



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Thursday 26 May 2022 – Morning

A Level History A

Y312/01 Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries

Time allowed: 2 hours 30 minutes

You must have:

- the OCR 12-page Answer Booklet



INSTRUCTIONS

- Use black ink.
- Write your answer to each question in the Answer Booklet. The question numbers must be clearly shown.
- Fill in the boxes on the front of the Answer Booklet.
- Answer the question in Section A and **any two** questions in Section B.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is **80**.
- The marks for each question are shown in brackets [].
- Quality of extended response will be assessed in questions marked with an asterisk (*).
- This document has **4** pages.

ADVICE

- Read each question carefully before you start your answer.

SECTION A

Read the two passages and then answer Question 1.

- 1 Evaluate the interpretations in **both** of the two passages and explain which you think is more convincing as an explanation as to whether the prosecutions of witches in East Anglia were initiated from above or below. [30]

Passage A

The only English prosecutions which were obviously stimulated from above, in the continental manner, were the work of professional witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins, and his associate John Stearne. Hopkins' campaign probably brought him some personal profit, though both he and Stearne denied it. His two hundred or so victims also constituted a sizeable proportion of the total number of witches executed in England. But professional witch-hunters were exceptional. At a time when it was customary for professional promoters to initiate prosecutions for every kind of offence, their relative absence is notable. Local corporations occasionally financed prosecutions, and local clergy or gentry, influenced by continental ideas, sometimes set out to extract confessions of participation in diabolic witchcraft. But the evidence does not support the view that, the Hopkins affair apart, many English witch-prosecutions were initiated from above. Although Hopkins ran into some opposition, there is every reason to think that what he did was to turn a higher proportion of informal popular allegations and suspicions into actual prosecutions, twisting them from charges of maleficium* into allegations of devil-worship in the process. There is no reason to think that the persecution of witches in England originated in a campaign led by clerics and lawyers against the instincts of ordinary people. Whatever the role of judges and inquisitors may have been on the Continent, it cannot be said that in England the judiciary ever took much initiative in the prosecution of witches.

* maleficium – mischief or evildoing, any magical act intended to cause harm or death to people or property

Adapted from: K. Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, published in 1978.

Passage B

All the time Hopkins and Stearne were building on pre-existing and localised tensions and could not have succeeded without wider support from below. Over twenty people witnessed against the six most notorious witches. Hopkins and Stearne were only part of an influential group who wished to exterminate witches. There is also evidence of counter-pressure. Again, this illustrates the way in which witchcraft accusations mobilised wider rivalries in the village. The usual explanation for the prosecutions is that they were stirred up by Hopkins and Stearne. The usual motive ascribed to them is greed. A similar impression is that Hopkins and Stearne, like the justices, clergymen, and other notable inhabitants, really believed that they were performing a public service, dealing with a public menace. The witch-finders repeatedly asserted that they did not go around stirring up trouble, but only answered a public demand, as Hopkins said he only went to towns where he was welcomed. The pressure behind the trials could not have been exerted by a small group of witch-finders; they were distributed far more widely. Given the demand for their services, Hopkins and Stearne could well argue that they merely gave local authorities expert advice.

Adapted from: A. Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, published in 1970.

SECTION B

Answer **TWO** of the following three questions.

- 2*** 'Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the large-scale persecution of witches was the result of pressure from below.' How far do you agree? **[25]**
- 3*** To what extent did the social and employment composition of those prosecuted for witchcraft change during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? **[25]**
- 4*** To what extent did the response of authorities to witchcraft change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? **[25]**

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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