

Witch bottles from King's Lynn and Earsham, Norfolk

# Witchcraft Resource Pack

GCSE History

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[www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk)



# Introduction

This Witchcraft Case Study Pack is designed to work with the syllabus of the Edexcel GCSE History examination. This compliments and extends the information available online on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website.

The Case Study Pack provides details from the website, copies of paper archives held by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, excavation reports, photographs and extracts from specialist journals and publications designed to help students develop an understanding of local examples of witchcraft from the 17th century.

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It provides an introduction to local sites and finds that can be used as comparative material for case studies covered in textbooks and allows students to understand Norfolk witchcraft in its local, national and international contexts. It is designed for GCSE students to use independently or as part of class exercises and the pack also includes possible teaching activities.

The pack is part of a series of Case Study Packs designed for Key Stage 3 and GCSE students available from Norfolk Landscape Archaeology. Find details and download other packs on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website:

[www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk)

## Background

Material evidence of witchcraft can be divided into a number of different forms. Physical spells like witch bottles, spirit traps and apotropaic marks have all been found in Norfolk. These are recorded on the Norfolk Historic Environment Record—an archive of all the known archaeology of Norfolk. This Resource Pack provides a brief introduction to some examples, from Norfolk, of the archaeology of witchcraft.

People have always been superstitious and have sought ways to protect themselves from their fears. Different types of spells, charms, amulets and protective objects were made and deposited. In some societies today people believe in spirits and actively protect themselves from them. Some of the most common forms of protective spell include the witch bottle and the deposition of ritual objects such as shoes, animals and other items. Another type of deposit is the spirit trap. These were all designed to protect a house and its occupants from harm. More details and specific examples can be found in the Resource Pack.

Another type of spell that leaves a physical trace that can still be found today is the apotropaic mark. These are symbols that are painted, scratched or written on the walls, wooden beams and doors of houses to protect the occupants from harm. Marks placed on the chimney prevented evil coming down them.

Other similar protection devices include copied religious texts on paper which were then stuffed into holes in the timber frame of the house. Those who could not read or write themselves used to copy what they thought were religious words. This is why you often find nonsense words on these papers.

Other deposits cannot be understood today. It appears that people tried to protect themselves from harm by carrying out various rituals. Unfortunately we can't decipher what these rituals meant from the archaeological remains alone and there is nobody left to tell us.

# Witchcraft in the National Curriculum

GCSE History examinations give students the opportunity to study historical sources of varying kinds. It is often difficult for teachers to source local historical information and case studies and it is for this reason that this series of Case Study Packs have been created.

This Case Study Pack includes information on witchcraft in Norfolk and has been created in consultation with the Edexcel syllabus but will be useful for teachers following other specifications. The packs give students a chance to interact with material evidence in a fresh and interesting way and provide comparative examples for case studies encountered in text books.

The pack contains Possible Teaching Activities that use the source material in the pack and require students to respond to this material and comment in detail on primary evidence. These questions are similar to those encountered in GCSE examination papers. The Witchcraft Case Study Pack may also be of use for candidates who are opting for coursework components and students may also benefit from visiting the Norfolk Historic Environment Record at Gressenhall to access further information.

## **Witchcraft in the Edexcel Syllabus**

### **Section B: Study in development**

#### **B2—Crime, punishment and protest**

Witchcraft is important in the study of crime and punishment in the Middle Ages , attitudes towards women and crime and punishment with particular reference to the witch-hunting craze.

# Possible Teaching Activities

## **Source 1: Witch Bottles**

1. Search the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website for examples of witch bottles found in Norfolk. Choose one to write about in detail.
2. Where in Norfolk was the example found?
3. What did the witch bottle contain?
4. Where in the building was the bottle found?
5. What does the large number of witch bottles found in East Anglia tell us about the fear of witchcraft in this region?
6. What do the bottles buried after the 16th century tell us about attitudes to witchcraft in East Anglia?

## **Source 2: Samuel Butler's Hudibras**

1. List the reasons the poet gives for witches to be hanged.
2. Do you think the poet thinks those that were hung were 'real witches'?
3. Did all people believe in witchcraft during the 17th century?

## **Source 3: Matthew Hopkins Witch Finder General**

1. What are the names of the 'imps' according to the confessing woman shown to the right of the engraving?
2. Why do you think Hopkins would publish this pamphlet?
3. How do Hopkins' motives affect the content and presentation of the pamphlet?

## **Source 4: Spooky Norfolk, EDP24**

1. Why did the people of Great Yarmouth send for Hopkins?
2. Why was Mark Prince accused of witchcraft and enchantment?
3. Do you think the journalist is right to say Prince was found not guilty because he was a man?
4. How were Yarmouth witches tested?
5. Were these fair tests? How could the results be explained away in modern terms?
6. Do you think the witches accused in Yarmouth were guilty?

## **Source 5: History of Myrtle Cottage**

1. What was found in the bottle in the fireplace at Myrtle Cottage?
2. What does the reburial of the bottle tell us about the views of the people who reburied it?
3. If you found the bottle in your house would you open it and investigate or rebury it? Why?

## **Source 6: X-ray of Witch Bottle**

1. Can you identify the objects in the bottle?
2. Which way up was the bottle when it was buried?

## **Source 7: Photograph of Witch Bottle and Contents**

1. What type of bottle is this? (clue - read Source 1)

2. What did it contain?
3. Go to the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website and found out where this was found.
4. When was it buried?
5. Why were witch bottles buried after the witch craze had ended?

**Source 8: Apotropaic Marks**

1. Search the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website for examples of apotropaic marks found in Norfolk. Choose one to write about in detail.
2. What type of apotropaic mark is the example?
3. Where was it found in the house?
4. What was this mark designed to do?
5. What does the large number of these marks found in East Anglia tell us about the attitude to witchcraft in Norfolk?
6. Why are there apotropaic marks in later houses too?

**Source 9: Apotropaic Mark in Tudor House**

1. Draw the mark picked out in blue paint on the wood.
2. What was this mark designed to do?
3. Would you leave the mark or remove it if you found it in your house? Why?

**Source 10: Witchcraft Deposits**

1. Search the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website for examples of witchcraft deposits found in Norfolk. Choose one to write about in detail.
2. What object was hidden in your example?
3. Where was it found in the house?
4. What was the object supposed to do?
5. Why was this particular type of object chosen?

**Source 11: Hall Farm Building Report**

1. What was found at Hall Farm?
2. What items were found in the 'trap'?
3. How did the trap work?
4. Why is the date of the trap interesting? What does it tell us about views on witchcraft in East Anglia?

**Source 12: Excavations at Castle Acre Castle**

1. What was discovered in the ditch at Castle Acre castle?
2. Why did the archaeologists think it might be related to witchcraft?

**Source 13: Witchcraft in the 17th century**

1. Do you think there is evidence that there was more concern about witchcraft in the 17th century?
2. Do you think that all people accused of witchcraft were innocent? Why?

## Cross Curricular Links

### **ITC**

Ask small groups of students to investigate one particular aspect of witchcraft in Norfolk. They could look at witch bottles, apotropaic marks, witchcraft deposits or the Great Yarmouth witch trials. They should research the topic using a variety of sources. They should then prepare a short PowerPoint presentation for the rest of the class.

### **English**

In response to the poem by Samuel Butler students ask students to write a satirical poem about the witchcraft trials of the 17th century.

Write the "True Story" of Mark Prince as a modern tabloid newspaper would report it. Headlines could be: "I'm no witch - exclusively told to our reporter!"

### **Art**

Using the engraving from Matthew Hopkins' pamphlet students could produce work representing two different views of the same witch trial.

Create a modern witch bottle complete with contents.

### **Graphics**

Work on designing some 'modern' ritual marks. Where would they be placed and what are designed to protect? You could take inspiration from modern graffiti styles.

### **Drama**

Create a piece that recreates the events leading up to the creation of the ghost trap at Hall Farm. Think carefully about what types of objects that were deposited and how the people involved in the construction of the trap must have been feeling at the time.



# Make a Post Medieval Witch Bottle

## **You will need:**

A bottle with a re-sealable lid  
Pencil and paper  
Scraps of cloth  
Washed and cleaned bones from a roast chicken  
Pins or nails  
Charms, spells and other small objects.

1. Think about what you would like to put inside your witch bottle. You might like to write a spell warding off evil or draw a picture of the witch you have trapped inside the bottle.
2. Make a list of items to put into the bottle – remember you have to be able to fit them through the neck of the bottle.
3. Collect together the things you want to place inside the bottle. Very carefully put the items inside the bottle and seal the lid. The witch is now trapped and won't be able to escape from the bottle! You should have good luck from now on.
4. You might like to decorate the outside of the bottle. You could draw special good luck designs or make the bottle look like a Bellarmine pottery bottle by drawing a face and sticking it on.
5. Think about where you are going to put your bottle to catch any more bad luck that comes your way. You might like to put it by your window or your bedroom door.



Witch bottle from Norfolk



## Using the Images with an Interactive Whiteboard

You can find high quality images from this pack on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer Teachers' Resources gallery:

<http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery584.html>

Use the notepad to annotate the drawings. Think about what they actually tell us about witchcraft in Norfolk. Identify different features or draw over the apotropaic marks. Can you identify any of the designs used on the beams at Tudor House, Alburgh?

Capture some of the images and use them to create your own worksheet. You can either print this off or ask the students to complete it on the board and then print off the completed sheet for their books or for revision purposes.

You could load the images onto the school network and ask the students to use them to create a short film using Windows Moviemaker or a similar program about the people who created and hid the spell. Who were they? Why did they create the spell? How did they think it would protect them? Did it work?

Use the images during revision sessions to create thought showers and start discussions.

Use the images to create a class presentation about witchcraft in Norfolk in the 16th and 17th centuries. Combine the physical evidence used in this pack with documentary evidence.

## Finding Out More

### **Websites**

Hoggard, undated. The Archaeology of Folk Magic. Available:  
<http://www.whitedragon.org.uk/articles/folk.htm> Accessed 14 April 2007.

Hoggard, B., undated. Folk Magic in Britain. Available:  
<http://www.apotropaicos.co.uk/index.html> Accessed 14 April 2007.

Evans, I., undated. World of Old House, Ritual Objects. Available:  
<http://www.oldhouses.com.au/docs/ritual.html> Accessed 14 April 2007.

Museum of Witchcraft, undated. Museum of Witchcraft. Available:  
<http://www.museumofwitchcraft.com/> Accessed 14 April 2007.

Unknown, undated. Traditions of Magic in Late Antiquity. Available:  
<http://www.lib.umich.edu/pap/magic/intro.html> Accessed 14 April 2007.

### **Books**

Merrifield, R., 1990. Archaeology of Ritual and Magic. (New York, New Amsterdam Books).

## Source 1: Witch Bottles

In Classical times there was a fear of spirits beneath the earth. If a well or pit was dug the sacrifice was afterwards dropped down it so as to placate any spirits you may have upset. In Saxon and medieval Europe there was a change to a fear of spirits of the air. Chimneys were open to these air spirits. Therefore witch bottles began to be deposited in chimneys to trap evil spirits.

Witch bottles can be made from any type of bottle although they are often Bellarmine bottles—stoneware bottles with a crude mask-like face decorating the outside. They contain a variety of objects and liquids including urine, hair or nail clippings, thorns, nails, pins, bones, wood, scraps of material and letters and books. After the objects have been put inside the bottle is then sealed and hidden.

The bottles are designed to work by enticing the spirit that travels by a sense of smell. The spirit is distracted by the hair and nail clippings into thinking there is a person in the bottle. Once the spirit has entered the bottle the spirit cannot go in reverse or turn around. Therefore you can trap it as it tries to get into your house. By placing religious and or sharp items in the bottle you can torture the spirit so that if by any chance it does get out it will not come back again.

This form of "bottled spell" dates back hundreds of years, and was prevalent in Elizabethan England - especially East Anglia, where superstitions and belief in witches were strong. The bottles were most often found buried under the fireplace but are also found by doors. The theory is that as a witch walks over the bottle her spells were drawn into it making her powerless.

The witch bottle was believed to be active as long as the bottle remained hidden and unbroken. People did go through a lot of trouble to hide their witch bottles - those buried underneath fireplaces have been found only after the rest of the building has been torn down or during extensive renovations.

Several examples of witch bottles have been found in Norfolk and computerised records for these can be seen on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website:

[www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk)

## Source 2: Samuel Butler's Hudibras

Has not this present Parliament  
A Lieger to the Devil sent,  
Fully impowr'd to treat about  
Finding revolted witches out  
And has not he, within a year,  
Hang'd threescore of 'em in one shire?  
Some only for not being drown'd,  
And some for sitting above ground,  
Whole days and nights, upon their breeches,  
And feeling pain, were hang'd for witches.  
And some for putting knavish tricks  
Upon green geese and turky-chicks,  
And pigs, that suddenly deceast  
Of griefs unnat'ral, as he guest;  
Who after prov'd himself a witch  
And made a rod for his own breech.

This is an extract from the second part of Samuel Butler's famous burlesque poem "Hudibras". The poem is an elaborate satire on magic and witchcraft. The hero, Sir Hudibras, consults the occultist Sidrophel and ultimately unmasks him. The intention is to show the whole magical tradition as bogus. The poem was famous and Samuel Pepys comments in his diary that "all the world cries [it] up to be the example of wit". How does the poem show that not everyone took witchcraft seriously?

## Source 3: Matthew Hopkins Witch Finder General



An illustration of Matthew Hopkins interrogating witches from a leaflet published by Hopkins before 1650.

Why do you think Hopkins wanted to publish these pamphlets publicising his success?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery584.html>

## Source 4: Spooky Norfolk, EDP24

Extract from Eastern Daily Press, undated. Witch Finder General. Available: <http://www.edp24.co.uk/Content/Features/SpookyNorfolk/asp/EastNorfolk/Witchfinder.asp>, Accessed 12 October 2006.

Matthew Hopkins is the most notorious name in the history of English witchcraft, and was more commonly known as "The Witch-Finder General". Throughout his reign of terror, 1644 to 1646, he was responsible for the executions of some 230 alleged witches, more than all the other witch-hunters put together during the 160-year peak of the country's witchcraft hysteria.

Great Yarmouth, which severely persecuted its witches in the latter part of the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries, sent for Hopkins early in 1645, when he already had over 100 hangings to his name.

Hopkins appears to have been too busy to give much attention to Yarmouth, but he paid speedy visits to the town in September and December, and, at his suggestion, a small group of local women were appointed to keep an eye on suspects. Elizabeth Harward, a woman of unique experience in dealing with the supernatural, was appointed to take charge, and was requested to chose three underlings.

As a result of these investigations Hopkins claimed that 16 witches were hanged at Yarmouth, but the records, which may, of course, be incomplete, only name seven.

Six reputed Yarmouth witches, when appeared before a jury towards the end of 1645, were found guilty, and were sentenced to be suspended by the neck until they were dead, but only five of these were eventually hanged. The charge against one of them, Elizabeth Bradwell, was of practising witchcraft, and of having diabolically and feloniously used, practised and exercised the same art upon and against John Moulton, the infant son of Henry Moulton. The same old woman was further charged with similar practices on Elizabeth Linstead.

For a male to be charged with witchcraft was rare, but Mark Prince was indicted at Yarmouth in 1645 for using 'both witchcraft and enchantment', having declared to Ann Cann where she could find a certain cushion she had lost. He was further charged with using witchcraft to enable him to inform John Ringer what had become of certain of his money which had disappeared. Prince was indeed a lucky man to have been found not guilty. Had he been an ugly old woman, his fate would have been surely sealed.

The torture which these Yarmouth witches underwent at the hands of Hopkins and his accomplices was unbelievably terrible. After suspected witches had had their bodies thoroughly examined for the devil's marks, they were placed cross-legged on a stool or table in the middle of a closed room, the door of which had a small hole through it to allow the devil's imps to come,



provided, of course, that the witch-hunters were not too scared to permit this.

Accused persons were kept in this position for as long as two days, during which they were allowed neither sleep or food. If this system failed to produce confessions, then the accused were walked about and even whipped until they could, in nine cases out of 10, bear their plight no longer.

In cases where the torture failed, Hopkins resorted to 'swimming'. The thumbs and great toes of the accused were fastened together, and, 'with a roape tyed about their middles', they were thrown into a river. If a body sank it was a sign of innocence, but to float took one well on the way to the gibbet, for it proved that one had rejected the sacramental layer of baptism, so now the water refused to receive the body.

Pricking was another method used to discover witches. If a person is turned upside down and a pin is stuck into them there is frequently found to be no bleeding. In Hopkin's day this was accepted as absolute proof that a person was a witch.

At last a country gentleman, shrewder than his contemporaries, managed to capture Hopkins and serve him as he had treated so many women. With his thumbs and toes tied together the 'witchfinder general' actually contrived to float—which certainly saved his life, though it spoiled his practice. Thereafter Matthew Hopkins was not heard of again.

The full document is available at the website cited above.

Do you think the modern press believes the people accused by Matthew Hopkins were witches? How does the article ridicule Matthew Hopkins?

Copyright Eastern Daily Press.

## Source 5: History of Myrtle Cottage

Extract from Arnall, D.C., 1994. History of Myrtle Cottage, Lynch Green, Hethersett, Norfolk. Unpublished document.

### **Bellarmino Bottle, c. 1660**

Early in 1987, when the hearth of a modern fireplace was taken up on the south side of the centre stack, a stone bottle was discovered. It was buried in an upright position and coated in a lime residue from top to bottom down two-thirds of its area. Part of the lime was removed to reveal a traditional bellarmino bottle with the mask of a bearded face on the neck and a five-petal flower medallion on its belly...The mask and medallion design suggest it originated from Frenchen, near Cologne in Germany, during the 1660s. Salt-glazed stone bottles were used for importing wine during the 16th and 17th century and would have been a very common artefact. An X-ray revealed at least two iron nails and a number of bent bronze pins in an iron-bronze lump accumulated at the neck. Its buried location and contents established that it had been used as a witch bottle to ward off evil. The contents would also have included urine and possibly pieces of cloth into which the pins may have been fastened. Two views are held regarding the use of witch bottles. On a personal level, if the occupant of the house was thought to be the victim of witchcraft, the bottle containing the victim's urine and other paraphernalia would be buried upside down in the fireplace. The objective was to counter the evil and bring distress to the witch. The other more prevailing view is that they were buried to protect the house and people living therein from the influences of evil. People were suspicious when fire bays with chimneys came into ordinary houses. They left openings through which evil spirits could enter. The bottle would be expected to give protection. Myrtle Cottage's bottle may have been discovered and replaced twice before. Bent pins set in the residue at the top of the neck suggests that it was originally buried upside down in the traditional manner. It was discovered standing upright.

### **People and Events**

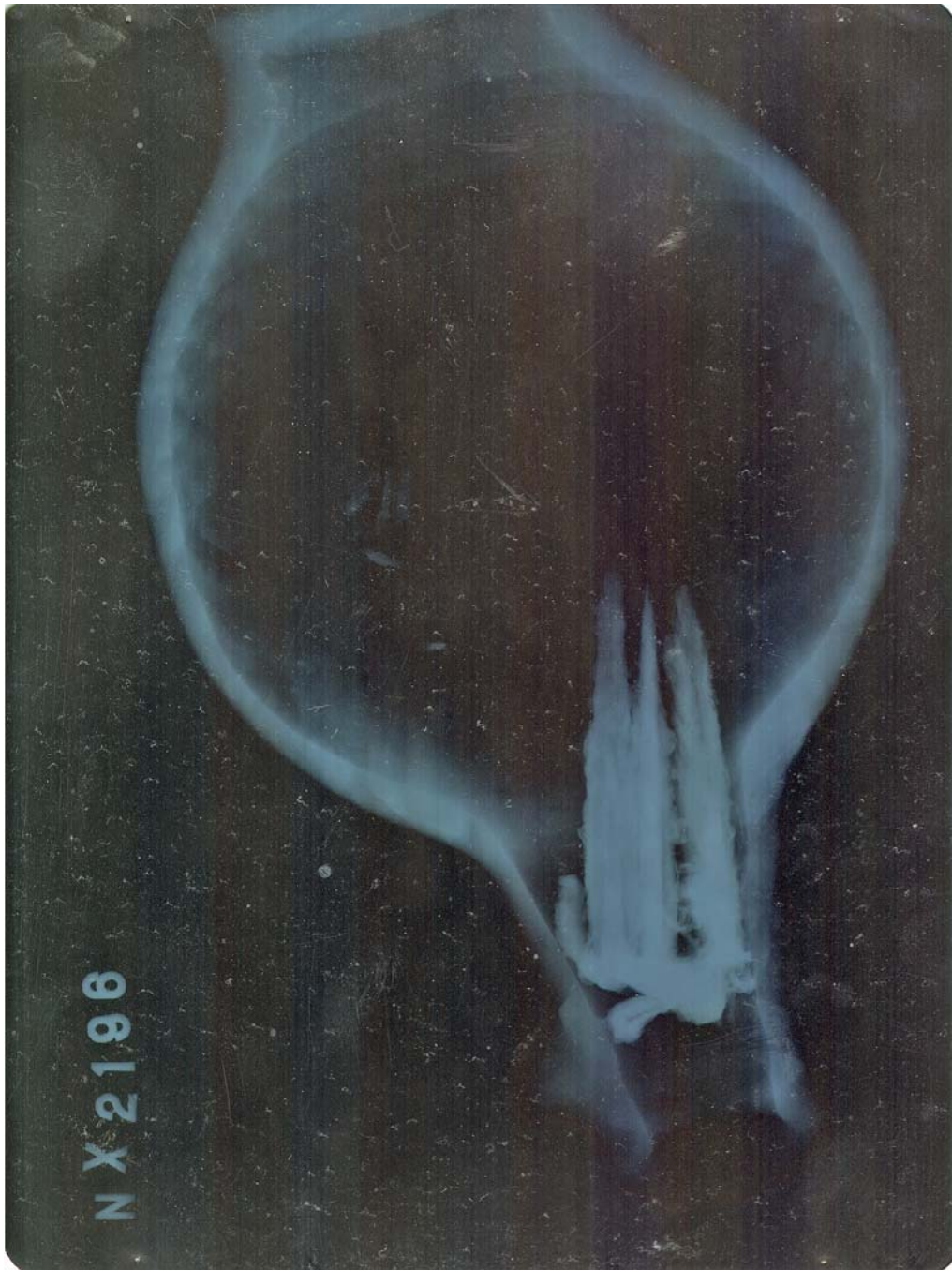
Robert and Susan Freeman's action of burying a bellarmino under the hearth illustrates the fear of witchcraft and belief in the supernatural that prevailed in the 17th century. William and Susan Wiffen, who made money by farming and building, left their mark on the two front dormers following an impressive rebuild in 1729. In haste they reburied the witch bottle the wrong way round but did not open it or disturb the contents.

The full pamphlet is available in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record at Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Do you agree with D.C. Arnall—do you think the witchbottle was buried by people who actually believed that spells could enter a house down a chimney? What would you do if you found an intact witch bottle in your house? Why?

Copyright D.C. Arnall

## Source 6: X-ray of Witch Bottle



This X-ray shows the inside of an unopened witch bottle from Earsham, NHER 16279.  
Can you identify the contents?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery584.html>

Copyright Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service

## Source 7: Photograph of Witch Bottle and Contents



This photograph shows a Bellarmine pottery jug and the scrap of cloth in the shape of a heart pierced with several pins that was found inside it.

What effect do you think the pins were meant to have on the witch who was sending the spell?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery584.html>

Copyright Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service



## Source 8: Apotropaic Marks

The word apotropaic comes from the Latin for a verse or hymn intended to avert the wrath of angry gods. Apotropaic marks are symbols painted, scratched or written in candle smoke on the walls, wooden beams and doors of houses to protect the occupants from harm. Marks placed on the chimney prevented evil coming. If a second floor was added to a house it was common to place marks in the new second floor to rid the area of any ghosts or evil spirits that had been living in the attic.

The usual form of mark is Ave Maria Gracia Plenis which was usually shortened to AM. After the Reformation the meaning of this mark was lost and gradually became simple scratches resembling Ms or Xs. The Sussex marigold is another common mark. This circle divided into petals is also called a daisywheel or hex. Other symbols look like runes and are called pseudo-runic symbols. It is thought that these had magical powers. They are often found in stables where they kept the 'night-mare' from horses.

There are many examples of houses in Norfolk that contain apotropaic marks. Search for 'apotropaic' as a keyword on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website to find some:

[www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk)

You can read more about the apotropaic marks of Norfolk on this website:

<http://www.homewld.demon.co.uk/content.htm>

Other similar protection devices include copied religious texts on paper which were then stuffed into holes in the timber frame of the house. Those who could not read or write themselves used to copy what they thought were religious words. This is why you often find nonsense words on these papers.

## Source 9: Apotropaic Mark in Tudor House



Detail of a blue painted apotropaic mark in Tudor House, Alburgh.  
Can you trace over the mark? Why else might people write on their beams?

Available online at: <http://gallery.e2bn.org/gallery584.html>

Copyright Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service



## Source 10: Witchcraft Deposits

Deposits of shoes, animals and other items are often defined as symbolic or ritual. Shoes are commonly found in chimneys, under the floor, in walls and in the roof. These shoes are almost always well worn and it is possible that they were used to trick the spirits into smelling them and being enticed inside before getting trapped.

Another types of deposit is the spirit trap. These are often found in the space beside the chimney stack. Here items such as old clothes were deposited to trick the spirit into entering the space thinking there was a person in there. Once in the spirit could not escape. In some spirit traps it seems clear that objects have been added to the cache. Scraps of wall paper found in the traps indicate that during redecoration traditionally more objects were added to the trap.

Other deposits cannot be really understood. It appears that people tried to protect themselves from harm by carrying out various rituals. Unfortunately we can't understand these rituals from the archaeological remains alone and there is nobody left to tell us what they meant. There are several deposits of this type in Norfolk – we cannot be sure but they do seem to indicate a real belief in witchcraft .

There are several examples of witchcraft deposits in Norfolk. Search for 'witch' as a keyword on the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website to find some:

[www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk)

## Source 11: Hall Farm Building Report

Extract from Rose, E., 2004. Hall Farm Building Report. Unpublished document.

NHER 14206

### **Ritual deposit**

The previous owner of the property is reported to have cut through the ceiling of the ground floor to gain access to the sealed space at first floor level beside the axial stack. This caused a collapse of a large quantity of material, including many shoes, a woman's dress, a baby's bonnet, a clothes peg, and various wooden architectural features. These...have been dated to the late 18th century. The previous owner stated that he had also found 'two chamberpots complete with contents' and a dead baby wrapped in linen—however, he did not unwrap the latter and his identification seems to have been a guess based on the shape. These he burned.

The occurrence of a hoard of this type is not uncommon and is known as a ghost trap or spirit trap. The theory seems to be that an evil spirit entering via the chimney—a great fear in early post medieval times—would be decoyed by the smell associated with human garments and waste products into thinking that it was entering an occupied room, and would be trapped in the space by various ritual means. Although unbaptised babies were buried within domestic dwellings at various times, to find such a corpse in this context would be very unusual and this was more probably a straw dummy wrapped in baby clothes again intended to divert the assailing spirit from the real target...

The ghost trap contains items that have been dated to the late 18th century...This is most interesting as a remarkably late occurrence of such a feature; these usually occur in the late 16th and 17th centuries.

The full text is available in the Norfolk Historic Environment Record at Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Why do you think the ghost trap was constructed? Does the construction of the trap indicate a continued belief in witchcraft in Norfolk into the 18th century?

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## Source 12: Excavations at Castle Acre Castle

Extract from Coad, J.G., Streeten, A.D.F. and Warmington, R., 1987. 'Excavations at Castle Acre Castle, Norfolk, 1975-1982 The Bridges, Lime Kilns, and Eastern Gatehouse'. The Archaeological Journal 144, 256-307.

NHER 3449

### **Later Alterations and Abandonment**

...Fill of the upper ward ditch likely to have accumulated after abandonment of the castle contained a sixteenth-/seventeenth-century jetton...Above this, in the post-medieval accumulation, was a disarticulated human skull and phalange as well as the remains of a juvenile cat. It is tempting to speculate upon a possible association with witchcraft, and the evidence certainly defies less than sinister interpretation.

The full text is available in the library at Norfolk Landscape Archaeology.

Why do you think the skull, finger and cat were buried in the ditch?

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## Source 13: Witchcraft in the 17th century

It is not true, despite Hollywood, that there was increased paranoia over witches in the 17th century:

- At the Reformation the civil law took over control of witchcraft from the church. In the Middle Ages local church hierarchy could ordain a punishment for witchcraft. These punishments were rarely recorded. During the 16th and 17th century civil courts were set up and cases were recorded. Trials, executions and punishments had to be visible to the public. Before they could have gone on behind closed doors.
- Far more 16th to 17th century houses survive than medieval houses. Therefore we have more apotropaic marks from 16th and 17th century houses simply because there are more 16th and 17th century houses surviving.
- Greater literacy amongst the lower classes after the Reformation meant that more people could attempt to write charm and apotropaic marks.

It is also worth considering that the modern attitude to the witch trials is one of “we know that is all nonsense, there is no such thing as the supernatural, therefore these people must have been innocent and persecuted”. What if it is all true? What if many were guilty? If people can be made to believe that a person has unnatural powers over them the effect can be much the same as if it was true. There is good evidence that some witches organised a kind of black magic mafia, demanding food and money in return for not bewitching people.

# **norfolk heritage explorer**

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## **NORFOLK HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD**

Union House  
Gressenhall  
Dereham  
NR20 4DR

Phone 01362 869 389  
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Written in February 2007

