

Under king james vi history essay

[History](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

Under King James VI (James I), both Scotland and England experienced severe apocalyptic tensions as a result of the escalating Reformation disputes of the 1560s. The culmination of such a dualistic environment led to an increase in both state and ecclesiastical condemnations of witches, and such attitudes led to a revival of witch-hunts in epic proportions. Prior to King James, the persecution of witches was a rarity, which was associated with the uneducated, unemployed and undervalued members of society. Three years after the ideas of the Reformation took hold on both the Continent, and in Scotland, the Scottish Witchcraft Act was passed, thus turning witch-hunts from a poor man's boredom to a nobleman's sport. Throughout this thesis, it will be shown that James' aggressive strategy in rooting out those accused of witchcraft was not based simply on an ecclesiastical motive, but was also used as a cover for a political revolution; James' primary intention was to remove Catholicism. There were few cases of witchcraft before James' ascension, particularly few cases under Elizabeth, yet, after the Reformation had occurred there developed, both from the state as well as the people, an inherent desire to quell all things associated with witchcraft. This official fear, as well as James' personal animus, made way for a paranoid regime, obsessed with destroying all forms of 'evil' and unconcerned about how many innocent lives it took to do so. There is no doubt that the people of Scotland truly believed in the concept of witchcraft, and, as Christina Larner notes, '[for witch-hunts] to be effective, it must be generally believed to be effective'[1]. A genuine fear of witches existed, and it is the intention of this thesis to highlight that King James exploited this fear, and used it as a

pretext for hunting Catholics. James used the accusation of being a witch for political gain, and this is most evident in James' charge of witchcraft on his cousin, the Earl of Bothwell, who was supposedly involved in the attempt to sink James' ship in 1589. It has been suggested that under Elizabeth, the Witchcraft Act was introduced in order to provide a coherent reason for the 'religious crusade against Catholicism', and that the actual act was initially made to 'attack two marginalised groups of people... those who practised any form of magic, and those who were Catholic, under the pretext of idolatry'[2]. The use of 'attack' is indicative of James' reign, as torture of those suspected of witchcraft was sanctioned by the monarchy. James' obsession with witches stemmed from his paranoia of a conspiracy theory, whereby all witches were plotting to remove him from the throne. Due to this, part of the torture process was consistently searching for a 'Devil's mark', which to James, was evidence of a demonic contract. If the King wished for further evidence of such a pact, a witch who was accused of participating in a witches' Sabbath would face extreme torture so as to force the witch into not only a submission of her own guilt, but also a submission of all those (real or imaginary) that she attended the Sabbath with. These forced submissions, coupled with the zeal of the persecutions, led to an extortionate amount of people, mainly women, brutally killed. It is hard to provide an accurate number of those executed due to a lack of Church court records for this period, but it is estimated that between 1663-1736, of the 3,212 named individuals, 205 were executed (roughly 67%), with many more fleeing from the persecution, or else being publicly humiliated if they were to be acquitted[3]. Yet, in England, a much larger realm, it is thought that only 500 executions took place[4]. Contrast this figure with those executed in <https://assignbuster.com/under-king-james-vi-history-essay/>

England in the same time period and it is clear to see not only the brutality of James, but also the severe extent to which the people of Scotland were concerned about this ‘genuine’ threat. The first section of this dissertation will focus on the developing ideas of witchcraft from both state, and religious perspectives and how the view of witchcraft formed a link with the view of Catholics in the eyes of James I. The first link between Catholics and witches was formed in 1589 with James’ crossing from Denmark, and the Catholic link is highlighted as the ‘unholy congregation’ who supposedly met at the Kirk of North Berwick were working with both the Devil, and a Catholic priest. The outbreak of persecutions that followed were the product of religious and political disputes that escalated from the Reformation, and, generally, these persecutions were widely supported and spread rapidly due to innovations such as the printing press and a more educated congregation. The second section will focus on the intensification of witch persecution and the war against Catholicism, versus James’ personal animus. The second section will be an exploration of how far James’ personal aggression stemmed from his condemning view of women as inferior, and from his alleged homosexual preferences. There were four key events in particular which shaped the Catholic/witch persecutions: James’ crossing from Denmark and the North Berwick trial; the report of the ‘attack’ as it appeared in News from Scotland; James’ Demonology, published in 1597; and the Salemsbury witch trials of 1612. Lastly, there will be a contrast of these links with Catholicism to other trials that involved no link such as the Lancashire trials, of 1612 (no Catholic conspiracy); and the persecution ‘from below’ which appeared to be more personal than religious. Lastly, the third section will focus on the ‘cooling off’ from witch mania and the decline of the witch persecutions in the

<https://assignbuster.com/under-king-james-vi-history-essay/>

later stages of King James' life. This section will explore how far the decline of persecutions coincided with a diminishing Catholic threat.