

## About British Online Archives

British Online Archives (BOA) is one of the UK's leading academic publishers and online repositories. Hosting over six million records, carefully sourced from private and public archives, such as The National Archives (UK) and British Library, our unique primary source collections cover over 500 years of world history.

They boast extensive documentation from across the globe, providing invaluable source material for students, educators, and researchers working within a range of scholarly disciplines, including history, politics, sociology, and international relations. Our fascinating digital holdings offer insights into global historical events and trends, typically through a British lens. They serve to broaden our understanding of history, and help us to make sense of contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes.

## Related Collections

Our primary source collections are organised thematically so as to enhance user experience and boost discoverability. Via careful reflection on our archival holdings, and in dialogue with scholars, we have grouped our collections under key historical themes.

*Witchcraft and Magic in England, c. 1400–1920*, falls under the broad themes of “Culture and Society”, “Medicine”, “Philosophy and Religion”, and “Science and Technology”. You can explore these themes by scanning the QR codes, where you will find related collections such as *Records from Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1559–1932*, and *Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925*.

Culture and Society



Medicine



Philosophy and Religion



Science and Technology



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Witchcraft and Magic in England, c. 1400–1920



## Witchcraft and Magic in England, c. 1400–1920

Bringing together **over 57,000 document images**, this unique resource **explores witchcraft and magic in England over five centuries**.

Sourced from The National Archives (UK), British Library, University College London Special Collections, and The Folklore Society, the collection incorporates a fascinating range of records and texts, exploring an array of key topics and themes, such as **belief, gender, medicine, politics, religion, and science**.

Significantly, **it features assize records from witch trials of the early modern period** and examines pamphlets and printed material that cast the accused (mainly women) as deviant social forces.

The sources also spotlight groups who escaped suspicion: members of the elite or “cunning folk”, as well as medical practitioners who engaged in “respectable magic”. Indeed, the **collection contains many alchemical tracts, astrological almanacs, and herbals**.

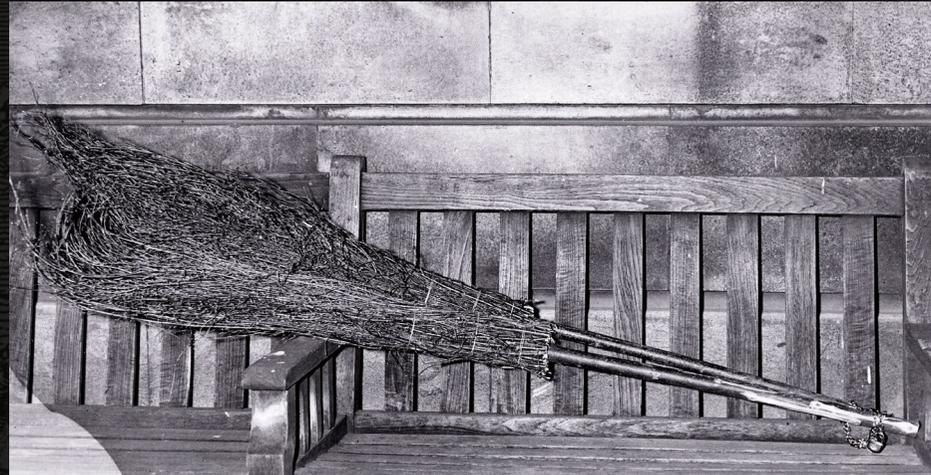
The study of magic and witchcraft became **a widespread scholarly pursuit during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries**. Literature generated by writers who turned their attention to these subjects features prevalently.

Interdisciplinary in ethos and expansive in terms of its chronological scope and the sources that it contains, *Witchcraft and Magic in England, c. 1400–1920*, will appeal to students, educators, and researchers working within a range of scholarly fields, including **anthropology, philosophy, sociology, religious studies, and women’s studies**. It will likewise interest those situated within various branches of historical study, such as **the history of ideas and the history of science, as well as social, cultural, and political history**.

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“Witchcraft is a wicked Arte, serving for the working of wonders, by the assistance of the Deuill, so farre forth as God shall in iustice permit.”

M. William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft, Framed and Delivered* (1610).



The collection hones in on the **concept of the witch in late medieval thought**, when longstanding beliefs in astrology, ritual magic, superstition, religion, and theories of health and healing competed, but were nevertheless largely co-existent. It then surveys the post-1450 period, when shifting attitudes towards witchcraft led to legal and secular changes, alongside an increase in accusations against, and persecutions of, those perceived to be witches.



This early modern manuscript features 67 illustrations that depict alchemical transformation symbolically through the sun and moon, the elements, and animals. Detailed explanations of the alchemical process occur throughout.



Women tended to be accused of witchcraft, not least because Christian teaching portrayed them as weaker and more susceptible to the influence of the Devil. Yet men were also prosecuted for witchcraft.



Vividly illustrated, *The Book of Fortune* (1672) is a game and map of human fate. Utilising dice throws, wheels, and astrological signs, readers are encouraged to consult fortune itself.



Accusations of “maleficium”—evil magic, such as casting harmful spells—are conspicuous in the collection. These can illuminate aspects of everyday life, such as people trying to comprehend a failed harvest.

This collection surveys various esoteric and magical practices, such as alchemy, astrology, divination, enchantment, herbalism, and sorcery. Some of these practices, such as alchemy and healing rituals, can be viewed as the precursors of modern scientific fields, namely chemistry and contemporary medicine. In recent years, scholars have highlighted the importance of the alchemical tradition with regard to the development of modern metallurgy, as well as minting and mining techniques. Similarly, throughout the early modern period many people turned to astrological almanacs for weather forecasts and to track the phases of the moon.

During the nineteenth century, the study of magic and witchcraft became a widespread scholarly pursuit. This collection showcases literature generated by this intellectual trend, such as Joseph Ennemoser’s *The History of Magic* (1854); Edward Heron-Allen’s *A Manual of Chierosophy* (1886); H. Stanley Redgrove’s *Bygone Beliefs, Being a Series of Excursions in the Byways of Thought* (1920); and *An Introduction to the Study of the Kabalah* (1926) by William Wynn Westcott, co-founder of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

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Sources include: The National Archives (UK), British Library, University College London, The Folklore Society.