

Britain: losing and gaining an empire, 1763–1914:

Introduction

Overview

This option offers students the opportunity to study Britain's influence on the development of the world. A small island off the coast of Europe became the dominant world power, ensuring that English became something akin to the world language and London the world's financial capital with the pound sterling almost the world's currency. It is a story of remarkable achievement.

The start date is the year peace was concluded with France, ending the first genuine world war. Britain became the dominant power in India and, by annexing French Canada, the dominant power in the American continent as well. It did seem that the words of the new song 'Rule Britannia', composed in 1740, had become an incontrovertible truth and Britannia did now rule the waves. In fact such patriotic pride was inviting a mighty fall, which the first of the aspects in depth addresses. By 1783, Britain had lost her American colonies, which had evolved as the most important part of the British Empire in the seventeenth century. To many observers in Europe it seemed that Britain would lose her great power status and return to being a rather unimportant offshore European island. This was not to be.

Five years later the first settlement in Australia took place and a whole new area of empire developed. This forms the basis of the second depth study. If the first British American colonies had turned into the independent United States, Canada had remained loyal to the crown; in fact, Upper Canada, or what is now known as Ontario, had started as a place of refuge for American loyalists. Britain did not make the same mistakes here as in the original American colonies: conciliation not confrontation was the policy adopted, as the third depth study makes clear. This was not the case in India, where British power had expanded since 1763. The fourth depth study invites students to consider the events leading up to the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and dramatic events of that year. Finally, the British occupation of the Nile valley at the end of the nineteenth century is the focus of the last depth study, replete with colourful figures such as General Gordon, whose death in Khartoum absorbed the attention of the nation in 1885.

The 'Aspects in breadth' make clear the vital importance of the seas and oceans in explaining Britain's world pre-eminence in these years. It was a trading empire first and foremost, held together by a vast merchant marine operating from Liverpool, Bristol, Glasgow and London to name but the chief ports. Dotted around the globe, jewels in the imperial necklace, were other great trading hubs like Hong Kong and Singapore. The whole was protected by the Royal Navy, the largest navy on earth and for much of this period capable of taking on the combined fleets of the rest of the world. In 1897, for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, thirty miles of warships lined up off Portsmouth and for everyone at Spithead, there was another on active service round the world.

The British Empire is actually a story of two empires, victory in war, and the evolution of Britain economically, industrially and militarily from a position of superiority to supremacy and series of mistakes, some of which were learnt from better than others.

Key questions:

Q. How important was government policy in shaping changes to patterns of trade in the years 1763 to 1914?

Q. What was the significance of the evolution of Britain's network ports, and entrepôts and trade routes in the years 1763 to 1914?

Over the course of the period you study Britain's economic policy will change from one centred on mercantilism, closely associated with the first British Empire, to a gradual transition towards free trade, associated with the impact of the industrial revolution on Britain and the consequences it has for Britain's military power best reflected in its victories at **Trafalgar in 1805** and **Waterloo in 1815**.

It must be remembered that the sole purpose of Britain's economic policy was to make money. The ends however, would justify the means. If this meant fighting for the 13 colonies, so be it. If this meant embracing free trade, so be it. A successful economy generates business which in turn generates tax. Tax can be used to fund the Royal Navy which in turn defends the empire. Conversely, Britain's ability to adapt its trade policy would be controlled by the very vested interests least likely to change, notably the ruling conservative, land owning aristocracy

These two dates represent the evolution of Britain's position in the world from one of superiority, as established after the Seven Years War in 1763, to one of supremacy. This would be a position Britain would hold both economically and militarily through until 1914.

However Britain's position as the words '*First Industrialised Nation*' would not go unchallenged indefinitely. From the 1860s onwards Britain's economic and military position was starting to be challenged and with it, the '*Pax Britannica*'.

Key Dates and Events

Use the internet to find the dates and add a brief description of the event.

Year	Event	Brief description
	Britain introduces taxes to raise money from the colonies	
	American War of Independence begins	
	Free Trade given to Ireland	
	Victory at Trafalgar	
	Slavery Abolished	
	Victory at Waterloo	
	Founding of Singapore	
	The Great Reform Act	
	Compensation to West Indian Slavers	
	Victory in First Opium War	
	Famine in Ireland	
	Repeal of The Corn Laws	
	Navigation Acts Repealed	
	Britain purchases shares in Suez Canal	
	Britain occupies Egypt	

	Britain partitions East Africa with Germany	
	Britain leases Weihaiwei	

Q. What do the following terms mean?

Term	Definition
Protectionism	
Mercantilism	
Free Trade	
Manufactured goods	

By attempting to enforce greater Mercantile control over these two areas, in defiance of the emergence and perceived benefits of free trade, and ending the previous laissez faire approach of salutary neglect, the American colonies would slide from protest to rebellion and revolution around the populist notion of:

‘No taxation without representation’

However, as the industrial revolution transformed British manufacturing free trade became more advantageous. The British government gradually (as the franchise extended) moved away from the mercantile system to flood the world with cheap mass produced, manufactured goods from Britain. These goods would be carried initially on British ships until, even that was no longer required by law with the abolition of the Navigation Acts in 1849.

Britain would be the champion of free trade and informal empire until the geopolitical position was threatened by other nations towards the end of the 19th century.

The abolition of the slave trade

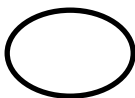
Using the websites at the bottom of this pack, find the dates for each event and then briefly explain how they contributed to the end of the slave trade.

Date	Event	Significance to the abolition of slavery
	Quaker Petition	
	The establishment of SEAST	
	French Revolution	
	Haitian rebellion begins	
	French Republic declared	
	War with France begins	
	Haitian rebellion ends	
	Wilberforce's bill defeated The House of Lords	
	Wilberforce secures cabinet support	
	Slave Trade abolished	

Q. Who was in favour of the slave trade and why?



Q. Who was against the slave trade and why?



The adoption of free trade, 1842 to 1846

Q. What is free trade?

Q. How is it different to mercantilism?

Q. Why was Adam Smith's book: 'The Wealth of Nations' so influential?

Q. Why did Americans in the colonies adopt his ideas readily?

Q. Why was free trade resisted by Parliament?

However, the industrial revolution was making a lot of people very rich very quickly. These emerging middle class merchants demanded a greater say in the running of the country and resented the power held by the House of Lords, and its landowning elite that held a veto on British government policy.

Q. What was the 1832 representation of the people act?

Q. Why is it so significant in the changing economic policies of Britain?

Arguably, the foundations of mercantilism were the Navigation Acts, dating back to the 17th century. Colonies have been acquired abroad in order to exploit the natural resources of the colony but also to create a market exclusively for British goods. The goods from these colonies could only be shipped in British flagged ships and only allowed to dock in British ports.

This policy clearly favoured Britain as the mother country, especially, after the industrial revolution massively improved Britain's manufacturing base and sucked in imported raw materials. It also started to clearly limit how much economic (and therefore social) development could be undertaken in the colonies before it started to compete with Britain, which would contribute to the difficulties Britain started to experience with America as the latter clearly found herself in a subordinate position, yet was economically and politically maturing and consequently demanding recognition of your liberty. During the period of salutary neglect, a laissez faire British government had in advertently contributed to the development of free trade or, as they called it, smuggling.

The repeal of The Navigation Acts 1849 - The dismantling of the mercantile system

Q. What were the Navigation Acts?

The Navigation Acts, like almost all of the mercantile laws, had never been rigorously enforced on the American colonies. Distance and the on-going wars with the French clearly made this impossible. With the end of the war however, and burdened with a massive national debt, the British ended their long-standing policy of salutary neglect and enforce the laws consequently challenging the perceived rights and freedoms i.e. liberty, of the 13 colonies

The Navigation Acts and mercantile laws were however, very effectively enforced in Britain and Ireland.

With the loss of the 13 colonies and the granting of free trade to Ireland in 1779 there was proof that free trade worked. Trade with the former doubled, whilst as an economic tool, free trade helped keep the peace in Ireland.

The Tories made limited moves towards liberalising trade but were ultimately hindered by their own members self-interests. Only with the election of the Whigs in 1830, campaigning for parliamentary reform did real progress happen.

The passing of the Great Reform Act in 1832 led to an increased the number of middle class voters who voted for reforming the economy further to allow greater economic freedom and social mobility. It also showed awareness, largely missing during the American War of Independence, to the needs of a maturing middle class claiming their inherent rights to liberty. Consequently, two key economic reforms took place.

Using the websites at the bottom of this booklet, answer the following questions:

Q. What were the Sugar Duties, The Corn Laws and Navigation Acts and why were they significant?

Q. Why was the repealing of The Navigation Acts so significant?

Q. Was it a dangerous act or calculated risk?

'Britain should not, and could not, try and maintain its industrial dominance by pricing everyone else out of the market. Instead it should do everything it could to stimulate economic activity in foreign countries and encourage uninhibited trade across the world'

Ben Wilson - Heydey

'The plains of North America and Russia are our corn-fields; Chicago and Odessa our granaries; Canada and the Baltic are our timber-forests; Australasia contains our sheep-farms, and in South America are our herds of oxen; Peru sends her silver, and the gold of California and Australia flows to London; the Chinese grow tea for us, and our coffee, sugar, and spice plantations are in all the Indies. Spain and France are our vineyards, and the Mediterranean our fruit-garden; and our cotton-grounds, which formerly occupied the Southern United States, are now everywhere in the warm regions of the earth.'

W. S. Jevons

'By facilitating international trade and the movement of labour, Britain could take a slice of pie at every turn. The country was well placed to do so. It possessed ports and coaling stations along the international highways west to east, from Halifax to Hong Kong. Its early industrial take-off equipped it with surplus capital to pour into railway construction everywhere from the Pampas to the Russian steppe. In turn, it supplied these ventures with high tech equipment such as power tools, telegraphs and engines. These railways and telegraphs meant that more foodstuffs and raw materials could reach the global market. The British merchant marine was ideally suited to carry the produce of the world and warehouse it, duty-free, in the ports of the Empire. As capital from Europe funnelled out of London, goods from the Americas, Africa and Asia flowed into Liverpool to be distributed to the markets of the Continent.'

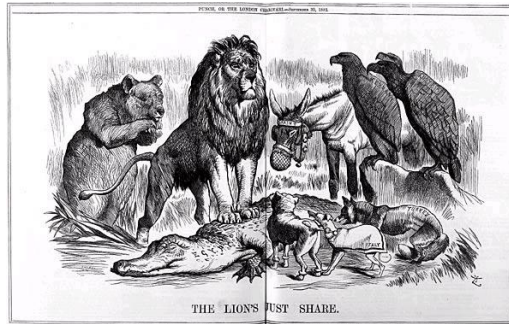
Ben Wilson - Heydey

Ultimately however, the Britain's position as a global economic hegemon was temporary. Her position as the world's first industrialised nation would only buy an advantage as long as her more populous and naturally resourced rivals lagged behind:

'The shifting balance of world forces was eroding British supremacy in two ominous ways. The spread of industrialisation and changes in the military and naval weights which followed weakened the relative position of the British Empire more than that of any other country, because it was the established Great Power, with less to gain than lose from fundamental alterations in the status quo.'

Paul Kennedy – The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers

Changes in economic fortunes led to a resurgent threat from other countries. Britain was still economically and militarily supreme but, her position was to become increasingly challenged.



How threatened was the British Empire by other imperial powers, 1763-1914?

Use the internet to help find the information to fill in the table below.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Threat</u>	<u>Consequence</u>
France		
Germany		
Russia		
Germany		
The United States of America		

Websites to help:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/British-Empire>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf7fr82/revision/1>

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/empire/>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Navigation-Acts>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/>

Extra Resources:

Resource	Breadth or depth aspects?	Type
Niall Ferguson, <i>Empire</i> (Penguin, 2004)	Breadth and depth	Popular text
James Morris, <i>Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress</i> (Faber & Faber, 1973)	Breadth and depth	Old but readable text
Bernard Porter, <i>The Lion's Share</i> (Harlow, 1984)	Breadth and depth	Old but readable text
Gordon S Wood, <i>The American revolution</i> (Phoenix, 2005)	Depth 1	Concise and readable textbook
Robert Hughes, <i>The Fatal Shore: History of Transportation to Australia 1786–1868</i> (Vintage new edition, 2003)	Depth 2	Popular and readable text
Peter Burroughs, <i>The Canadian Crisis and British colonial Policy 1828–1841</i> (Arnold, 1972)	Depth 3	Old but concise account
Saul David, <i>The Indian Mutiny 1857</i> (Penguin, 2003)	Depth 4	Highly readable text
Thomas Pakenham, <i>The Scramble for Africa</i> (Abacus, 1992)	Depth 5	Several relevant chapters in this classic text

<p>The National Archives</p> <p>British Empire site: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/empire/</p> <p>India 1857 lesson: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/cpd/india-1857.htm</p>		<p>Web materials</p>
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Course specification:

Aspect	Details	
Breadth 1: The changing nature and extent of trade 1763-1914	Reasons for, and nature of, changing patterns of trade 1763-1914, including:	
	The slave trade	
	Trade in coal	
	Trade in textiles	
	New trading patterns with the Americas, India and the Far East	
	The impact of industrialisation on trade	
	The importance of government policy including:	
	The abolition of the slave trade in 1807	
	The adoption of free trade 1842-46	
	The repeal of the Navigation Acts 1849	
	The changing importance of ports, <i>entrepots</i> and trade routes within the UK and throughout the Empire 1763-1914, including:	
	The acquisition of Singapore 1819	
	The acquisition of Hong Kong 1842	
	The opening up of Shanghai to trade 1842	
	The purchase of the Suez Canal shares 1875	
Breadth 2: The changing nature of the Royal Navy 1763-1914	The acquisition of Zanzibar 1890	
	The lease of Wei hai-wei 1898	
	The significance of changing ship types	
	The growing role of commerce protection, including:	
	Protecting and later suppressing the slave trade	
	Suppressing piracy and defending British commerce	
	The attack on Algiers 1816	
	The work of exploration and mapping	
	Captain Cook's exploration of the South Seas 1768-71	
	The importance of the acquisition and retention of key strategic bases around the globe 1763-1914 including:	
	Gibraltar retained 1783	
	The acquisition of Malta, Ceylon and Cape Town in 1815	
	The acquisition of the Falklands in 1833	
	The acquisition of Aden in 1839	
	The acquisition of Cyprus in 1878	
D1: The loss of the American colonies 1770-83	Tensions between colonists and the British, 1770-75	
	The issue of custom collection and tea duties, including the Boston Tea Party	
	The Coercive Acts 1774 and their impact	
	Clashes between British forces and rebels, 1775-76	
	The Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation	

	Britain's defeat, 1777-83	
	French and Spanish involvement	
	Britain's limited military resources	
	The defeats of Burgoyne 1777, and Cornwallis 1781	
	The decision to seek peace and accept the Treaty of Paris	
	Impact of defeat on Britain 1783	
D2: The birth of British Australia, 1788-1829	Australia's role as a penal colony from 1788	
	The importance of Lachlan Macquarie	
	The development of Sydney	
	Land grants to ex-convicts	
	Development up the Hawkesbury River	
	The growth of Macquarie towns	
	Impact of British settlement on Aborigines in Tasmania and New South Wales, 1788-1829	
	The spreading impact: penal settlement in Van Diemen's land 1803	
	The development of whaling	
	The first crossing of the Blue Mountains 1813	
	The first settlements in Western Australia 1826	
	The extent of colonial control by 1829	
D3: Learning from past mistakes: Canada and the Durham Report, 1837-40	The political nature and governmental system of Upper and Lower Canada	
	The perceived threat from the USA	
	The revolts of 1837-38: causes	
	The revolts of 1837-38: the course of the revolts	
	The revolts of 1837-38: impact	
	The importance of the Earl of Durham's appointment as High Commissioner	
	The roles of Charles Buller and Edward Gibbon Wakefield	
	The main recommendations and importance of the Durham Report	
D4: Nearly losing an empire: the British in India, 1829-58	The role of the East India Company and the Governor General	
	The importance of Bengal and the Company Army	
	William Sleeman's campaign against Thagi	
	The drive against Sati and female infanticide	
	The impact of missionaries	
	The Indian Rebellion, including:	
	The reforms of Dalhousie	
	The annexation of Awadh	
	The outbreak of the revolt and events in Meerut, Cawnpore and Delhi	
	The siege and relief of Lucknow	
	Reasons why the British retained control	
D5: The Nile valley 1882-98	Reasons for intervention in Egypt, 1882	
	Arabi Pasha and Arab nationalism	
	Protecting European loans and people	
	French withdrawal	
	The British military campaign	

	Egypt as a 'veiled protectorate'	
	The promises to withdraw and the failure to do so	
	The work of Sir Evelyn Baring	
	The problem of the Sudan	
	The Mahdi	
	Gladstone's concerns and policy	
	Gordon's mission, 1884-85	
	The conquest of the Sudan, 1898	
	The fear of French occupation	
	The role of Kitchener	
	The significance of Omdurman	