely held claims; here, witchcraft accusations.
Witch craze	The widespread persecution of alleged witches across early modern Europe.
Prosecution	The legal process of formally charging and trying someone with a crime.
Acquittal	A legal verdict declaring a defendant not guilty of the charge.
Fraud	Deliberate deception designed to mislead courts, clergy, or the public.
Possession	The supposed taking over of a person's body and will by a demon.
Confession	A formal admission of guilt, often extracted under pressure or torture.
Spectral evidence	Evidence based on dream visions claiming to show a witch's spirit.
Pamphlet	A short printed work used to spread ideas or argument to a wide audience.
Empiricism	The theory that knowledge must be grounded in observable, testable evidence.
Lord Chief Justice	The most senior judge in England; John Holt held this office 1689–1710.
Decline	The gradual reduction and eventual cessation of witch prosecutions.

Key Skills

- Analyse and explain the social, economic, religious and political factors behind witch persecution.
- Evaluate the roles of key individuals and institutions in prosecuting or challenging witch belief.
- Analyse and evaluate contemporary source material related to the witch craze.
- Retrieve knowledge to construct verbal and written arguments related to the key topics.
- Compose effective responses to essay questions.

I will understand

Topic 1. The growth of scepticism, c1580–c1750 - The impact of notable frauds and doubtful cases: the Boy of Burton 1597; the Pendle Swindle 1634; the Demon Drummer of Tedworth 1662; the case of Jane Wenham 1712.

Topic 2. The role of Sir John Holt, 1689–1710 - Holt's consistent record of acquittals in witch trials; his challenge to spectral evidence; his wider significance for the decline of witch prosecutions in England.

Topic 3. Notable sceptic publications, c1580–c1750 - Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft 1584; Harsnett 1599; Thomas Ady 1656; John Webster 1677; and the significance of Balthasar Bekker's The Enchanted World 1691.