

What was the Witch craze and what does it tell us about Stuart society?



People in Tudor and Stuart England were very superstitious; despite lots of new discoveries in science, medicine and technology, people just couldn't understand why animals just dropped dead or crops failed. On many occasions, when bad things happened in a town or village, it was concluded that a witch must be at work. Witches, people thought were the devil's helpers, always doing evil things and helping sinners find their way to hell.



Why did England change from not worrying about witches in the 16th Century to the witch craze of the 17th Century?



Historian 1: Rising prices and economic changes like 'enclosure' made people want someone to blame for the hard times.



Historian 2: Everyone believed in the Devil and Hell. If things went wrong they blamed witches.



Historian 3: Superstition was linked to Catholicism. Protestants accused those involved in superstitious rituals of witchcraft.



Historian 4: The Civil War set neighbour against neighbour. People had old grievances and didn't trust each other.

Which of the following causes support each historian?

WAR

MONEY

RELIGION



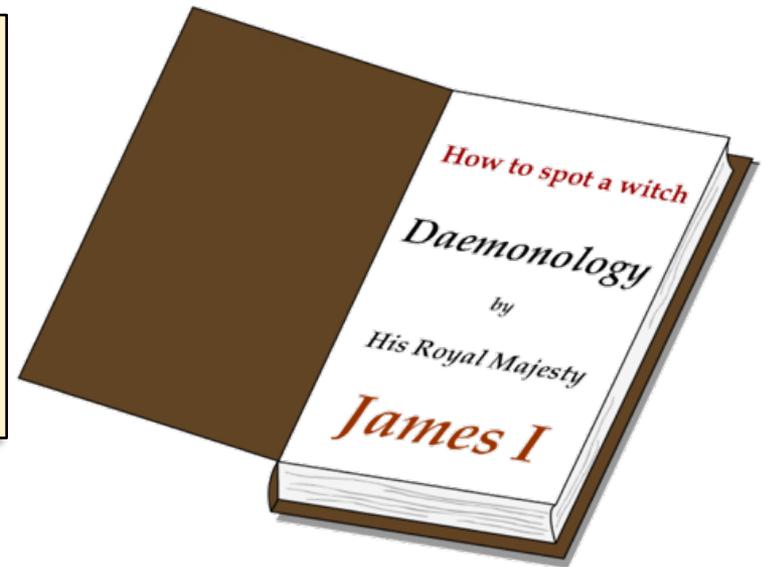
King James I was very interested in witchcraft and wrote a book suggesting different ways to catch witches it was called 'Daemonology'. He said all witches had strange marks on their bodies where their **'familiar's'** (small creatures eg toad or cat) sucked on their blood every night.

How many of you talk to your pets?

Other ways to spot a witch:

- They couldn't say the Lord's Prayer without making a mistake
- They had no shadow
- They talked to themselves
- If an accident occurred after an argument with the accused

James told Parliament to pass strict laws against anybody who was thought to be a witch and in 1604 witchcraft became a crime punishable by hanging. Over the next 100 years, thousands were accused of being a witch; usually poor, elderly women (they were more likely to live alone with a pet and have marks from a lifetime of hard work).



Why do you think King James was so worried?

In King James' book, he claimed that one of the best ways to identify a witch was 'swim' them, it was like a trial once they had been accused. They had their arms tied in front of them with a rope around their waste. They were then thrown into a pond (that had been blessed by a priest) if they floated they were a witch (because the 'pure' water rejected their evil not allowing them to sink) they were then taken from the pond to be hanged.

If they sank, the 'pure' water wanted them so they must be pure and couldn't possibly be a witch then declared innocent (but drowned in the process).





Figure 8.4 Old and poor women were most often the first accused of witchcraft.

Old
+
Poor
+
Female
=
WITCH!



Witches and their familiars

Inspection of a witch at her trial





William Harvey was a doctor but also a 'new thinker', like many during the Renaissance.

Harvey discovered the heart was a pump and pumped blood around our bodies which had finally proven thousands of years of medical theory wrong.

What has he got to do with the Witch Craze?

King James instructed Harvey to check the accused's bodies for marks left by their familiars often noted by Harvey as being in their 'secrets'

William Harvey – King James' doctor

Witchcraft and the witch craze

Witch-hunting was at its height in East Anglia between 1645 and 1646. An unsuccessful lawyer named Matthew Hopkins set up his own company claiming he had the Devil's list of witches, he became known as the **'Witch Finder General'**. Hundreds of people were rounded up as a result of his enquiries. Hopkins tortured them until they confessed to being a witch. Hopkins was responsible for the deaths of at least 90 people in East Anglia.

Matthew Hopkins was paid £23 to cleanse the town of Essex, (the average daily rate of pay was 2p). Hopkins visited King's Lynn on 2nd September 1646 and was due to be paid £15 but by the end of his visit he was paid £20. The following were those accused in King's Lynn in 1646:

Do you think Matthew Hopkins was successful in his visit to King's Lynn in 1646?

Grace Wright – Hanged

Dorothy Lee – Hanged

Dorothy Floyd or Lloyd – Hanged in 1650

Thomas Dempster – Not Guilty

Cicily Taylor – Not Guilty

Dorothy Griffin – Not Guilty

Katherine Banks – Not Guilty

Emma Godfrey – Not Guilty

Lidiah Brown – trial postponed “not of sound mind”





Many of the tools Hopkins used were spring loaded so they caused no pain or bleeding = Witch

He laid her body naked to the waist, with her clothes over her head. He ran a pin into her thigh, and suddenly let her clothes fall and asked her why she did not bleed. Then he took out the pin and set her aside as a child of the devil.

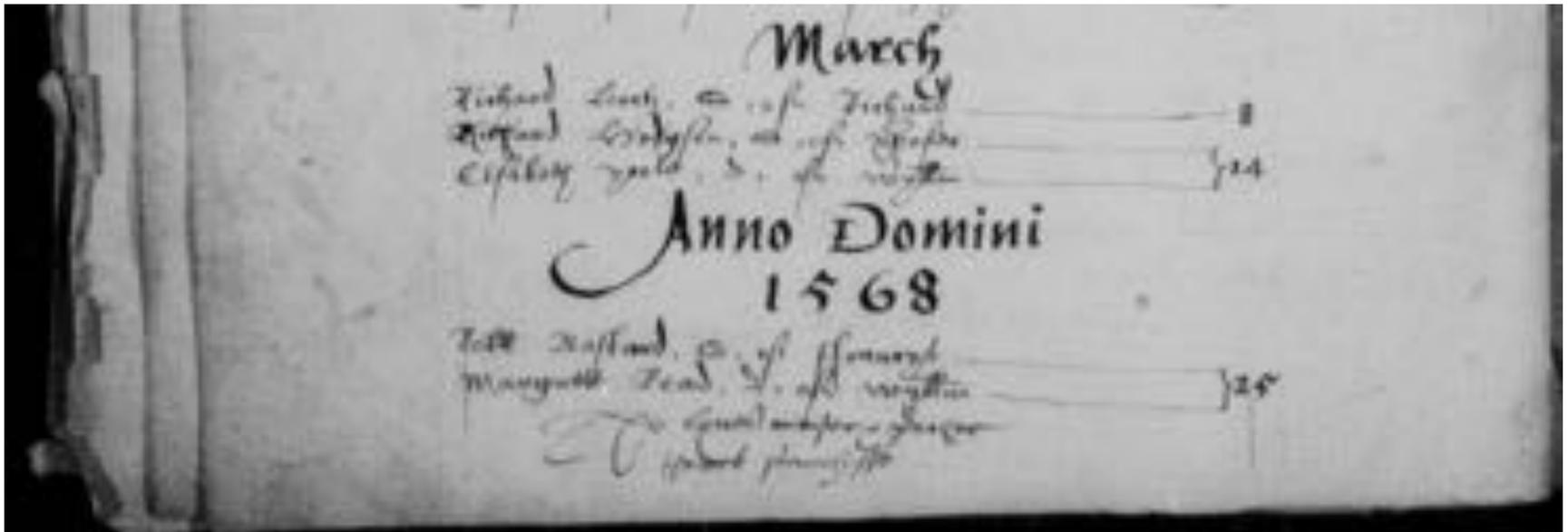
*Witness at a Newcastle witch trial,
1649*

Tuesday Market Place



What is this?





What is this?

Parish birth records for Margaret Read...

The Tuesday Market place had long been the place for public executions in King's Lynn, as the legend goes, Margaret was burnt alive here in 1590 and at the moment of her death, her heart burst out of her chest and landed on the wall. It then found its way into the river, where it frothed and boiled.

Witchcraft and the witch craze

Why has the artist of this page, published in 1647 drawn so many animals?

Bloody Britain Episode

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3i2lkwh5P4>

Imagine Hopkins is coming to King's Lynn, you really want to impress him. Design a page that gives details of how we've been trying to catch witches. Include:

- Information about spotting a witch
- Successful convictions
- Drawings to show your witch trials



Why was King James so worried, even paranoid?

Was he right to be worried?

His father had been blown up, strangled and stabbed to death

He had been raised by strict protestants telling him the devil is at work everywhere

Many protestants didn't trust him believing him to be Catholic



James translated a new version of the Bible (King James Version) which angered the Catholics. It is still the most popular version of the bible to this day

His mother, Mary, Queen of Scots was executed by having her head chopped off

There were many Catholics who wished him dead as he said their beliefs = witchcraft

He believed the storm that nearly killed his wife travelling from Denmark was a curse

Why did the Witch Craze come to an end in England?

2000 people were hanged in England, Wales and Scotland during the 'witch craze'. The last victim in 1727, Janet Horne, accused of turning her missing daughter into a flying horse!

- The Monarchy had been restored in 1660 with Charles II becoming king, this brought peace after 60 years of distrust, panic, war and paranoia.
- Tensions eased between Catholics and Protestants who often accused each other of witchcraft and working for the devil. Puritans had also moved to the New World.
- The renaissance in 17th Century Europe led to a much greater understanding of Science, Technology and Medicine. There was a rise in humanism and rationality which led to people no longer blaming floods and famines on supernatural causes
- Many people didn't like the violence and lawlessness caused by the Witch Finders, particularly as it became very clear that most accusations came from personal issues between neighbours

Of these 4 reasons, by raising our hands, lets see which you think is the most important reason for why the Witch Craze came to an end in England?



People believed that witches helped the **Devil** to find folk to turn into **Demons**. A witch kept an evil spirit called a **familiar**. The creature fed on the witch's **blood**. A lawyer called Matthew **Hopkins** started up a witch hunt in 1645 in East **Anglia**. He called himself the '**Witch... Finder... G eneral**.' and claimed he had the **Devil**'s own list of witches.



Shakespeare's Macbeth



When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606, then, he knew that his audience would have felt a mixture of fear and fascination for the three 'weird sisters'.



Task

1. Read the extract from *Macbeth*. Find evidence that:

- Witches had the power to kill people
- Witches can harm animals
- Witches have power over the elements
- Witches are vindictive

2. Why are modern authors still writing about witches?

