The Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of Witches) is one of the most infamous and controversial books of the early modern period. The Malleus Maleficarum has been blamed for the death of tens of thousands of women and men, and its instructions on the identification, prosecution, and punishment of witches arguably did much to pave the way for the great witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and in the New World. The contents of the Malleus Maleficarum will be used as a starting point for a study of witches and witchcraft in early modern Europe, and an assessment of important trends in recent historiography. The Malleus Maleficarum offers intriguing insights into the late medieval and early modern mentality, and tells us much about the relationship between witchcraft and religion, magic and science, fear and disaster.

However, the Malleus Maleficarum was not the only treatment of witchcraft in print, and it is important not to exaggerate its impact. Learned treatises such as the Malleus Maleficarum certainly did much to raise awareness of witchcraft, and highlight the alleged pact between the witch and the devil. But were the fears expressed in the literature borne out in reality? Why did the people of early modern Europe fear witches – or witchcraft – so much, and what were the concerns and motivations of those who persecuted and prosecuted witches, and those who made accusations against their neighbours?

We will consider a variety of explanations for rising accusations of witchcraft, the relationship between the Malleus Maleficarum and the early modern witch hunt, and the influence of this infamous book on the events of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Students will be introduced to other primary sources, and to recent writing on early modern witchcraft, and encouraged to consider the value of a text such as the Malleus Maleficarum to historians of the witchcraze.

We will use the text of the Malleus Maleficarum edited by Christopher Mackay, The Hammer of Witches. A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge, 2009). References to specific sections in the recommended reading below can be followed up using the contents list beginning on p.61 of the Mackay edition.
**Week 1: Introductory Session**

Approaches to History: studying early modern witchcraft

**Week 2: The Malleus Maleficarum: Compilation and Context**

**Essential Reading:**

*Malleus Maleficarum: Author’s Justification, Papal Bull, Approbation* (pp.69-80 in the Mackay edition)

**Background Reading:**


R. Kieckhefer, *The European Witch Trials. Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture.* (1976)


**Seminar Questions:**

- What explanations can we offer for the growing fear of witchcraft in this period?
- What circumstances gave rise to this kind of writing?
- Why was the church so concerned by the ‘problem’ of witchcraft?
- How might we best understand these three documents?
Week 3: The Intellectual Origins of the Witch Hunt

Essential reading:

*Malleus Maleficarum: Part One, sections 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.12, 1.13, 1.15, 1.18*

Background reading:

B.P.Levack *The Literature of Witchcraft* (1992)
R. Kieckhefer, *The European Witch Trials. Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture.* (1976)
G.Scarre, *Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe* pp.1-18
S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (1997) chapter 1, 2, 12

Seminar questions:

- How did the authors of the Malleus define witchcraft?
- What sources did the authors use?
- How did the learned stereotype of the witch develop? What is new about this text?
- How important is the pact with the devil to the image of witchcraft in the *Malleus*?
- What is the relationship between witchcraft and heresy?
- Why does God permit witches to exist?
- How do the authors of the *Malleus* seek to persuade sceptics?
Week 4: The *Malleus Maleficarum* and the uses of witchcraft

Essential Reading:

*Malleus Maleficarum* Part 2, sections 2.1.1-2.1.15

Background Reading:


Seminar questions:

- Why was witchcraft so feared - and by whom?
- Were there differences between popular and learned views of witchcraft?
- Was there a clear difference between witchcraft and superstition?
- What allegations are levelled against the witches?
- What might have informed these accusations?
- Is any attempt made to distinguish between magic and misfortune?
**Week 5: The Malleus Maleficarum: Protections and Cures**

**Essential Reading:**

*Malleus Maleficarum: Part 2, sections 2.2.1 – 2.2.8*

**Background Reading:**


--------, ‘Cunning Folk in England and Wales during the 18th and 19th Centuries’, *Rural History* (1997)

--------, ‘Charmers and Charming in England and Wales from the 18th to the 20th Century’, *Folklore*, 109 (1998), 41-52


D. Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch. The system of the sacred in early modern Terra d’Ottoranto* (Manchester, 1992). Ch.4-7


**Seminar Questions**

- How easy is it to separate witchcraft from other attempts to manipulate the supernatural?
- What is the role of the church in providing protection from witchcraft?
- Why might counter-magic be problematic?
- Why were both Catholic and Protestant churches so hostile to magic?
- What function did magic and the supernatural have in early modern culture?
Week 6: *The Malleus Maleficarum: The trials of witches*

**Essential Reading:**

*Malleus Maleficarum: Part 3, sections 3.1-3.16, and section 3.36*

**Background Reading:**


**England:**


**Scotland:**


**France:**


Germany:
G. S. Williams, Defining dominion : the discourses of magic and witchcraft in early modern France and Germany (Ann Arbor, 1999).

Seminar questions:

- Who was responsible for the persecution and trial of witches?
- How were trials conducted?
- How important was torture in securing confessions?
- Were other remedies or forms of protections available? From whom?
- How did trials shape witchcraft and perceptions of witchcraft?

Week 7: The Malleus Maleficarum and the female witch

Essential Reading:

Malleus Maleficarum: Part 1, sections 1.6-1.11, and Part 2, section 2.1.16

Background Reading:


Background Reading

R. Briggs, Witches and Neighbours, chapter 7 (the gendering of witchcraft)
H. C. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in South West Germany* (1972)
R. A. Horsley ‘Who were the witches?’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9 (1979)
G. Scarre, *Witchcraft and Magic in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*

Seminar Questions

- Why were women so prominent among the accused in witch-trials?
- Why were women so prominent among the accusers in witch-trials?
- Is witchcraft a ‘gendered’ issue?

**Week Eight: Witches in England and Europe**

Case study: The *Pendle Witches* (DVD)


[http://www.pendlewitches.co.uk/](http://www.pendlewitches.co.uk/) (with relevant primary sources)
**Week Nine: Witches in England and Europe**

From our earlier discussions on the historiography of early modern witchcraft, it will be clear that there are a number of possible explanations for the persecution of witches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Having looked at the *Malleus*, and analysed the views of historians in recent research, in this session we will make more use of the records of the trials of witches, and test out the various hypotheses at the local and individual level.

**Seminar Preparation:**

Using books and articles on the reading list, or searching online sources (with suitable caution!), find an account of the trial of a witch (or a group of witches), and bring the details along to the class. We will look at each of the witches and witch trials, and consider how they might influence our assessment of the importance of the *Malleus*, and our attitudes to trends in modern historiography. When choosing your witch, think about what light the case might shed on the issues that we have discussed earlier in term, and how closely your witch conforms to the models set out in the *Malleus*. How reliable is the evidence for your trial, and what kind of bias might we expect to encounter in this kind of source? Is an account of a trial more useful or less useful to the historian?

**Week Ten: Essay returns and tutorials**

This session will be used to provide feedback on essays, and for individual tutorials during which any questions arising from the course may be discussed.
Essay Questions and Exam Questions

Essays:

Essays must be handed in by Monday of week eight, directly to the History Part One Subject officer, Sukh Thiara (room 162). Any request for an extension to the deadline will need to be made to the Part One Examinations officer, Dr Rebecca Rist, using the standard university Extenuating Circumstances Form.

Please choose an essay title from the list below, or discuss with me if there is a specific issue that you would like to explore.

To what extent should the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* be viewed as the catalyst for the European witch-hunt?

How useful is the *Malleus Maleficarum* to the historian of early modern witchcraft?

Why did women make up such a high proportion of those accused of witchcraft?

Sample examination questions:

Has the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* been exaggerated?

Why was witchcraft so feared, and by whom?

To what extent does the image of the witch contained in the *Malleus Maleficarum* conform to that found in documented trials?