Paper 2 Section A Thematic study: Britain: Power and the people, c.1170-present day

Summary Booklet

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Revision sheet 18  Power and the People Background and Magna Carta

- After 1066 William the Conqueror developed the feudal system based on land, loyalty and obligations.
- The barons were below the king, but above knights and peasants.
- The Church became very powerful as the King and barons granted it land.
- It became custom for new kings to grant Charters of Liberties based on the idea that people had been freer under English law from before the Norman Conquest.
- King John (1199-1216) was unpopular because he was cruel, lost land in wars against France, fell out with the Pope and charged high taxes.
- In June 1215 the barons and Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, forced John to accept their grievances.
- This 'Magna Carta' promised personal liberties, the rule of law and limits on taxes the King could collect without consent.
- John soon rejected efforts to force him to accept Magna Carta.
- Civil war broke out, but ended when John died in 1216 and was succeeded by Henry III.
- Later Kings reissued Magna Carta and it has become seen throughout the world as a symbol of people's freedoms under the law.
Revision sheet 19  Henry III, Simon de Montfort and the Origins of Parliament

- Henry III became King in 1216 and Magna Carta was re-issued in 1216, 1217 and 1225.

- Henry's extravagance and arbitrary rule brought him into conflict with his barons.

- Increasingly in the 1230s and 1240s Parliaments (or 'talking meetings') were called.

- In 1258 barons forced Henry to accept the Provisions of Oxford.

- An uneasy stand-off between the King and many barons became war when Simon de Montfort's army defeated Henry III at Lewes in May 1264.

- De Montfort effectively became ruler.

- In January 1265 representatives of the Commons (knights and burgesses) were invited to Parliament for the first time as the barons' support for de Montfort declined.

- The Commons' grievances were addressed in return for the right to tax them.

- De Montfort was defeated and killed by Henry's son Edward at Evesham in August 1265.

- De Montfort is known as the 'Father of Parliament' because he began the role of the Commons.
Revision Sheet 20 Peasants’ Revolt

- In the early C14th there were floods, drought and famine and the gap between rich and poor increased.

- The Black Death killed up to 50% of the population, 1348-1349.

- The 1351 Statute of Labourers, Sumptuary Laws and Game Laws all made life harder for ordinary people.

- To fund wars against France, Richard II charged a Poll Tax in 1377, 1379 and 1381.

- In May 1381 tax collectors were forced to flee when villagers in Brentwood, Essex refused to pay.

- Wat Tyler led rebels from Kent who freed John Ball from prison in June 1381.


- Richard II met the rebels at Mile End on 14 June and Smithfield on 15 June.

- After Wat Tyler was killed Richard said he would meet their demands, including ending serfdom.

- After the rebels dispersed, the King changed his mind and thousands were killed.

- Though the Revolt failed in the short term, it frightened the authorities and inspired future protests.
Parishioners in Louth, Lincolnshire were concerned about the pace of change from Catholicism, the 1536 dissolution of their local monastery, Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon and increased taxes.

On 2 October 1536 one of the King's Commissioners was captured and forced to write to Henry to express their grievances.

Gentry joined the revolt and the Lincoln Articles were sent to Henry.

When rebels heard Henry was angry and sending an army, they melted away and 57 were executed for their part in the revolt.

Robert Aske was a York-based lawyer who got caught up in the Lincolnshire Rising.

He helped spread the revolt into Yorkshire, leading 30,000 rebels marching on York.

Their demands included restoration of the 'old ways' of religion and lower taxes.

They didn't want to remove the King, but to remove people like Thomas Cromwell who were thought to be leading him astray.

The revolt spread in the north, including up to 50,000 knights, gentry and commoners.

Henry tricked the rebels, 216 were executed and he emerged more firmly in control.
Revision Sheet 22  English Civil War and Aftermath

- Civil war broke out between supporters of Charles I and supporters of Parliament in 1642.
- Causes included feared Catholicism, ruling without Parliament (1649-1640) and taxes such as ship money.
- Many soldiers in Cromwell’s successful New Model Army held strongly Puritan religious views.
- In the 1647 Putney Debates ideas of Levellers such as John Lilburne, including every man having the vote, were rejected by Cromwell.
- Other radical groups such as Diggers emerged, demanding abolition of private property.
- In January 1649 Charles I was executed, then monarchy itself and the House of Lords were abolished as England was declared a Commonwealth.
- Cromwell dismissed Parliament and became Lord Protector in 1653.
- His strict Puritan rule made him unpopular.
- In 1660 monarchy was restored, with Charles II as King.
- In the 1688 Glorious Revolution the Protestants William of Orange and his wife Mary replaced her father, James II.
- They had to accept their reign was conditional, with Parliament having joint control of the army and making laws.
- The Bill of Rights also said no British monarch could ever be Catholic.
By 1775 2.5m people lived in the Thirteen Colonies of Britain along the eastern seaboard of North America.

In the 1756-1763 Seven Years war for control of American colonies between Britain and France, Britain wanted the colonies to pay the costs of some of the British troops protecting them.

Britain passed Stamp Acts to impose further customs and duties in the American colonies.

In the 1773 ‘Boston Tea Party’ colonists tipped tea from the East India Company into Boston harbour in protest at British taxes.

Thomas Paine’s 1776 The Rights of Man argued that the American colonies should be independent from Britain.

British politicians were generally divided between Tories who wanted to keep control of the colonies and Whigs who supported ideas of greater freedom and independence (at home and abroad).

The idea of ‘No taxation without representation’ appealed to many.

In 1776 leaders of all 13 colonies came together and declared independence, using language echoing that of Magna Carta.

Britain fought and lost the American War of Independence by 1781.

This ‘American Revolution’ led to the spread of belief in democracy, freedom and basic human rights, partly inspiring many protests against ruling elites in Britain during the late C18th and throughout the C19th.
Revision Sheet 24 C19th Reform

- In the early C19th very few people could vote and the electoral system was very unrepresentative and corrupt.
- Conservatives wanted to keep things as they were, radicals such as Major John Cartwright and William Cobbett wanted reform.
- In August 1819 at least 11 people were killed in the ‘Peterloo Massacre’ when people came to listen to Henry ‘Orator’ Hunt talk about reform at St Peter’s Field, Manchester.
- The 1832 Great Reform Act extended the right to vote to around 650,000 people.
- From 1838-1848 Chartists campaigned for further reforms, including votes for all men.
- Chartists failed at the time, but further reform acts extended the franchise in 1867, 1872 and 1884.
- Anti-slavery campaigners included Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, Josiah Wedgwood and Olaudah Equiano.
- The slave trade was abolished in 1807 and slavery abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833.
- The Anti-Corn Law League, including the powerful speeches of John Bright, achieved success when the Corn Laws were repealed by Sir Robert Peel’s government in 1846.
- Other reformers included Lord Shaftesbury (factories and education), Octavia Hill (living conditions), Elizabeth Fry (prisons) and Florence Nightingale (nursing).
Revision Sheet 25 C19th trade unions

- Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 banned workers from combining to try to force change.

- Nevertheless early trade unions formed to try to protect wages, often in the face of new technology.

- In 1834 the GNCTU tried to combine workers from all trades across the country.

- In 1834 the six 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' were transported to Australia for 7 years for trying to form a union and get a pay rise.

- A massive campaign led to them being pardoned and returning to England in 1837.

- In 1868 the Trades Union Congress, a meeting with delegates from across the whole country began.

- In the 1880s unions of non-skilled workers grew.

- In 1888 Annie Besant led the successful strike of match-girls at the Bryant and May factory.

- There were further successful strikes, including gas workers, dockers and transport workers in the late C19th.

- Employers used 'black legs', lock outs and the courts to fight back against union power.

- In 1893 the Independent Labour Party was formed to represent workers' interests, with Keir Hardie becoming the first Labour MP.
Revision Sheet 26  Votes for Women

- Women's suffrage (the right to vote) was explicitly forbidden in the 1832 Great Reform Act

- After women were excluded from voting again in the 1867 Reform Act the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), led by Millicent Fawcett, was formed.

- They used touring speakers, leaflets, pamphlets, a newspaper and interrupting meetings to promote their cause.

- Opponents included Queen Victoria, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale.

- In 1903 the more radical Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), led by the Pankhursts, was formed.

- WSPU tactics included disrupting meetings, breaking windows, setting fire to letterboxes and damaging golf courses.

- In 1913 Emily Davison was killed when she ran in front of the King's horse at the Epsom Derby.

- During WW1 most suffragists and suffragettes suspended their political activities.

- In 1918 women over 30 were given the vote and in 1928 it was extended to all women over 21.


- In 1979 Margaret Thatcher became the first female PM.
Revision Sheet 27 General Strike and late C20th trade union reform

- Before WW1 the Triple Alliance of railway, coal and transport workers had been very militant in trying to improve pay and conditions.
- The price of coal fell after WW1.
- In 1926 the Samuel Commission recommended a 13.5% reduction in miners’ wages.
- On 4 May 1926 the TUC called a general strike.
- The strike was called off after just 9 days after it became violent and strikers were accused of trying to undermine the constitution.
- Union power was dealt a big blow as the 1927 Trades Dispute Act banned sympathy strikes and mass picketing.
- Unions were weak during the Great Depression but became more powerful after WW2.
- A miners’ strike of 1974 helped bring down Edward Heath’s government.
- On becoming PM in 1979 Margaret Thatcher set about reducing union power.
- The miners struck unsuccessfully from 1984-1985.
- Most mines have since been closed and unions are now far weaker than they were in the 1970s.
Revision Sheet 28 Minority Rights

- In 1948 492 people arrived from Jamaica on the Empire Windrush.
- At first migrants were actively recruited to fill labour shortages, e.g. in the NHS and transport.
- Through the 1950s to 1970s an estimated 1.4 million migrants came to Britain from Commonwealth countries.
- Migrants often faced discrimination and had to live in poor quality, overcrowded housing.
- The National Front staged protest marches in areas of high immigration.
- Measures designed to improve race relations has included the 1968 Race Relations Act and setting up the Council for Racial Equality in 1976.
- In April 1981 riots broke out in Brixton, an area of London with a large black population and a history of poor relations between black people and the police.
- Disturbances followed in Liverpool, Manchester and Nottingham.
- It led to the setting up of the Independent Police Complaints Authority in 1985.
- There were further riots in Brixton in 1985 and 1995.
- In areas such as Leicester, the development of multi-racial societies is seen as largely successful.