

The Salem Witch Trials

In 1692, a small town in Massachusetts called Salem became the centre of one of the most infamous events in American history: the Salem Witch Trials. These trials led to the deaths of 19 people and the imprisonment of many more, all accused of practising witchcraft.

It all started in January 1692 when two young girls, Betty Parris and her cousin Abigail Williams, began acting strangely. They screamed, threw fits and claimed they were being pinched by invisible forces. The local doctor could not find anything physically wrong with them and suggested they might be bewitched. Soon other girls in the town began showing similar symptoms and fear quickly spread.

The girls accused several women in the town of causing their illness through witchcraft. As time went on, more and more people were accused, mostly women. The town became gripped by fear and paranoia and in June 1692 a special court was created to hear the cases of those accused.

The trials were held in a courtroom but unlike trials today, very little real evidence was required. The court relied on something called 'spectral evidence'. This meant that if someone claimed to see a ghostly figure or the spirit of the accused person, it could be used as proof. Many accused people had little chance to defend themselves properly and were not allowed legal representation.

By 1693, 19 people had been executed and over 200 people had been accused. Many others were held in prison in terrible conditions. Accusations even began spreading beyond Salem to surrounding towns. When the wife of the governor was accused, he ordered the creation of a new court where spectral evidence was no longer allowed. Soon after, those still imprisoned were released and the trials ended.

Today the Salem Witch Trials are remembered as a warning about the dangers of fear, misinformation and injustice. Historians study these events to understand how panic can spread through societies and why fair evidence and justice are so important.

Key Facts	
Year	1692
Location	Salem, Massachusetts
People Accused	Over 200
Executed	19 people