History Knowledge Organiser HT4: Why did Britain want an Empire?

What was the British Empire?

The British Empire was a group of countries that were taken over and ruled by Britain. They took many forms including dominions which had some degree of power, including their own parliament, and colonies which were ruled directly from London.

Why did Britain want an Empire?

Britain had many reasons to want an empire. Economically, the rich natural resources available in Africa, Asia and the Pacific earned the country a lot of money as goods were imported and exported. Politically, it made Britain a very powerful country and allowed the spread of their influence across the world.

The British Empire in India

India was regarded as the 'jewel in the crown of the British Empire'. It provided her with rich natural resources such as tea, sugar, metal ore and diamonds. India's position on the edge of the Indian Ocean gave the Royal Navy a powerful base to police the Asian trade routes.

The British Empire in Australia

Despite being a barren and desolate land, Australia was important to the British Empire as a penal colony. It provided a destination for British prisoners to be sent to as prison's in England and Wales were dangerously overcrowded. Prisoners helped public works like road laying and bridge building.

The British Empire in Africa

Britain participated in the Scramble for Africa between 1881 and 1914 when most of the continent was divided between the leading European countries. Ghana provided Britain with Gold, Nigeria provided oil and Egypt the ownership of the Suez Canal.

The British Empire in Ireland

Ireland was Britain's oldest colony. It was first claimed for England by Henry II in 1171. The British passed discriminatory laws and ruled with an iron fist to make sure her closest neighbour did not cause her any trouble.

Attitudes to the Empire (I)

Attitudes to the empire in Britain were good. People celebrated 'Empire Day', children read comics about daring British explorers in the colonies and leading members of the government declared the British Empire to be the saviour of people in Africa, Asia and elsewhere.

Attitudes to the Empire (II)

Attitudes to the empire changed significantly in the colonies. Many people felt as though the British had stolen their resources and given nothing back in return. The British government turned to propaganda to change people's minds.

A Haunted Legacy?

The British Empire has been a force for good in the world including spreading education, culture and sport to its colonies. However, it also treated some of its colonial subjects brutally and some of the world's major political problems can be traced back to the empire.