



Witchcraft

Some Basic Information

Witchcraft has a long history and is not simply the stuff of legend.



The best way to think of Witchcraft in a 'traditional' sense is as a term referring to various folk traditions related to nature and 'natural healing' (such as use of herbs). These 'traditional Witches' are best considered as local 'wise' or 'cunning folk' who served a purpose within their community.

They may have been mid-wives, healers, soothsayers - in many ways fulfilling the role we see today in other cultures. In Cornwall the traditional wise person seems to have been referred to as a Pellar.

A number of us may remember our Grandmothers, some elder relative, sharing their folk tales and approaches; charming warts, weather sayings, blessings and such like. And whilst we may not have thought of these relatives as 'witches' they were certainly sharing something of what could be called the 'cunning tradition'.

However the popular view of Witchcraft is one of an organised group of people meeting regularly at 'sabbats' to perform conjurations, incantations and sacrifices to their some identified deity. This stereotypical view is one created and maintained by the medieval church and fed off local superstition.

The fact that so many confessed to signing pacts with the Devil or some other such demon under torture was that the inquisitors were asking questions based upon various scripts and texts written by the establishment—the persecutors.

There is little evidence of a fully organised and homogenous witchcraft tradition in Europe during these times - only local practices which included magical lore, nature festivals and observances and spell casting appropriate to the area.

Weather witching, blessings, love potions, spells, fortune telling and midwifery were probably the core practices of most of these 'witches' and they may have shared recipes or 'old knowledge' within families - the claim of many modern 'traditional witches' (if that's not an oxymoron).

We need to remember that the word 'witch' will mean different things to different people at different times and in different places - and for the most part in a negative way.

The modern western 'witchcraft movement' seeks to challenge this perception. In a later briefing document we will explore the *Inquisition* and the *Witch Trials*

Combating Prejudice through Knowledge

