Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE

History

Advanced
Paper 3: Themes in breadth with aspects in depth
Option 33: The Witchcraze in Britain, Europe and North America c1580–c1750

Tuesday 19 June 2018 – Morning
Source Booklet

Paper Reference
9HI0/33

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Source for use with Section A.

From a letter written by Governor William Phips to the Earl of Nottingham in London, 21 February 1693. Phips had arrived in Salem in May 1692. The Earl of Nottingham was the Secretary of State with responsibility for overseas territories.

I have already given an account that, at my arrival here, I found the prisons full of people arrested upon superstition of witchcraft. Continual complaints were made to me that many persons had been grievously tormented by witches. These persons named several individuals as the cause of their torments. The number of these complaints increased every day and, by advice of the Lieutenant Governor and the Council, I set up a Court of Oyer and Terminer to try the suspected witches. The head of the Court was the Lieutenant Governor and the rest were persons of the best character and judgement. I depended upon the Court for the right method of proceeding in cases of witchcraft.

At this time I then went to command the army at the Eastern part of the Province and I continued there for some time. When I returned I found people much dissatisfied at the proceedings of the Court, for about twenty persons were condemned and executed of which some were thought to be innocent. The Court still proceeded in the same method of trying them, which was by the evidence of the victims. When the witnesses were brought into the Court, as soon as the suspected witches looked upon them, they fell instantly to the ground. Once revived, they swore that the prisoner did afflict them and that they saw a spectre come from the bodies of the accused. And the victims also swore that this then put them to pain and torments. This was taken to be undoubted proof of the accused being witches, but I was certain that some of those who were accused were innocent.

The use of these methods continued until I put an end to the Court and stopped the proceedings. There were at least fifty persons in prison, most of them having only spectre evidence against them and their arrest warrants were wrong. I let some of them out on bail and the judges freed others. Some of the judges acknowledged that their former proceedings were too violent and not based upon the right legal foundation.

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