



She's A Witch!

People have believed in witches for a long time. There are mentions of witches in Bible tales as far back as 800 BC. Witches have been seen as evil for much of history. There were even messages in the Bible to “not suffer a witch to live.”

Witchcraft wasn't a common crime until the 1400s. Hysteria really took over Europe around 1450. Suddenly, lots of people were being accused of witchcraft. Many people think that a book published in Germany called *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches) was to blame. The book told people how to identify witches.

Over 200,000 people were tortured or executed between 1484 and 1750 for witchcraft. Most of them were women. It was very hard to prove you were innocent. This meant that lots of people were accused of witchcraft for very little. You could be accused of being a witch if you were a single woman. Lots of people thought widows were witches. Acting a bit odd was definitely a sign of a witch. Many women were accused because somebody thought they looked like one. If they had a long nose, warts, a snaggle-tooth or sunken cheeks, they were often considered to be witches.

Many people thought they were doing a good thing. Lots of witches confessed to their crimes. Unfortunately, they normally confessed after lots of torture with thumbscrews or red-hot leg irons.

In 1645 a man called Matthew Hopkins arrived in Norfolk. He claimed to be a 'Witchfinder General'. He persuaded the people that he could get rid of all of their witches. The average daily wage at that time was 2p. Hopkins charged the towns between £6 and £23 to clear all of their witches in one day. He became a very rich man. He had 68 people executed for witchcraft in just one day in Bury St. Edmunds.

Hopkins knew that he needed to find witches to get paid. He claimed to be able to spot a witch by a Devil's Mark. He believed a person was a witch if a wart or mole didn't feel any pain when he poked it with a needle. Hopkins was very cunning. He had a special needle that retracted into the

handle when he pushed it against the wart or mole. This meant that it never pricked the person and they didn't feel any pain. By using this devious device, he knew he was guaranteed to find lots of witches.

Most laws against witchcraft were removed in 1736, but witch hunts still went on for a long time. The last woman to be arrested for witchcraft was Helen Duncan in 1944. She was arrested because she was claiming to be a witch and stealing people's money. At least she wasn't arrested for having a crooked nose or lots of warts!



RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How far back was the first mention of witches?
2. When did people really begin to accuse witches?
3. What does Malleus Maleficarum mean?
4. What physical features might mean somebody was a witch?
5. How much did the average worker get paid per day in 1645?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

E

Why has the author included “not suffer a witch to live” in inverted commas?

V

Which word tells you that people were acting with lots of emotion?

I

Why did people start to accuse witches more once Malleus Maleficarum came out?

I

Why did Matthew Hopkins have to trick people into finding witches?

E

Why has the author included the final sentence?

Answers:

1. 800BC
2. 1400s
3. The Hammer of Witches
4. Long nose, warts, a snaggle-tooth or sunken cheeks
5. 2p

E: Because it is a quite from the Bible

V: Hysteria

I: It told them lots of ways to identify witches. Once they knew what to look for, they started to see it in lots of people

I: Because witches didn't really exist but he needed to find them to get paid

E: It adds a bit of humour and reminds people why some people were arrested and executed in the past