

## SUFFOLK WITCHES – PIP WRIGHT

Pip Wright is a retired School Teacher living in Stowmarket and now writes local history books and gives talks to various groups across East Anglia. At the August meeting Pip treated U3A members to a most interesting talk entitled 'Suffolk Witches'.

In the time of Henry VIII it was rumoured that Anne Boleyn was a witch. She was said to have six fingers on one hand and a third nipple. At the time of Elizabeth I witchcraft was seen as a 'misdemeanour' rather than a crime. In England witches were hanged but not burned as they were in Scotland. In Scotland James VI was determined to rid his country of witches and once he became James I of England the laws relating to witchcraft were strengthened..

Agnes Waterhouse (1503–1566) was the first woman executed for witchcraft in England. She was accused, along with 2 other women - Elizabeth Francis and her daughter, Joan Waterhouse. Elizabeth Francis confessed to having a familiar - a cat named Satan.

On 5th July 1589, three witches all called Joan were hanged within 2 hours of their trial –Joan Cunny, Joan Prentice and Joan Upney.

At one time Suffolk was a centre of the persecution of women, and men, accused of witchcraft. Two specific trials in 1645 and 1662 became historically well known. The 1645 trial "facilitated" by Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled 'Witchfinder General' saw 18 people executed by hanging in one day. The judgment by the future Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, Sir Matthew Hale in the 1662 trial acted as a powerful influence on the continuing persecution of witches.

Hopkins was paid by local parishes to find and try witches, usually by confession so it was obviously in his interest to extract those confessions. This involved 'witch pricking' with needles or trial by water where the suspect was tied and dunked (swum) in a pond. People did confess to being witches but many of these people had been kept awake for several days. If they floated they were deemed to have been saved by the devil and therefore guilty. . If they sank they were deemed innocent but simply drowned. It's estimated Hopkins' work lead to around 100 executions across East Anglia.

Moyse's Hall Museum in Ipswich has a display of dead cats and witch bottles which have been recovered from houses where they were bricked up behind walls to ward off witches/evil spirits Witch bottles are stoneware containers that contained a wide variety of materials such as pins, needles, hair and nail clippings and urine.

Pip has written 'Witches in and around Suffolk' which can be obtained via his website [www.pipwright.com](http://www.pipwright.com)