

# Popular beliefs and religion in tudor-stuart society

[Religion](#)



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In the days Tudor-Stuart society were many changes in state religion by different ruling monarchs that affected the lives of ordinary people. This was especially during the period of 1558-1667, where immense confusion arose by the nation people over what religion to practice. During this time, there was further confusion, not only religious, but also confusion of not being able to explain the unexplainable. This resulted in superstition, which was popular during this period, as a way for the people to explain the things that could not be explained.

With the increasing amount of superstition, and other popular beliefs, it led to an increase in insecurity leading to the accusations of witches. The established Church had many affects on the lives of ordinary people. The Church acted as a tax collector and a charity having a financial affect on the people. It controlled occupation groups, such as teachers, midwives and teachers, hence the Church controlled people in these professions. The Church had control on people attending Universities, promoting theology as most important subject.

Basically, they were promoting religion and importantly getting people to follow the Church. Any disputes over marriage, wills, or other matters people had to go through the Church to sort it. Overall, the established Church had power and control of people in this society. The Church was a subject of authority. Ordinary people depended upon the Church for their uncertainties in hope that the Church would help them, and their souls in heaven. Therefore people obeyed and followed the rules of their Church for assurance. Great confusion arose during the time period of 1558-1667.

It seemed with every new ruler of England bought a new religion with them. This was evident after 'Bloody Mary's reign being over and her Protestant sister Elizabeth succeeded her. The nation people had to endure constant changes in religion and they themselves had to worship the same way their King or Queen did. Strong devout followers of the monarch may have changed their religion several times through their life to match their ruler. In most cases, this was not evident, those devout to their Catholic or Protestant religion would maintain their religion despite the changing monarch.

These people held Mass and practiced their religion in secrecy. In Tudor-Stuart society, it was a crime not following the same religion as your ruler. Punishment was very severe and people who were caught risked imprisonment or even death. Death was a common punishment for those caught during " Bloody Mary's reign. Many things were unexplainable during this period. In this era, people did not have science to explain why influenza and plagues occurred, allowing their insecurities to get the better of them. Popular beliefs helped explain tragedies for which there were no rational explanations.

To calm people down and take their minds off things, they believed in superstitions. Such as the superstition where if you drop salt, take a pinch and throw it over your left shoulder. You would then throw it into the face of the devil as he stands on that side of you. This calmed people so they did not panic during the years of uncertainty. Other superstitions comforting people were the prospects of going to heaven. It said, that, to enter heaven, one must place a penny in the mouth of a deceased being the payment to St Patrick to enter heaven.

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One of the most important superstitions, was the one, when someone sneezed, the first sign of the Black Plague. It was important someone had to bless them, hence, the term "bless you". These superstitions calmed and comforted the people in this society. Otherwise, they feared the things not understandable to them. During Tudor-Stuart, society was many popular beliefs. They include the ladder leaning against a wall to form a triangle with the wall and the ground. The triangle represented The Holy Trinity - The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.

If one broke the triangle by walking through it, God would think they were in league with the devil. There was the belief of carrying a rabbit's foot for luck, this stems from an ancient notion that witches turned themselves into rabbits to escape capture. To carry a rabbit's foot protects the carrier from witches. Another belief that was the ringing bells to scare demons away, because they were afraid of bells. During the witches' cries in Elizabeth's reign, wearing a blue bead was a popular protection from witches. Ivy growing was popular during the high accusation rates of witches.

Ivy was seen to protect the inhabitants from witchcraft and evil. Every party of the Catholics and Protestants accused each other of involvement in magic led by the devil during the religious quarrel and confrontation by the two religions. Witches were very much believed in, and seen as the symmetrical word to clergy. Living in this time period people had to be careful of what to say and do. Their actions could be used against them if someone cried witch upon them. Then entered professional witch hunters, such as Matthew Hopkins, his job to locate witches. With supposed witches among the people, they lived in a state of panic.

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Innocent people, majority of them women were falsely and wrongly accused reflecting the prejudice towards women in this period. People lived in a state of fear, not knowing what would happen next or who would be proclaimed witch, if not themselves. Therefore Tudor-Stuart society between 1558-1667 bought amongst the ever changing religion of each ruling monarch, the population too changing with it. For the devout believers of their religion refusing to practice in secrecy (recusants) faced harsh punishment. Superstitions was prominent as a means for people seeking comfort after the Protestant reformation, which discarded saints and cardinals.

People sought comfort and security through superstitions and popular beliefs. Witchcraft was scattered all over this period and there were certain times such as the Elizabethan reign hitting peak the declining again. Witchcraft disrupted people causing their lives to a state of confusion, uncertainty and fear. The Church affected people lives by having power and authority over them. They captured the heart and souls of these people in this period. The people were loyal to their religion and their Church therefore obeying the Church and their rules. This is how the Church affected their lived, but also in many other ways.